



Dear Childcare Sector,

NOTE FOR ALL CHILDCARE PROVIDERS FOLLOWING FM'S STATEMENT

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS – A note from the Scottish Government

Today the First Minister made a statement to the Scottish Parliament setting out *Scotland's routemap through and out of the crisis*, including a phased approach out of lockdown. You can view the routemap [here](#). Alongside that routemap the Scottish Government has published a Strategic Framework which sets out the high level plans for the reopening of schools, early learning and childcare settings and also wider childcare settings including out of school care and childminding. The Strategic Framework can be found [here](#).

The Routemap

The routemap sets out the phases in which Scotland will ease out of lockdown. There are no dates attached to each phase and only when the medical and public health advice says it is safe to do so will the Scottish Government make changes to the current lockdown restrictions.

Phase 1 of the routemap includes plans to change guidance so that staff can return to schools and for an increased number of children to access critical childcare provision. It will also enable the re-opening of childminding services and fully outdoor nursery provision. Reopening will only happen when it is safe for children and staff. We will work with public health experts and the sector to fully understand what measures need to be in place to allow these services to reopen, to set those out in clear and accessible guidance, and to confirm a date for reopening which gives providers an opportunity to implement any new measures.

Wider reopening of the ELC and childcare sector is shown in Phase 3 of the routemap, meaning that we can't yet confirm a date when this will happen but it is our current expectation that we will move into this phase over the summer period. We will formally advise the sector when a date for re-opening has been set.

The Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework will ensure that children and families can access safe, high quality ELC and childcare as early as possible. Quality of experiences and the wellbeing of children and families remain at the centre of our decision making.

The Framework, which has been developed in partnership with the Critical Childcare and ELC workstream of the Education Recovery Group, describes the age-appropriate public health measures which will be put in place to support the wider reopening of ELC, taking account of advice from the Chief Medical Officer's Advisory Group and international practice and evidence. They are:

- enhanced hygiene and cleaning practices,
- caring for children in small groups,
- minimising contact between those groups,
- maximising use of outdoor spaces, and
- physical distancing between adults in the setting, including parents at drop-off and pick-up times.

Where these measures reduce the capacity available in any individual setting, Local Authorities and providers are asked to prioritise access to capacity in line with the principles in the Framework to support those children and families who will benefit most from access to ELC and childcare. There is local discretion over how to allocate overall capacity in line with these principles, in a way that reflects the local Getting It Right For Every Child practice model. Meaningful and genuine partnership working across the whole ELC and childcare sector will be vital to make the best overall use of the capacity available, and we will support and encourage that wherever we can.

What does this mean for the Childcare sector?

There is no change at the moment. The Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate, local authorities and sector representative organisations are working together to develop guidance that you will all receive before reopening your services beyond critical childcare provision. All registered settings will receive notification through the Care Inspectorate when this guidance is available, and when a timetable has been confirmed for reopening. It is important that individual settings then take the time they need to implement measures to ensure the health and safety of everyone in the setting, and to prepare to welcome back staff and children.

What does this mean for parents?

Parents and carers will have lots of questions about what this will mean for their children. It is understandable that they will want to know what level of ELC and childcare they will be able to access, and also how we are ensuring the health and wellbeing of their children. We won't be able to answer all of those questions right now, but we will provide more information about the recovery as soon as we are able to. Local communication will also be key, as parents will be keen to know about local arrangements. Please see parentclub.scot for the latest parent information, including a Q&A about what today's statement will mean for ELC and schools. We would be very grateful if you could share the Parent Club information with settings and families.

Critical Childcare provision

As we plan for the recovery phase and re-opening of ELC and childcare settings, critical childcare provision will continue to be provided and there is much to learn from the practice which has already been developed in delivering this provision. As recovery progresses, the use of dedicated childcare hubs for all provision may reduce, where possible reopening more settings so that children can access ELC and childcare in their usual environment.

Early Learning and Childcare Expansion

We remain united in our determination to achieve our ambition of increasing access to high quality funded early learning and childcare, because we know that is a cornerstone to improving outcomes for all children, especially those growing up in more disadvantaged circumstances. We will continue to work with Local Authorities and partners to revise the timetable for the expansion once we know the true impact of the measures that we need to take to respond to Covid-19.

Next Steps

We will continue to keep you updated through the Care Inspectorate as new information and guidance is produced.

Thank you for everything you do for children, families and Scotland.