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## Reflecting the COVID-19 context in early learning and childcare (ELC) and school inspections from August 2022

This inspection advice note provides details on how HM Inspectors will reflect the COVID -19 context in inspections from August 2022.

We recognise that the pandemic has had an impact on all communities. We will listen and talk to you about how the current context of your school/setting has changed as a result of COVID-19. We will want to learn about the specific impact COVID-19 has had on your school/setting; how you have adapted to address challenges as a result of the pandemic; and the impact this is having on learners.

During inspections, we will use your self-evaluation as the starting point to help us understand your context and setting. We will listen to what senior leaders and staff tell us about current priorities and ongoing challenges. We will also listen carefully to the views of learners, parents, partners and staff and use these views along with a range of evidence to reach our judgements. We will continue to provide evidence for the National Improvement Framework.

We will be sensitive to the pressures and challenges leaders, staff teams and your wider community face. Inspections will take place in person. Learning from our approaches to engagement with schools/settings during the pandemic, some of our activity may take place online where this is appropriate. For example, we may have initial discussions virtually with the headteacher. It may also be appropriate to hold meetings with parents or partners online. We will discuss with headteachers the most appropriate approaches for your setting.

We will continue to be proportionate and responsive as we gather our evidence. We will focus on the experiences of all learners and will want to understand how well their learning and wellbeing needs are being met. We will continue to promote children's rights as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We will listen with care, and act on the views of children and young people.

We are, first and foremost, interested in the learning experiences and achievements of children and young people, and how the school/setting is ensuring these are of the highest quality. We want to see the school/setting in action and learn from staff, learners, parents and partners about what is working. We aim to carry out inspections in a way that seeks to minimise burden on staff and keep paperwork required to a minimum. We will ask for your self-evaluation in advance of the inspection. There is no need to update all policies before an inspection.

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### Inspection frameworks

We will continue to use the quality improvement frameworks *How Good Is Our School?* (4th Edition) and *How Good Is Our Early Learning and Childcare?* as the focus for our inspections. We are not replacing or rewriting the existing quality indicators (QIs) you currently use for self-evaluation activities. We have outlined below how we will reflect the current context for each QI.

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## QI 1.3 - Leadership of change

We recognise the challenges arising for senior leaders in leading continuous improvement while managing the impact of the pandemic, including both staff and pupil absence. We know that as a result of the pandemic, approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school/setting may have been adversely affected.

We will explore your journey; the priorities you have identified for improvement and recovery; why you are focusing on these areas; and how these priorities are making a difference for children and young people. We recognise that you may have streamlined your approaches to strategic planning and prioritised areas that are likely to have the greatest impact on learners' experiences and outcomes. We are interested in learning about any priorities you have changed or adapted and the difference this is making for children and young people. We will speak to stakeholders about how they are working together with you to ensure your vision, values and aims are meaningful and relevant to your establishment and its wider community. We want to learn about how well the vision, values and aims are being used to support ongoing recovery and improvement.

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## QI 2.3 - Learning, teaching and assessment

We will take into account your current context when we evaluate the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. We will continue to observe children and young people learning. We recognise that because of the impact of COVID-19, it may take longer for a few children and young people to settle into class, participate in group work or engage with each other in group activities. We will discuss this with you and your staff, and be sensitive to the needs of children and young people when we observe learning. After observing a lesson, or part of a lesson, we will have a conversation with the member of staff. If it is not convenient, we will arrange to have a discussion about the lesson at another suitable time. We do not grade individual lessons.

We recognise that changes to learning environments due to COVID-19 may have resulted in approaches to learning, teaching and assessment being adapted. We are aware that for a few children and young people engagement in learning and approaches to learning may have been adversely affected. We will want to hear from you about the challenges and the approaches or strategies being developed to support learners to engage confidently and meaningfully in their learning. A feature of this will be consideration of how you make use of digital tools and platforms to support effective learning and teaching. We will also talk to you about how you are supporting continuity of learning for all children, including those children and young people that are absent.

We acknowledge that approaches to assessment may be different than those used prior to the pandemic. We will ask about your current approaches to planning learning, teaching and assessment and how you use data to ensure you meet the needs of all learners. We will explore with you the approaches you have in place to provide continuity of learning for different groups of learners and how well you are assessing their progress.

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## QI 3.1 - Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

We will consider the context of each school/setting and will discuss with you the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's wellbeing. We will listen and learn about your approaches to ensuring wellbeing and how these are meeting the needs of all children, young people and their families. We will be interested to hear about your relationships with families and awareness of community needs. We recognise that the needs of children and young people continue to change and will want to understand how you support this.

We appreciate that approaches such as supporting mental wellbeing, working with partners and providing professional learning for staff, are making a positive difference to learners across Scotland. We will explore with you how partnership approaches are improving mental wellbeing.

We will continue to explore how staff and practitioners continue to fulfil their statutory duties. We will discuss your approaches to supporting and improving attendance. We will look at how you support and include all children and young people, including those who face additional challenges, in all aspects of school life.

We will talk to children, young people and parents about your approaches to inclusion and equality. We will explore with you how your approaches are making a difference for children and young people. We will continue to explore how you support all children and young people to value diversity, challenge discrimination and be aware of their rights.

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## QI 3.2 - Raising attainment and achievement / securing children's progress

We will explore the context of each school/setting and will discuss with you the specific impact of the pandemic on children and young people's attainment and achievement. Schools and settings will have a range of information and data about learners' progress, attainment and achievement. We will discuss the range of data you share with us and how you have used this information to support children and young people to make progress.

We will speak to children and young people about their successes and achievements and sample their work. We will discuss with you the progress of cohorts, individuals, and identified groups of learners. We will listen and learn about the approaches you have used to identify where children and young people have gaps in their learning. We will discuss the steps you are taking to address these gaps to ensure all learners are making the best possible progress. In primary schools, ELC settings and across the broad general education to the end of S3 in secondary schools, we will use your data to discuss progress children and young people have made over time, always bearing in mind the impact of the pandemic. .

We will continue to use information you have, including Scottish Government Insight data and your school data, to evaluate attainment at the senior phase. We appreciate that there have been different awarding approaches since 2019. We want to reassure you that we use Insight attainment figures as a reliable reflection of young people's attainment. We will continue to consider how well your young people have attained, in comparison to the virtual comparator and the national average where appropriate.

We will discuss the approaches you are using to support educational recovery and increase progress in improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. This will include a discussion about how any additional funding is being used to improve outcomes for learners in line with the updated Scottish Attainment Challenge: Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress.

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## QI 2.2 – Curriculum: learning pathways

We recognise that you may be revisiting your curriculum rationale or changing your curriculum to reflect the context over the last few years. You may be trying out different approaches, or made changes to build on approaches developed during the pandemic. We will be interested to learn about the approaches you have continued to develop and/or implement and the difference this is making for your learners.

We recognise that the pandemic had an impact on the delivery of aspects of the curriculum, including practical subjects and play based learning. We will explore with you how you are supporting children and young people to build on their prior learning to develop their skills and knowledge across the curriculum. We will explore what, if any, elements of remote education remain in place as part of your curriculum now.

We recognise that learners and staff teams have developed digital literacy skills at pace during the pandemic. We will explore with you how your community has built on these achievements and how children and young people access and use digital technology to support and enhance their learning.

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## QI 2.7 – Partnerships: parental engagement

During the pandemic, we have heard about the approaches you have used to engage with parents and carers. On our inspections, we will want to hear about how these approaches have been evaluated, adapted and improved as recovery continues. We will be interested in hearing about your approaches to ensuring all parents and carers engage with the work of the school/setting, and how their views are sought and acted upon. We will talk to parents and carers about their experiences of engagement with the school/setting and the shared work to improve outcomes for all learners.

### How grades will be applied to the quality indicators

The inspection begins with your self-evaluation of your work. We will use this as the starting point for our discussions. We want to find out as much as we can about your work and the difference it is making for your learners. This may mean we will ask about something we have read, observed or heard about and will ensure we fully understand your work.

During the inspection, we will build up our understanding of your school/setting through our observations, discussions, reviewing documentation and the range of inspection

activity. This will give us a broad evidence base to understand the strengths and areas for improvement in your work. We will consider the strengths and areas for improvement to arrive at an overall grade for each quality indicator. We do not grade individual themes within a quality indicator.

At the end of the inspection week, we will share our findings, discuss strengths and aspects for improvement, and share provisional grades with senior leaders and local authority officers.