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Introduction

During May, Glasgow City Parents' Group (GCPG) sought nominations via social media from parents to take part in an on-line Q & A with Maureen McKenna, Executive Director of Education. Nearly 300 parents asked to participate. From these, three groups were selected by GCPG. The parents were mostly from Parent Councils and were asked to seek questions from parents in their communities. The first group represented mainly secondary schools, the second represented mainly primary schools and the third had a broad mix including nurseries.

Below are highlights of the notes which were taken at each of the meetings. They are not designed as a record of the meetings but to give a flavour of the range of issues and the responses received.

Gaps in Learning

What provision will be made to ensure attainment gap does not widen in Secondary Schools?

This is a real challenge. Young people will only be in for part-time teaching. Maureen posed the question about whether we skew provision to S4-6.

Teacher contact just now is variable and how young people are responding is variable. In August there will be more regular contact with teachers which will improve young people's engagement and learning.

Expectation is that teachers will be setting work for the next time young people are in.

We cannot lose sight of attainment and achievement. It will continue to be a major priority for the city.

How do we level the playing field?

Equity is a concerning feature and the gap widens every day that children aren't in school.

Home – School Learning and the reliance on screen-based learning which can be detrimental. What are the alternatives?

Digital learning is not the only answer. It can be very positive and there are lots of strengths in digital learning but there are equity issues. The experience in the next phases will be different as children will have more teacher contact, our current digital learning strategy is based on children working with a teacher, not remotely.

The iPad roll-out was part-way through and we are exploring ways in which we can prioritise for senior pupils and accelerate to more learning communities in the city.

There will be more home based activities. Teachers will now be teaching in schools full time and won't always be able to be directing on-line learning.

Will the children who have made good progress at home be held back by those who have done little or no learning at home?

All children learn at a different pace. Teachers are used to supporting a wide variety of needs. They will continue to do so when children return to school.

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What are the plans for children to catch up on lost learning?

Very aware that there are disparities in learning. Children's experiences have been varied. Teachers will pick up from where children are at and will build on prior learning.

Children and their teachers will have more contact than they do presently during lockdown. Children and young people will be set lesson tasks when they are in school that they will take home to be worked on and completed during the learning from home days and taking into account that not all families have access to digital and online resources. It will continue to be a different experience as children will not be in school full-time but headteachers are very focused on addressing this issue. Staff will have preparation time and will begin to prepare for this in June. Our high quality teachers will rise to the challenge and our children will make progress.

How can Parent Councils help?

Be the advocate for other parents. Work with the school and let them know what is and isn't working. Be the bridge to explain things such as 'please don't come in to the playground' and why new processes are in place.

Fears about returning to school

What happens if parents don't feel safe returning their children to school?

How will GCC support parents to provide their children with education if they don't want them to go back?

We need to work with parents to alleviate fears and build confidence.

Healthy children and young people should be at school. The evidence is emerging that children and young people appear to be incredibly resilient to this virus. In Australia, not all schools closed and there is a recent research study from Australia that tracked young people that showed exceptionally low transmission rates.

Although young people are incredibly resilient they may be caring for others. Schools know their pupils well and will take appropriate steps around this. If a parent refuses to let their child return to school the school will work with them to build trust and confidence. Parents will not be penalised but children need to be back in formal learning and our schools will help reassure parents of the measures in place to reduce the risk of the virus.

Is there an expectation in terms of take-up? Are we expecting 100% attendance?

Will there be sanctions if parents don't return their children to school.

We are a nurturing city and this remains important. Parents have the right to make their own decisions. There will not be sanctions – we want to work with parents positively so that their child receives a high quality education.

What happens if parents are anxious and don't want to return their children to school?

We will work with parents to build confidence. We cannot have children not attending school and it won't be possible to provide work at home for those being kept off who could come to school. Parent Councils can play a role in boosting confidence. We will support them to get children back to school and benefiting from teacher contact.

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Young carers will need to be more cautious around social distancing. Updated advice around shielding is expected from NHS as initial letter was only for 12 weeks.

Evidence from elsewhere about parents not returning their children to school.

Evidence from other European countries show low risk, good hygiene, handwashing and consistent groupings help with good safety.

Emerging evidence that children are not the carriers of the virus that we thought they might be.

Not returning will be detrimental to education. A welcoming, nurturing environment will be important.

No evidence exists for staff wearing PPE except for very specific tasks. The protocol for First Aid has been written by our Health and Safety team in partnership with health colleagues.

Parents are suggesting that the use of videoing of classrooms and the school would be helpful in alleviating some of the fears.

Concerns about P1 entrants and transitions at the infant end of school.

There are challenges with transitions at all levels. It will be a different experience for all.

All children will be supported by staff to help them get used to a new way of working in classes. As an example, handwashing will continue to be a major part of the day as it was before lockdown.

Soft starts will be encouraged to avoid lining up groups in playgrounds. Staff will be thinking about how to get children safely into school. Establishing routines will be important. There could be zoned playgrounds and staggered breaks / lunches which will take time to adjust to. Our staff will plan orientation sessions for all children and young people when they first go back.

Transitions to P1 and P7/S1 – Is there a possibility that they could have some time in schools?

Maureen is keen to have some form of transition activity in June. It needs to be valuable and meaningful for children. It's not certain that bringing P1 children into school would be valuable as school is not operating normally and there is a 6 week gap until August. Recommendation will be that schools engage with parents to alleviate anxiety and build confidence.

P7 visiting secondary schools in small groups will be more valuable and could be done in small groups where this takes place

Variability of the learning + composite classes

The grouping of children will depend on the context of the school. All classes will be smaller.

Will there be staff to cover for absence?

There will continue to be supply staff and we are looking to increase the number of teachers in the supply pool to help with absences.

Will children return to the teacher they had pre-lockdown?

Setting rules like this will be really hard. Children will be in a smaller group e.g. 12/13 children. There may be more composite groups. Parents shouldn't worry about this. There is

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always a spread of ability in every class grouping and teachers are used to this and classes will be small.

Will parents get a chance to see what the schools look like?

Not practical for parents to visit schools to reduce the number of visitors in each school.

Staff are aware that they will need to spend time establishing routines and helping children to become familiar with procedures for things like handwashing, use of Fuel Zone etc. and any new process will be communicated with parents so that they can help get their children ready to go back to school.

How will playtime be supervised?

This will be based on emerging evidence. Playground could be zoned off depending on school layout. Children in each zone will be consistent and they will be supervised. More learning and activity outside is desirable.

Staggered lunches and breaks will feature.

Will days in school be fixed?

It is likely to be consistent to support working parents. We will be guided by the Government and scientists about any changes to the part-time nature of education.

School practice will be regularly reviewed and Parent Councils will have a key part to play.

Will sibling groups be considered when looking at attendance and will this work across more than 1 school?

Family Groupings will come together when there is more than 1 child in the same school. It is impossible to plan this to align across the sectors.

Will there be a partnership with employers?

Education Services needs employers to be sympathetic to the needs of families. Employers will hopefully support us by matching working patterns to the pattern of school and allow more flexible/work from home arrangements.

This is a Scotland wide issue and work is being done to raise the importance of this with employers.

Emphasised that working parents will struggle with children only having 2 days in school.

Government rule is that key worker children will be prioritised. It is impossible to provide full-time childcare for all. We don't have staff or buildings to accommodate so we are working with Glasgow Life, our out of school partners and the third sector to try and secure community accommodation.

Challenges for working parents. Evidence from elsewhere is that women really lose out and many cannot work from home. What support has been considered for those in such circumstances?

Discussions are taking place with third sector organisations, out of school care and community venues to work our plans to support childcare for key workers on the days that their children are not in school. We will not have the space in our schools due to the reduction in capacity so that's why we need to explore other options. As Scottish

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Government has also said, we will need businesses to work with parents to offer flexibility to the working week during this period whilst the schools are at half capacity in line with the government guidance.

While we have been more relaxed in the hubs about key worker status, there will need to be a considered approach in the next phase. It is likely to be an application process as we may not be able to offer this universally.

What will patterns of attendance look like in nursery?

Admissions policy is being developed. Discussions will be taking place with families in Glasgow nurseries to manage the situation as best we can. Staff know their children well.

Discussions are taking place with Partner Nurseries and they will also be speaking to their families about what can be offered.

Blended model of learning (school/home) – anxiety of timescales and how they will implement/childcare and P1 being deferred until January?

No, we will not be deferring P1s.

Blended model ...we've only just started engaging with the HTs and the unions and how this would look and we only heard the SG timescales last week. We know that some of our classrooms will not take 15 children with the current social distancing guidelines.

One example would be to split the school in half and two groups – two days in school and three days at home...we need to maximise the teaching hours with children. The blended model will be better than now – they will see their teachers every week. Interim step back to a new normal until the virus is under control.

Blended Learning / Part-time School Learning

Support for Parents – will this be made available?

When teachers have more contact with children there will be less reliance on parents. This should reduce the pressure. Family Learning will continue in some way but we will need to reduce the number of people coming in to school.

A blended model could include online elements. Work will be given out when young people are seen more regularly in school. Staff and children will work more closely together.

If pupils are in for 2 days and out for 3, will the work provided for home be with or without support?

It will be difficult to free up staff to do this as they will be teaching the other half of the class. There may be opportunities to use staff who cannot come in to the school environment to support learning from home.

How might sacrament preparation be managed?

Archdiocese will be thinking about this creatively. School and church will work together. Preparation for sacrament does not need to be done entirely at school.

School Transport

What provision will be made for those reliant on school buses?

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We will be guided by national advice. SPT are engaging with contractors about what provision will look like for all users. GCC will follow government advice. If parents don't want their child to use buses then they will need to take responsibility to get them to school.

What commitment is there from GCC and Scottish Government that Education will have the resources that it needs?

We will use current budgets to make the adaptations needed until we hear of any additional budget from the government. Pupil Equity Funding will continue to be used under the direction of our schools. The council is keeping a note of all additional expenditure e.g. childcare for key workers during Spring and Summer breaks. The council is very supportive of Education.

What will happen to Afterschool Clubs?

We will try not to lose this completely as it adds to the rich school experience. Staff and parents will be very anxious in the beginning but we hope that clubs will return as confidence returns. Will need time in the beginning to settle everyone back in.

Will Local Authorities be able to have their own approach?

Government will set the principles and we will have approaches based on this. Our staff will be encouraged to think creatively as we need bespoke solutions - secondary schools will require bespoke solutions due to the timetabling and different subjects offered.

Is GCC working with other local authorities to standardise approaches?

GCC is working with the other 7 authorities in the west partnership area. We still need clarity around 11th August start date from the government. Currently this is an in-service day in Glasgow.

If teachers are expected to be in school, what happened to their children?

Teachers are category one keyworkers. If there is no-one else to care for their children then they could access the childcare in the local authority they live.

Our School is used as a Hub – could we be trialling some of the things being suggested?

We have learned many things already from the hubs e.g. how can PE be delivered etc. and will be using the experience to shape our plans.

What is the timeframe for parents finding out what days their children will be in?

We need to wait and see what the Government advises and continue to discuss with the trade unions.

Groups of senior staff and teachers will be going back into their schools over the first and second week of June to start to pull plans together for their school community.

Lots of this needs to be bespoke to the school. Clear information to parents is more likely to be over the summer than by end June and we will let parents know the confirmed details as soon as possible.

Pupils will have been out of school for a while. Could the breadth of some subjects be changed and secondary school exams changed to reflect this?

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Exams are written 2/3 years ahead. Any change would be major. Priority is ensuring that S4-6 get the opportunity to undertake their qualifications. Breadth of learning is critical at this level.

S1-3 may experience a temporary reduction in the number of subjects studied. Aim is to get young people back into consistent learning, assess and review their learning.

What will happen to Language & Communication Resources (LCR) and similar provision?

Staff will plan dependent on needs and the staffing levels of the base and school.

Will all schools be guided to use the same online resources e.g. Showbie, Teams. SeeSaw etc.

Where schools are on a GCC managed system e.g. iPads there will be more consistency but we are looking to see how we can support all families and there's been a commitment by the government to support more digital equity.

What will happen to school holidays?

September weekend is a public holiday and October week is part of the teacher contract so there is no scope or plans to alter.

How will other types of learning be resourced e/g outdoor learning?

Outdoor Learning will be a feature as evidence suggests that being outdoors reduces risk of the virus. School is so much more than taught lessons and is about providing social and leadership opportunities for children and young people. Small scale residential experiences such as at Blairvadach are being explored.

How will quality music tuition be maintained?

Music tutors are planning at the moment about how they will deliver. We are committed to continuing to deliver a breadth of curriculum and learning.

The Saturday sessions at City Halls will be suspended and reviewed in October.

Challenges of Digital Learning

Blended learning and the inability to access online learning – will there be anything different?

Recognition that not everyone has access to online or that this appeals to them.

It will be different in that children will be in school some of the time. Teachers will be providing clear guidance on what children will do when they are learning at home. Plans will be regularly reviewed and modified as necessary.

IPad roll-out is being accelerated - teachers and secondary pupils are priority at the moment to prepare for exams and are more independent in their learning.

The connected learning programme is more than just a device and staff and pupils need support and training which has been difficult during lockdown.

We have still to see the detail around pre-loaded laptops that are being provided by the Scottish Government.

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Placing Requests & Appeals

Placing requests always carry a risk – there are no guarantees and a time delay. We can't hold appeal hearings during the crisis in the way we have done before

They may be done via conference calls. Parents have 28 days from the date of posting to lodge appeals. This means that they have until early June. There is often movement over the summer which allows us to resolve some of the appeals so not all appeals will need a hearing.

Appeal hearings likely to continue into July.

What are the proposals for making transitions and ensuring that enhanced transitions are smooth?

Now that we know that staff are back in June, Maureen will suggest that they do something around transitions in this period but detail still needs to be discussed including consultation with the trade unions.

For those needing bespoke transitions that could also be done during this time or during the summer or a softer start to the new term in August.

Schools have been asked to consider summer programmes with a strong learning focus. This is optional and staff would be paid to deliver them.

How will lunches be served and will packed lunches feature?

Packed lunches may be provided in some schools but it is not always ideal. For some children, school lunch is their best meal of the day. The practicalities of lunch arrangements are currently being worked through. Parents will still be able to provide their child with a packed lunch.

How will new teachers be introduced?

On day 1 it will be a staggered start and children gently introduced to the teacher and the new arrangements in school.

Health & Safety / Handwashing

Frequent handwashing is best and proven to be better than sanitizer.

Safe distancing – the scientific and medical evidence is changing all the time. At the moment it is 2m.

Reiteration of the message that we are all healthy when in school and that we shouldn't be in school if unwell. Clear protocols will be in place for those feeling unwell.

Signage will be important. It is important that safe distancing doesn't become a discipline issue – young people need to think and act responsibly and sharing that message will be key.

Testing for CV19 within schools

Test Trace & Isolate must be part of the national strategy. Unlikely to be able to offer testing in a school setting and we will follow the current guidance at all times.

Children are low risk. What happens if a child needs to isolate because a parent has been isolating?

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Health & safety protocol has been written in partnership with our NHS colleagues. Child would isolate but doesn't mean that everyone else in the class needs to isolate. We will always follow the most up to date guidance to keep everyone safe.

Protocols for handwashing – will additional resources be provided such as portable sinks?

It's easy to get taps set up outdoors but drainage is more challenging to put in place. If this is going to be a longstanding issue we would invest. We remain hopeful that it is temporary. Maureen has been looking at very creative solutions and will continue to do so.

Lots of classrooms have sinks which is great but if your school doesn't then the teachers will put in place arrangements for regular handwashing as they did before. Talking to children will be important and we can't simply impose on them. Parents and carers will also play an important role in key messaging about hand and cough hygiene in the home.

Will something be provided to mitigate the impact of handwashing?

We cannot provide emollient but children can bring their own. NHS advice is that there should be frequent handwashing.

What is the plan for reducing the anxiety of kids with Additional Support Needs (ASN)?

Smaller groups will help in mainstream schools. For those in specialist provision, the planning will be bespoke. Risk assessments will be done along with families where PPE for staff may be indicated.

Who will have responsibility for cleaning the active learning resources used with younger children?

Learning through play will be a challenge. More likely to be outdoors. Cleaning toys in nursery is normal practice. Soft toys will be taken away. More cleaning hours will be provided and procedures will be written up and shared with parents.

Does school uniform need to be boil washed?

Can uniform policy be adapted if outdoor learning is likely to feature more?

No evidence that CV19 survives for any length of time on clothing. Transmission is less likely outdoors. Our steps will be about minimising the risk and learning from the international evidence which shows that children are very low risk.

Parent Councils should be engaging in conversations with their school communities about clothing and uniform.

What will happen about intimate care such as nappy changing?

If children are healthy, the staff will take appropriate care as they have always done and do this safely.

Will there be opportunities for P7 group to go back to primary to say goodbye?

This may be part of the transition planning. For example, staff in primary schools could go with their class to the secondary school. It won't be exactly as it has been in previous years but there should be something to support this journey as we know this is a very important part of our P7s experience.

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Support for School Leavers

This work is underway. Pastoral care teachers and employability team identifying support needed. This will continue over the summer with employability team. Some of our major employers will be unable to take apprentices. Work underway with Skills Development Scotland to address this. This is a high priority.

Mental Health Support

Recovery, Resilience & Reconnection will be the focus. We are a nurturing city and well placed to deal with this. Counselling Services will continue to be available.

Are we considering the mental health impact of this?

Our own Psychological Services has been doing a huge amount to prepare for the pupils' return to the classroom and based on our well known nurturing principles. We will of course support our staff in anyway that's required in relation to the pandemic.

A report on the Danish schools' return that was a BBC feature a couple of weeks ago showed that schools had all the plans in place to support children's trauma and in fact the children were just delighted to be back in school and wanted to move on from the crisis and back to learning.

What support will there be for recovery?

We will need to create safe spaces for young people to talk. Pupils have suggested that PSE is about sharing concerns around 'Reconnection'.

We are still developing ideas and thoughts and building in the views of young people will be important. Their leadership of the issue will be important.

Provision for children who are shielding?

Teachers will need to plan for this and work with families in this category.

Feedback from parents following the events

Thank you so much for hosting these meetings and giving the parent body a voice. That is why we are all part of our parent councils. We all want the best for our kids and also our much valued school staff.

There will always be parents who are not happy, we cannot please everyone. It is a monumental task. Personally I feel Glasgow City Council are doing a very good job in such challenging circumstances and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of that discussion. It has been challenging trying to do the best for our children, parents and staff. I think some parents forget that we are only volunteers. We are doing this in the very little spare time we have while trying to home school and look after our own families. Thank you again for facilitating this. It is so appreciated.

I am reassured that in Glasgow we are continuing our nurturing approach and mindful of the impact of this on teachers as well as pupils. Thank you to all involved with today - it may not have been exactly what I was expecting but it was very useful anyway.

Thanks for convening - it was very useful feedback would that it was really well chaired, felt everyone had a chance to raise issues and air thoughts

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I thought that the group was very well run today and don't have any criticisms, I think it showed that on the whole we all have the same questions/concerns/issues and our main aim is to get the kids back to school quickly but only when safe.

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