

## Media Release

**Date: 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

### **Closing schools now would be premature but kept under review – Public Health and ESC**

It would be premature to close schools given the current local evidence, however this will be kept under review.

Public Health Services and the Office of the Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture will continue to collaborate on providing schools and early years providers with the most up-to-date information.

The Director of Public Health has given the community clear advice about the benefits of ‘social distancing’ in helping to contain the spread of viruses.

Advice has also been issued today for event organisers to consider whether their event is essential, or whether it can be held in such a way to meet social distancing advice. If not, then the advice is to postpone. The operation of schools and businesses is considered essential in this context, however additional advice will be provided to schools about events held within them such as assemblies. The latest advice is aimed at reducing the amount of non-essential activity, in line with previous guidance about non-essential travel.

Dr Nikki Brink, Director of Public Health, said:

‘Our current advice is that it would be premature to close schools at this stage. Latest evidence is that we are not seeing the kind of seeding in the community experienced elsewhere – this is the passing of the virus from person-to-person. We must also consider a range of other factors before such advice was given. For example closing schools would lead in many cases to grandparents looking after children, which could be counter-productive given grandparents would fall into the most vulnerable group for coronavirus. Closing schools could also result in the island losing key workers, in healthcare for example, who would have to be at home with their children. We must strike a balance and, based on the current evidence, we do not believe now is the right time.’

Ed Ashton, Director of Operations for Education, said:

‘We have been and remain in close dialogue with colleagues from Public Health on this. We are following their advice as we would encourage all islanders to do. The

advice so far has been focused on limiting wherever possible events and interactions where social distancing cannot be in place. This means anything non-essential but the running of schools and businesses is essential for many reasons. We will be giving schools and early years providers additional advice on how to limit close contact within their settings that isn't essential, so far example around the operation of assemblies or other groups schools run.'

Deputy Matt Fallaize, President of the Committee *for* Education, Sport & Culture, said:

'I want to thank all education staff for their ongoing commitment to their students. We appreciate these are difficult times for teachers as they are for our community generally and their professionalism in keeping schools focused on students' needs is commendable. Decisions are being guided by extensive advice from public health professionals. At the present time that advice leads us to keep schools open, but of course that may change and at every stage we will do what is in the best interests of the health of our students, teachers and whole community.'

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## Notes to Media

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