



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Reopening Our Schools

The Roadmap for the Full Return to School

27th July 2020



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Roadmap for the Full Return to School – Executive Summary

There are almost 1 million students attending school in the primary and post primary sectors, across approximately 4,000 schools, in which close to 100,000 staff are employed.

The announcement on March 12th of the closure of all schools, colleges, universities and other training and learning facilities was the commencement of a series of challenges across the education sector as a result of COVID-19.

The interests of students and their families, as well as the safety of the staff, have always been paramount as we have worked through these challenges.

This Roadmap set outs how schools will reopen for all students from the end of August and what the operation of our schools will look like and be sustainable in a COVID-19 context. It has been developed in line with [public health advice](#) issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC), the *Roadmap for Society and Business*¹, and follows comprehensive and intensive engagement with education stakeholders including the school management bodies and staff representatives. It also reflects a consideration of approaches adopted in other jurisdictions, which have been finalised in recent weeks.

The reopening process is a massive logistical operation, on both a national basis and local level for individual schools. This Roadmap sets out:

1. The **Public Health Advice** related to reopening of schools provided by the HPSC;
2. The **COVID-19 Response Plans** for Primary and Special Schools and Post Primary Schools, in line with the **Return to Work Safely Protocol**, to be implemented in advance of schools re-opening.

¹ The Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business sets out 6 over-riding principles as follows:

Safe	informed and guided by a public health assessment of risk
Rational -	includes consideration of the social and economic benefits and impacts of any modifications of restrictions and their feasibility
Evidence-informed	uses all of the data and research available to us to guide thinking
Fair	ethical and respects human dignity, autonomy and supports equality
Open & transparent	decisions are clear, well communicated and subject to the necessary checks and balances
Whole of Society	based on the concept of solidarity and supporting cohesion as we exit over time

3. The **Measures to be implemented in Schools** to (i) minimise the risk of introduction of infection in our schools; and (ii) managing risk of spread if introduced through:
 - Regular and good hand hygiene;
 - Good respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette;
 - Enhanced cleaning regimes; and
 - Maintaining physical distancing in the classroom and within schools;
4. The suite of **Additional Supports** available to schools to implement their Covid-19 Response Plan and operate in a sustainable way;
5. The arrangements to **Get Children Safely to our Schools**;
6. How the **Mental Health and Wellbeing of Students and Staff** will be supported throughout the re-opening process,
7. Guidance on **Learning and School Programmes in 2020/21**;
8. How schools can support those staff and students who cannot attend school for health reasons related to COVID-19 and in the event of a school closure in the future;
9. The **Communication Arrangements** in place to ensure schools, school communities and all stakeholders have clear, relevant and timely information to support the reopening and continued operation of schools; and
10. A summary on **what schools will be like** when they reopen.

Schools will reopen for all students from the end of August.

Public Health Advice

On June 24th 2020, the HPSC issued [*COVID-19 recommendations for the re-opening of schools and educational facilities*](#) (the 'Public Health Advice') to the Department of Education to inform the development of sector specific guidance for educational settings.

The interim Public Health Advice was developed in the context of the current COVID-19 epidemiology in Ireland, and it specifically notes that it *will be updated to reflect the changing situation*. The Department and Minister has continued to engage with health authorities since the publication of the interim recommendations. The Department will continue to work with the health authorities and implement as appropriate any changes necessary to support school reopening in line with any changes to public health advice to manage the spread of COVID-19. It has been confirmed that at the current time, there is no change to the public health advice for the reopening of schools and educational facilities that was provided at the end of June 2020 by the HPSC. The public health authorities will keep this under review as evidence emerges from other countries where schools have reopened.

The measures set out in the Public Health Advice are *“aimed at risk minimization of COVID-19, for young people, teachers, other staff, their families and the wider community, recognizing the importance of education for health and well-being and that free primary education provided by the State is a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitution”* and provides clear guidance for safe school operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in schools, predicated on two general recommendations:

1. Minimising the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the school community; and
2. Managing the risk of spread if introduced through:
 - Regular hand hygiene;
 - Maintaining physical distancing;
 - Application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and
 - Environmental hygiene.

All Departmental Guidance Documents referred to in the Roadmap, specifically the COVID-19 Response Plans and Templates, have been developed in line with the Public Health Advice.

Beyond the specific detailed guidance within the Public Health Advice, there are a number of broad themes outlined in the advice which are critical to our ability to minimising risk associated with COVID-19 in our schools:

- **A Balanced Approach**

“One of the key challenges for schools during this pandemic is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for pupils/students and where teachers feel able to engage with pupils in a way that supports their learning”

- **Apply Common-Sense**

“An atmosphere of fear and an overwhelming preoccupation with infection and hygiene can be harmful to teachers and pupils and to the quality of the educational experience without materially reducing the risk of infection beyond what can be achieved with a common-sense approach”

- **Create Awareness**

“A heightened awareness by staff, parents and children (where age appropriate) is required so that they know how to protect themselves and each other and how to recognise and report symptoms of COVID-19 infection”

- **Do Everything Practical to Avoid Introduction of COVID-19 into the school**

“The most critical part of managing the risks of COVID-19 related to schools is doing everything practical to avoid introduction of COVID-19 into the school. If the infection is not introduced it cannot spread. The risk of introduction is related to how common the infection is in the community served by the school at a given time. If the infection is uncommon in the community then the likelihood of introduction is much lower”

- **Stay at Home if Unwell**

“No person (child, teacher or parent) should attend an educational setting if unwell or any members of their household are unwell with symptoms consistent with COVID-19”

- **Keep doing the key measures to keep us all safe**

“Social (Physical) distancing, hand hygiene and good respiratory etiquette should be observed by all (children, teachers, parents and visitors)”

A key element to ensuring that schools remain open once they reopen is for everyone in the school community (students, their families and staff) to continue to play their role in keeping the virus out of their school by adopting behaviours in harmony with these broad themes.

COVID-19 Response Plans for Schools

The [Return to Work Safely Protocol](#), prepared by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health, is designed to:

- support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace; and
- to adapt their workplace procedures and practices to comply fully with the COVID-19 related public health protection measures identified as necessary by the HSE.

It sets out the steps that must be taken before a workplace reopens, and through its operation, including:

- mandatory COVID-19 induction training;
- the appointment of at least one lead worker representative charged with ensuring that COVID-19 measures are strictly adhered to in their place of work; and
- processes to deal with suspected cases of COVID-19.

Schools are places of learning for students whilst all schools are also places of work. The Return to Work Safely Protocol will be implemented in all schools. To support schools to implement the Protocol the Department has developed COVID-19 Response Plan template documentation tailored to reflect the differences between Post Primary Schools and Primary and Special Schools.

The completion and implementation of the **Covid-19 Response Plan** by a school is the means through which schools can best prevent the introduction and spread of Covid-19 in the school environment. **It is a very important living document which will be adapted over time to reflect the evolving COVID-19 context.**

The COVID-19 Response Plan templates has been developed in line with Public Health Advice, the guidance provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). They have been prepared and shared with the education partners. This centralised approach was adopted to reduce the administrative burden on schools and enable a consistency of approach across the sector. The templates include:

- a draft **COVID-19 Policy Document** to be updated by each school;
- the relevant **pre-return to work steps** to be completed by both the school management and staff;
- the **process for the appointment of a 'Lead Worker Representative'** at school level, as agreed by the Department and staff representatives;

- **a risk assessment template** to identify any risks to be managed at school level (developed in conjunction with the HSA);
- **various checklists** to allow for planning and reopening of schools, including induction training, dealing with suspected cases and cleaning of schools are also included;
- **Guidance on restricted access** to the school facility for persons other than staff and students for essential purposes and limited to those who have prior approval from the Principal; and
- Guidance related to the **prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals** whereby schools will be required to maintain a log of staff and pupil/student contacts and a detailed sign in/sign out log of those visiting the school facility will require to be maintained.

Where there is a **suspected case of COVID-19 in a school**, the COVID-19 Response Plan Guidance also sets out steps schools should take as follows:

- Bring the person to the designated isolation area available in each school;
- Arrangements to contact parents/guardians in the event of a suspected case in a pupil/student;
- Facilitate the person remaining in isolation if they cannot go home immediately;
- Supporting the making of arrangements for transport home or if they are too unwell to go home to contact 999 or 112 to advise it is a COVID-19 suspected case;
- Carrying out an assessment of the incident to determine follow up actions; and
- Arrangements for the appropriate cleaning of the isolation and work areas.

Where there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 amongst school staff or pupils, schools need to maintain both staff and pupil confidentiality at all times and must **follow the instructions of HSE Public Health**. HSE Public Health will:

- inform any staff/parents or students who come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process;
- contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made; and
- advise on the appropriate action, on a case-by-case basis, that should be taken vis-à-vis the operation of the school.

Measures and Operational Changes to be implemented in Schools

The measures set out in the Public Health Advice are predicated on two general recommendations:

1. Minimising the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the school community; and
2. Managing the risk of spread if introduced through:
 - Regular hand hygiene;
 - Maintaining physical distancing;
 - Application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and
 - Environmental hygiene.

In terms of *Minimising the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the school community*, **it is critical that people stay at home if unwell**. Nobody should go to school if they are unwell or any members of their household are unwell with symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

In managing the risk of spread of COVID-19 if introduced into the school community, this section sets out the specific guidance and supports available to schools relating to:

- Supporting and promoting good hand hygiene;
- Enhanced cleaning regimes within our schools;
- Maintaining physical distancing within schools and in the classroom; and
- The use of face coverings/masks in schools.

Supporting and Promoting Good Hand Hygiene

Section 5.1 of the Public Health Advice stresses the importance of regular and good hand hygiene as a key control measure to minimise the risk of spread of COVID-19 in infection is introduced. The Public Health Advice provides practical guidance on:

- Frequency of hand hygiene;
- Measures to support and promote good hand hygiene;
- Guidance on hand washing facilities, hand washing products and hand sanitiser.

Schools should carefully consider how best to apply this section of the Public Health Advice on hand hygiene in their school. In support of this work, schools will be provided by the Department with:

- access to training on when to wash hands and how to wash them properly.
- posters for display throughout the school to promote good hand hygiene; and
- access to hand hygiene products and consumables through a centralised drawdown framework (as described later in this Roadmap).

In addition, in primary schools a focus will be placed on the use of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme as a way to promote personal hygiene including proper hand hygiene for younger pupils.

As noted in the Public Health Advice *“Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a sanitiser (when hands look clean)”*.

As existing handwashing facilities in schools were not designed for the enhanced level of handwashing envisaged necessary in a post COVID-19 environment without significantly impacting on educational class time, funding will be provided to augment hand hygiene facilities in schools. Given that hand sanitisers can be deployed more readily at entry and exit points of schools and for classrooms, the Department will provide funding to schools to install and use hand sanitisers for each classroom and other key locations (entry/exit points) in their school.

Schools will have access to hand sanitiser dispensers, and the ongoing supply of sanitiser for each school through a centralised drawdown framework. The framework will be available for drawdown from early August and detailed guidance will issue to schools on how to use it.

The above measures will be important elements in ensuring that best practice in hand hygiene is applied in schools.

Enhanced Cleaning Regimes in our Schools

In line with the Public Health Advice, more regular and enhanced cleaning regimes will need to be implemented in each school to manage the risk of introduction and spread of COVID-19.

Section 5.5 and 5.6 of the Public Health Advice provides relevant guidance to schools on effective school cleaning including:

- steps to be taken before reopening the school;
- how to clean;
- the options for both routine and post COVID-19 case cleaning for surfaces, toilets and equipment;
- guidance on cleaning of shared equipment in schools such as musical instruments, art materials, electronic and sports equipment.
- guidance on how to manage cleaning of toys for young children and for the care of equipment and aids for pupils with special educational needs;
- the PPE to be used for cleaning in schools as well as the waste management treatment of materials resulting from routine cleaning and post COVID-19 cases.
- that each setting in a school should be cleaned at least once per day and where there is access to additional cleaning support during school hours it should be focused on frequently touched objects and surfaces; and
- the cleaning steps that should take place in a school room where an individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 was present as well as the arrangements needed for communal areas the person may have visited/used.

In support of schools implementing this enhanced cleaning regime in line with the Public Health Advice and the COVID-19 Response Plan, schools will be provided with:

- A template checklist within the COVID-Response Plan related to cleaning;
- A module in the Induction Training Programme which focuses on cleaning; and
- A COVID-19 capitation grant to fund the cost of enhanced cleaning regimes within schools.

Maintaining Physical Distancing in Schools

The Public Health Advice sets out the

“..the principle of distancing can be usefully applied in the school setting, allowing for some flexibility when needed whilst noting that it must be applied in a practical way, recognising that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue”.

In terms of maintaining physical distancing, measures outlined in the Public Health Advice fall into two broad categories:

- (i) *Increasing separation;*
- (ii) *Decreasing interaction between students themselves, between students and staff and between staff when they are together;*

It also recognises that:

- the implementation of physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning;
- care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times; and
- staff will not always be able to maintain physical distance from their students and it is not appropriate that they would be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the student or the learning and health and safety of other students.

Given that each school setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the school; and (iv) student numbers, schools themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate reconfigurations / operational changes necessary to maintain physical distancing.

Section 5.3 of the Public Health Advice outlines the practical measures that should be considered and, if appropriate, implemented in schools at both primary and post primary level.

The implementation of physical reconfiguration measures in schools, allied to the additional supports set out later in this Roadmap, provide the operational means through which physical distancing within schools can be maintained.

Specific additional guidance on the matter on maintaining physical distancing within the classroom at both primary and post primary level is set out below.

Maintaining physical distance in the classroom - Primary

The Public Health Advice sets out the guidelines for maintaining physical distance in the classroom as primary level:

- *A distance of 1 metre should be maintained between desks or between individual pupils. It is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore, achieving this recommendation in the first 4 years of primary school, is not a prerequisite to reopening a primary school for all pupils.*
- *Where possible, work-stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces that are shared.*
- *The risk of spread of infection may be reduced by structuring pupils and their teachers into Class Bubbles (i.e. a class grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as possible) and discrete groups or 'Pods' within those class bubbles, to the extent that this is practical.*
- *If a class is divided into Pods, there should be at least 1m distance between individual Pods within the Class Bubble and between individuals in the pod, whenever possible.*
- *Generally speaking the objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as the latter will not always be possible.*
- *The aim of the system within the school, is that each class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measure, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble.*
- *Pod sizes should be kept as small as is likely to be reasonably practical in the specific classroom context.*
- *To the greatest extent possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will not be possible at all times.*
- *Different Class Bubbles should where possible have separate breaks and meal times or separate areas at break or meal times [or this could be different class years i.e. 2nd class, 3rd class etc.].*
- *Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided/minimised where possible.*
- *Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible*

To maintain physical distancing in the classroom, primary schools and special schools should:

1. Reconfigure class spaces to maximise physical distancing
2. Utilise and reconfigure all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing

To support primary schools and special schools in the implementation of physical distancing in the classroom, the Department has developed a suite of illustrative classroom layouts of potential options (including arrangements for special classes) which are in accordance with the public health advice, and assumes

- Room is clear of any unnecessary furniture/shelves etc. on the walls
- A variety of classroom sizes.

[A link to the suite of illustrative primary classroom layouts is available here.](#)

[You can find the link for SEN classrooms here.](#)

Funding will be provided under the enhanced minor works grant to facilitate this classroom re-configuration works. This funding will be provided to schools by mid-August.

Maintaining physical distance in the classroom - Post Primary

In implementing the public health advice within post primary school classrooms, it is acknowledged that each school setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the school; (iv) student numbers; (v) class configuration; and (vi) ease of potential access to space outside the school.

In recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach would not be appropriate as schools themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate configuration for their school, the Department has developed a *Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom in Post Primary Schools with a full return of all Students for the 2020/21 School Year*. The Framework sets out a suite of available measures that must be implemented at individual school level to the greatest possible extent.

The suite of measures set out in the Framework are:

1. Reconfigure class spaces to maximise physical distancing;
2. Utilising and reconfiguring all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing;
3. Review Timetables;
4. Reconfiguring Classes;
5. Consider Use of Live Streaming within the School; and
6. Accessing available spaces within the local community

These suite of measures provides a practical framework for schools to use to maintain physical distancing in the classroom with the full return of all students for the 2020/21 school year.

In exceptional circumstances, where notwithstanding the application of these measures, physical distancing by organisational means for a larger class proves not to be possible, then the school must consider the use of face covering/visors in that larger class. This exceptional measure should be kept continually under review by the school, who should continue to make every effort to devise an alternative solution using the measures set out at 1 to 6 above.

Staff or students who cannot wear face coverings or visors for health reasons should be based in other classrooms or areas wherever possible. Students should not be required to wear face coverings or visors for the duration of the whole school day.

[A link to the Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom in Post Primary Schools with a full return of all Students for the 2020/21 School Year can be found here.](#)

[A link to the Illustrative guide for post-primary schools can be found here.](#)

Use of Face Coverings/Masks within Schools

On the use of face coverings/masks in schools, the Public Health Advice states that:

“Non-medical masks may reduce transmission from individuals who are shedding the virus. However, the extent of this benefit is unknown (especially in children) and would only be potentially beneficial if done properly. It is not practical for many students to wear a mask properly for the duration of a school day. Cloth face coverings are not suitable for children under the age of 13 and anyone who:

- has trouble breathing*
- is unconscious or incapacitated*
- is unable to remove it without help*
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering*

Older students should not be requested to wear a facial covering but those who may wish to wear a facial covering where physical distancing is difficult to maintain should not be discouraged.

It is essential that those wearing a cloth face covering understand

- The purpose is not to protect themselves but to reduce onward transmission and the benefit is reliant on ensuring the mask is worn appropriately see guidance on mask wearing*
- Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.*
- It is not a teachers responsibility to enforce mask use by pupils*

In line with the Public Health Advice, the use of face coverings/masks by pupils in primary schools by pupils should not occur.

In post primary schools, the use of face coverings/masks by students may be a feature where:

- The student themselves wishes to wear a facial covering in circumstances where physical distancing is difficult to maintain within the school; and/or*
- In the exceptional circumstances, where notwithstanding the application of the measures in the Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom in Post Primary Schools with a full return of all Students for the 2020/21 School Year, physical distancing by organisational means for a larger class proves not to be possible.*

Additional Supports Available to Schools

The Department is providing capital and current funding now of an additional €377 million to support the safe and sustainable reopening of schools under the Roadmap. Further funding for school costs related to hand hygiene measures and PPE needs under the COVID-19 Response Plan, will be confirmed post the establishment of the drawdown framework of suppliers, which schools will have access to, described at the end of this section.

In providing these additional supports, the Department is conscious that schools need to have certainty that what is provided not only allows them to reopen safely but to remain open.

The Department recognises that given the size and scale of the schools system and the inherent differences between primary, and post primary schools and the particular challenges for special schools and special classes, that a “one size fits all” approach would not be appropriate and schools should be provided with some flexibility to manage the suite of resources now available from the Department.

The section sets out the additional supports and measures available to primary, post primary and special schools/special classes.

Finally taking into consideration the impacts that the current school closures have had on students generally but particularly on children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage. Additional NEPS psychologists will be appointed to provide enhanced services to support the wellbeing of our school communities at this time, with a particular emphasis on the wellbeing of our special school communities.

Additional Support for Primary Schools

The range of additional supports available to Primary Schools are:

- An enhanced Minor Works Grant to support full implementation of COVID-19 response plans;
- Employing an aide to help with the school re-opening logistics;
- Increased management support to schools;
- Extending the current pilot supply panel for substitute teachers on a nationwide basis; and
- Additional financial supports to provide for additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs under the COVID-19 Response Plans.

Enhanced Minor Works to Support Full Implementation of COVID-19 Response Plans

The full implementation of the *COVID-19 Response Plans for Schools*, and the Public Health Advice, may require some reconfiguration works within schools including:

- Ensuring that all available space in the school should be availed of in order to safely maximising physical distancing; and
- the class space should be reconfigured to maximise physical distancing

Given that each school setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the school and (iv) student numbers; individual schools are best placed to decide on the appropriate re-configuration works for their school.

To support this work, a once off enhanced minor works grant will be paid to all primary schools by mid-August.

By providing funding to schools in this way, schools will have the necessary flexibility to implement necessary physical measures in their school quickly in compliance with the Public Health Advice and this Roadmap.

The Minor Works Grant is based on a flat rate of €5,500 plus a per capita rate of €18.50 for each pupil (€74 in the case of pupils in special schools or special classes). The enhanced element of the minor work grant will match this (therefore doubling the minor works grant to schools).

The table below provides an illustrative example of the value of the minor works grant for primary schools of various sizes.

School Size	Current Minor Works Grant	Enhanced COVID -19 element	Total Minor Works Grant
60	€6,610	€6,610	€13,220
100	€7,350	€7,350	€14,700
200	€9,200	€9,200	€18,400
300	€11,050	€11,050	€22,100
400	€12,900	€12,900	€25,800
500	€14,750	€14,750	€29,500
Calculations in this table based on number of mainstream pupils only;			

Employing an aide to help with school reopening logistics

Funding will be provided to primary schools to employ an aide to assist with the physical and logistical arrangements necessary for school re-opening including movement of furniture, setting up hand sanitising stations, signage, training, engaging with parents and Funding will be provided to each primary school on a sliding scale to facilitate this work. The level of funding is based on the size of the schools and is set out in the following table:

From Enrolment Range	No. of Days
<300	2
301 -600	5
>600	10

Increased Management Supports to Schools

The Department is providing funding for **1 release day per week** for teaching principals and for those primary schools with an admin principal, there will also be release days for the deputy principal. This additional provision is set out in the tables below.

Principal Release days

Size of School*	Additional Number of days release time
Principal + 5/6	6
Principal + 3/4	12
Principal + 0/1/2	18

*refers to mainstream class posts

Deputy Principals Release Days where schools have an Admin Principal

In schools where the Principal is an Admin Principal, the Deputy Principal will have an entitlement to Deputy Principal Release days in respect of the 2020/21 school year as follows:

Size of School*	Number of days release time
< Principal + 9	5
Principal + 9 – Principal + 16	10
Principal + 17 – Principal + 24	12
Principal + 25 – Principal + 32	14
>Principal + 33	16
All Special Schools > P+4	16

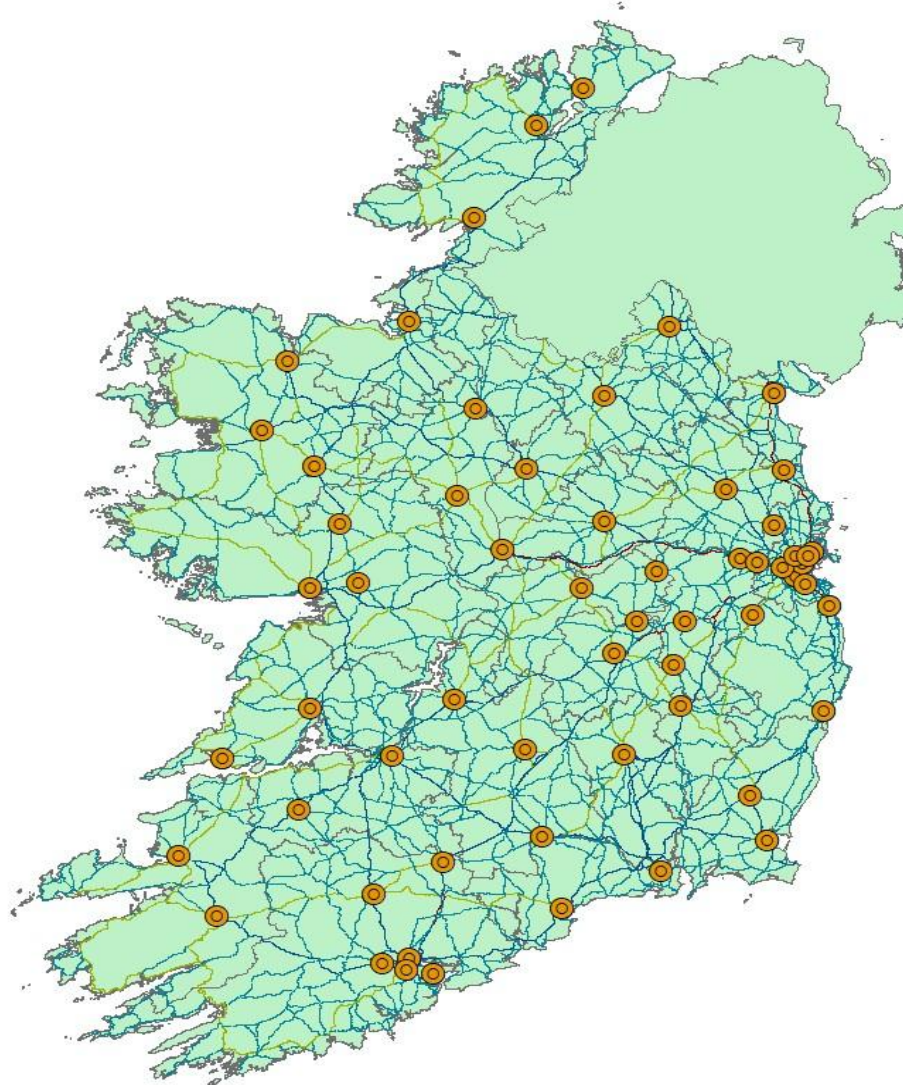
*refers to mainstream class posts

Extending the Current Pilot Supply Panel for Substitute Teachers on a Nationwide Basis

To support the availability of substitute teachers, the Department is extending the current pilot supply panels on a nationwide basis for the 2020/21 school year. This will involve the additional allocation of approx. 200 teaching posts. The location of the panels areas are illustrated in the following map. As work proceeds in establishing the supply panels, further refinements may be made where there are challenges in accessing substitute teachers.

County	Town
Carlow	Carlow
Cavan	Cavan
Clare	Ennis
Clare	Kilrush
Cork	Cobh
Cork	Mitchelstown
Cork	Mallow
Cork	Ballincollig
Cork	Cork City North *
Cork	Cork city Centre
Donegal	Letterkenny
Donegal	Donegal
Donegal	Buncrana
Dublin	Terenure *
Dublin	Dublin city centre
Dublin	Ballyfermot
Dublin	Artane *
Dublin	Arklow
Dublin	Ballinteer
Galway	Athenry *
Galway	Galway City
Galway	Tuam
Kerry	Tralee
Kerry	Killarney
Kildare	Maynooth
Kildare	Athy
Kildare	Leixlip *
Kildare	Kildare Town
Kilkenny	Kilkenny City
Laois	Portarlington
Laois	Portlaoise
Leitrim	Carrick On Shannon
Limerick	Castletroy
Limerick	Newcastlewest
Longford	Longford
Louth	Dundalk
Louth	Drogheda
Mayo	Claremorris
Mayo	Castlebar
Mayo	Ballina
Meath	Ashbourne
Meath	Navan *
Monaghan	Monaghan
Offaly	Tullamore
Offaly	Edenderry
Roscommon	Roscommon
Sligo	Sligo
Tipperary	Nenagh
Tipperary	Thurles
Tipperary	Clonmel
Waterford	Waterford
Waterford	Dungarvan
Westmeath	Athlone
Westmeath	Mullingar
Wexford	Wexford
Wexford	Enniscorthy
Wicklow	Arklow

Supply Panel locations



Wicklow Bray
Wicklow Blessington
* Pilot Supply Panels

Additional Financial supports to schools to cover additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs

To support the implementation of enhanced cleaning regimes in schools, a COVID-19 capitation payment will be used as the mechanism to support the implementation of enhanced cleaning regimes in Primary schools, including special schools and special classes, with close to an additional €40 million for this purpose. This will be provided on a sliding scale in line with pupil enrolments. Enhanced support will be provided for special schools and classes.

Examples of the amount payable to schools of various sizes is provided in the table below.

Primary schools supplemental COVID-19 Grant for cleaning costs	
Pupil Enrolment	Mainstream
Up to 60	€3,780
100	€6,300
200	€12,600
400	€25,200
600	€37,800

The COVID-19 capitation grant will also be the mechanism through which additional funding will be provided to cater for school costs related to hand hygiene measures and PPE requirements under the COVID-19 Response Plan. Additional provision for this purpose will be confirmed with the establishment of the drawdown framework of suppliers described later in this section.

Additional Support for Post Primary Schools

The range of additional supports available to post primary schools are:

- A new Minor Works Grant to post primary schools to support full implementation of COVID-19 response plans;
- Employing an aide to help with the school re-opening logistics;
- 1,080 additional teaching posts including 120 guidance posts;
- Enhanced supervision supports; and
- Additional financial supports to schools to cover additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs under COVID-19 Response Plans.

A new Minor Works Grant to Post Primary School to Support Full Implementation of COVID-19 Response Plans

The full implementation of the *COVID-19 Response Plans for Schools*, and the Public Health Advice, may require some reconfiguration works within schools including:

- Ensuring that all available space in the school should be availed of in order to safely maximising physical distancing; and
- the class space should be reconfigured to maximise physical distancing

Given that each school setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the school and (iv) student numbers; individual schools are best placed to decide on the appropriate re-configuration works for their school.

To support this work, a new once off minor works grant will be paid to all eligible post primary schools by mid-August.

By providing funding to schools in this way, schools will have necessary flexibility to implement necessary physical measures in their school quickly in compliance with the Public Health Advice and this Roadmap.

The Minor Works grant is based on a flat rate of €10,000 per school plus a per capita rate of €100 for each student (€400 in the case of students in special classes).

The table below provides an illustrative example of the value of the minor works grant for post primary schools of various sizes.

School size	Minor Works Grant
200	€30,000.00
400	€50,000.00
600	€70,000.00
800	€90,000.00
1000	€110,000.00
Note: Calculations in this table based on no of mainstream students enrolled only	

Employing an aide to help with school reopening logistics

Funding will be provided to post primary schools to employ an aide, similar to an examination aide, to assist with the physical and logistical arrangements necessary for school re-opening including movement of furniture, setting up hand sanitising stations, signage, training, engaging with parents and staff etc. Funding will be provided to each post primary school on a sliding scale to facilitate this work. The level of funding is based on the size of the schools and is set out in the following table:

Enrolment Range	No. of Days
less than 600	15
>600	20

1,000 Additional Teaching Posts

The Department is making over 1,000 additional teaching posts available to post primary schools in the free scheme. Posts equivalent to 0.6 PTR reduction will be allocated based as normal on school enrolments and will be clearly identifiable in the school's staffing schedule.

This allocation will support the important work of teaching and learning and provide additional teachers needed to support teacher substitution, management of physical distancing requirements by reallocating class timetables in schools to smaller groups class sizes where necessary. These posts will also provide for management supports.

Approximately 120 posts will also be provided for guidance to support student wellbeing recognising the particular importance for this support in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic challenges. These posts will bring guidance provision in schools back to the level last seen before the financial crises. Schools will have flexibility to consider how best to align this resource allocation within the objectives of the School's Guidance Plan.

It is also recognised that at an individual school level, notwithstanding the range of measures including the framework to support physical distancing and the teaching and management allocation referenced here, that some challenges may remain to allow a post primary school to fully reopen safely. The Department is making available a number of posts to support these schools and relevant details will be included in circular letters to schools.

Enhanced Supervision Supports

€40m funding is being provided for additional supervision to support the management of physical distancing in post primary schools (such as ensuring the careful movement of students to classes for specialist subjects where it is neither practical nor possible to remain in the classroom).

An additional funding allocation will be provided to schools to support this work and will be on a sliding scale to reflect pupil enrolments.

Examples of the amount payable to schools of various sizes is provided in the table below.

Post Primary Schools Supplemental COVID-19 Grant for Substitution & Supervision	
Pupil Enrolment	Mainstream
Up to 200	€21,000
400	€42,000
600	€63,000
800	€84,000

Additional Financial supports to schools to cover additional cleaning, hand hygiene and PPE costs

€12.4m will be provided to schools for enhanced cleaning to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 in schools.

The COVID-19 capitation payment will be used as the mechanism to support the implementation of enhanced cleaning regimes in schools with an additional €12.4m will be provided to schools for this purpose. This will be provided on a sliding scale in line with pupil enrolments and specific additional supports will be provided for special schools and classes.

Examples of the amount payable to schools of various sizes is provided in the table below.

Post Primary schools supplemental Covid Grant for cleaning costs	
Pupil Enrolment	Mainstream
200	€6,600
400	€13,200
600	€19,800
800	€26,400

The COVID-19 capitation grant will also be the mechanism through which additional funding will be provided to cater for school costs related to hand hygiene measures and PPE requirements under the COVID-19 Response Plan. Additional provision for this purpose will be confirmed to schools with the establishment of the drawdown framework of suppliers described later in this section.

Additional Support to Special Schools and for Special Classes

The Department is making additional provision for special schools and special classes in recognition of the particular challenges that these schools and classes will face dealing with children with complex medical and care needs.

Additional NEPS psychologists will be appointed to provide enhanced services to support the wellbeing of our school communities at this time, with a particular emphasis on the wellbeing of our special school communities.

Special schools will receive funding equivalent to 10 days, for the purposes of employing an aide to assist with the logistics for preparing for reopening.

To support this work, a once off enhanced minor works grant will be paid to all schools by mid-August. By providing funding to schools in this way, schools will have necessary flexibility to implement necessary physical measures in their school quickly in compliance with the Public Health Advice and this Roadmap. Enhanced per capita rates apply for pupils attending a special school or attending a special class attached to a mainstream school. Special schools and schools with special classes where there is a teaching principal will receive one release day per week. Those schools with admin Deputy Principals will be provided with 16 release days.

The Department is also supporting the replacement of all absences of SNAs in school settings.

Enhanced COVID-19 rates are payable in respect of students attending special schools and special classes attached to mainstream schools to assist with the extra costs associated with the cleaning of classrooms with a small number of students, operating specialist provision.

Primary Schools Supplemental Covid-19 Grant funding for cleaning costs in Special Schools	
No of Teachers	Enhanced funding
1	€4,620
2	€4,774
3	€7,392
4	€10,010
5	€12,628
6	€15,169
7	€17,556
8	€19,866
9	€20,944
10	€23,485
11	€26,026
12	€28,567
13	€31,108
14	€33,649
15	€36,190
16	€38,731

The COVID-19 capitation grant will also be the mechanism through which additional funding will be provided to cater for costs related to hand hygiene measures and PPE requirements under the COVID-19 Response Plan. Additional provision for this purpose will be confirmed with the establishment of the drawdown framework of suppliers described later in this section.

Access to Procurement Framework & Funding to support Hand Hygiene & PPE Needs within Schools

To ensure access for schools, on a value for money basis, to a secure supply chain for any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Consumables and Equipment associated with COVID-19 Response Plans, the Department is in the final stages of establishing a drawdown framework of suppliers of such products.

It is expected that this multi-supplier arrangement will be available to schools to access from early August. Under the drawdown framework, schools will be able to choose a supplier from the framework and the products which best suit their needs. It is intended that order from schools will be processed within a very short timeline and delivered directly to schools. Accompanying guidelines to schools on the accessing the framework will issue in early August.

All PPE, consumables and equipment requirements of schools under this Roadmap and with schools COVID-19 Response Plans, and in line with the Public Health Advice, will be available through the Framework including:

- Hand sanitiser dispensers;
- Hand sanitiser liquid;
- Hand soap;
- Disposable Paper Towels;
- Wipes;
- Gloves;
- Face masks
- Face coverings/visors;
- Aprons; and
- Detergents etc.

The funding to cover school costs will be by way of a COVID-19 capitation grant will be issued to schools and will be confirmed with the establishment of the drawdown framework.

Arrangements to Get Children Safely to our Schools

Getting children to school safely has been a key part of planning for reopening schools. In urban areas, this will mean supporting the NTA in promoting various alternative means for children to get to school in a safe way, including walking and cycling and more generally in reducing the impact on the public transport system of school reopening. There is intensive engagement with Bus Éireann to carefully plan for the School Transport Scheme and SEN transport, to ensure it is operating within the parameters of public health advice.

School Transport Scheme Services

School Transport Scheme services operated by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department will fully operate as normal, in line with public health advice, when schools re-open for the 2020/2021 school year.

In planning for normal resumption of school transport services consideration has been taken of the fact that school transport somewhat differs to public transport in that:

- School transport services are controlled environments.
- Each transport service carries the same children on a daily basis to their school of attendance.
- It is a restricted group of transport users which will facilitate contact tracing if required.

Observing hygiene requirements will be a key priority and clear communication to all parents of children or to older students using school transport services will set out the following requirements for those travelling on school transport:

- Not to use school transport if they are displaying symptoms.
- To maintain physical distancing while waiting for transport.
- To always sit in pre-assigned seating and next to a sibling or child from their class group (this should be the same child at all times).
- To use hand sanitizer on boarding the bus.
- To observe respiratory etiquette at all times while waiting for and on-board transport services.
- To disembark the bus one by one in an orderly fashion; and
- With the exception of those children who for medical or special educational needs reasons are not in a position to wear a facemask or face covering, all other

students travelling on the post-primary scheme are required to wear facemasks while waiting for and on-board transport services.

With regard to SEN Transport services, these health guidelines will also apply. Funding supports will be made available to schools for the provision of masks or visors to School Bus Escorts where required, bearing in mind the SEN needs of the child/children on the service, and where physical distancing cannot be maintained. These will be accessible to schools through the drawdown framework described earlier.

Bus Éireann, in consultation with the Department, is providing information and guidance for their own employees and to contractors contracted to operate on the School Transport Scheme to advise them of:

- Sanitisation and additional cleaning requirements.
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment for school transport staff.
- Measures to take if a child on a service becomes ill or is displaying symptoms while travelling.
- Return to work safely protocols.

Supporting the Wellbeing of School Communities

Introduction

The wellbeing of our school communities is a fundamental element of the Department's overall plan to ensure a successful return to school as we continue to manage the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are living through exceptional times and this impacts on the wellbeing of everyone in different ways and at different times. People have been naturally worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones and have been challenged by the public health measures that were put in place in Ireland to control the spread of the virus, such as staying at home and school closures.

People have an inbuilt capacity to adapt. This is what is at the heart of resilience. Most people are weathering this storm and will emerge stronger and with new skills. Most respond really well to information and practical advice on new ways of managing and staying active and connected. Some will, for a variety of reasons, struggle a little to adapt and will need greater levels of practical and social support to make the adjustments needed to stay well. A very small number may find the changes brought about by COVID-19 very challenging, and may need higher levels of practical and mental health supports.

We are now preparing for the reopening of schools. We know that most students, and indeed their families and school staff will be looking forward to going back, reconnecting with school, reconnecting with staff and friends and settling back into school work. This will be a time of change, with new rules and routines to learn, in order to keep everyone safe. Some students may feel worried about returning to school, and that's normal. Most will however, re-engage with little difficulty after an initial settling in period.

Supporting Wellbeing: Essential Elements

The Department has developed and prepared a comprehensive response to supporting the wellbeing of school communities at this time guided by five essential principles for wellbeing promotion at times like this. These are promoting:

- A sense of safety
- A sense of calm
- A sense of belonging and connectedness to school
- A sense of self-efficacy and school-community efficacy
- A sense of hope

These principles are widely accepted and explicitly recommended as protective factors to support optimal returning to normalcy and wellbeing in the aftermath of emergency situations.

A tiered model of support is recommended with a strong universal focus, based on the knowledge that people are naturally resilient and most will adapt with the provision of basic practical and empathetic supports while acknowledging some groups will need additional and more intensive levels of support. In this regard the Departments of Health; and Children, Disability, Equality and Integration; along with their services, will play a key partnership role.

Support provided by the Department of Education will utilise the usual school support structure – the Continuum of Support (Figure 1). This support structure allows schools to provide universal support for all students, using prevention and early intervention approaches, to support wellbeing and transition back to school. The Continuum of Support framework also recognises that some students who continue to struggle to settle, despite the provision of universal supports, will require more targeted support, while still others with more complex need will require an individualised approach to support.

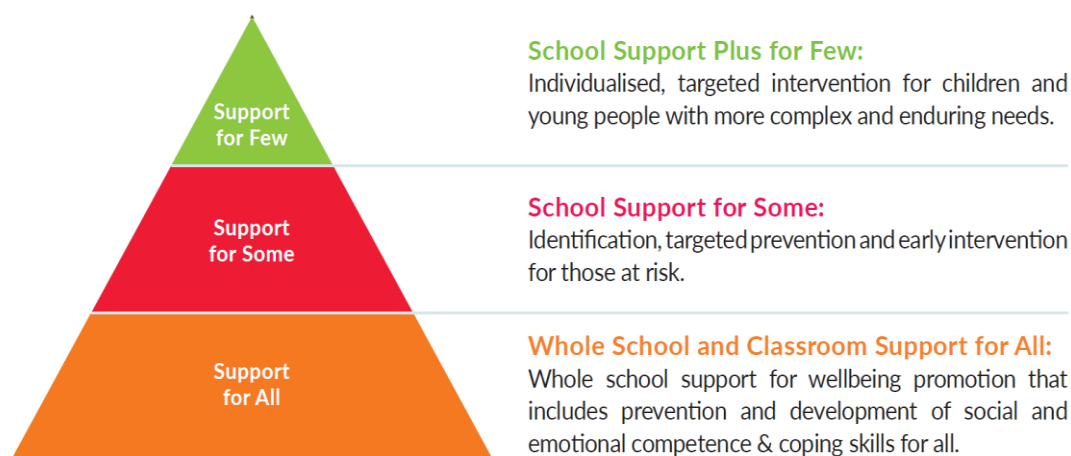


Figure 1: The DES Continuum of Support

Resources and Support for School Communities:

The foundation for the provision of a continuum of support in schools, will be the provision of support for school staff wellbeing, and guidance to help them feel confident and equipped to support the wellbeing of their students. The Department has worked closely

with its broad range of support services and agencies², and with the HSE/HSE-funded services and the Tusla Education Support Service to create an aligned and coherent package of supports and resources to assist schools in this regard. Supports will include:

- A comprehensive communications campaign, delivering universal messages of safety and wellbeing to all
- Webpage with access to all information relating to the reopening of schools, including information about wellbeing, with links to specific resources, guidance and support
- Wellbeing Webinars for primary/special/post-primary schools - supporting wellbeing as schools reopen
- Wellbeing Toolkit for Teachers with a range of easily downloadable, user-friendly materials
- Services provided by the National Educational Psychological Service, with enhanced focus on special school communities
 - Consultation and Advice Service to schools
 - Casework Service in schools
 - Support and Development Service to schools - Professional Learning Opportunities for Teachers
- Access to a range of support/resources and professional learning opportunities provided by:
 - Department's Teacher Education Support Services
 - National Council for Special Education Support Service (NCSE)
 - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
 - National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)
 - Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)
 - HSE's Health Promotion Team
- Access to additional teaching posts at post primary level, which may be leveraged to support guidance, wellbeing and leadership support
- e-mental health services, including on-line counselling, provided by the HSE/HSE-funded service providers including *spunout.ie*, *Jigsaw*, *MyMind*, *Childline* and *Turn2Me*.

² The Department's Support Services/Agencies include the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), Centre for School Leadership (CSL), National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Promoting School Staff Wellbeing:

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. Support for school staff wellbeing will be provided by Department Support Services including the PDST and CSL, as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team. An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life under the logo of 'Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile'.

Under the EAS, employees have a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc. Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home). A bespoke wellbeing portal and app which offers access to podcasts and blogs on topics around wellbeing and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition is also available. In addition online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. As part of the services provided by Spectrum Life a Mental Health Promotion Manager is available to develop and deliver evidence based mental health and wellbeing initiatives to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy and to increase engagement with the service. They will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote staff wellbeing in schools as schools reopen and during the upcoming school year.

[Further information on the wellbeing response can be found here.](#)

Guidance on Learning and School Programmes in 2020/21

The Department has worked closely with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST) on supporting schools in mediating the curriculum for the new school year.

Curriculum Guidance – General Principles

The Department recognises that curriculum considerations for 2020/21 school year at both primary/special school and post-primary level must take account of the variable learning experiences of pupils/students during the period of school closure, the likely gaps in learning and the practical context in which teaching and learning will be taking place in the new school year. Provision for curriculum also needs to take account of the likelihood that the impact of school closures on pupil/student experiences has not been uniform. It is likely that pupils with special educational needs, pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, pupils with English as an additional language and pupils experiencing homelessness or living in direct provision have been the most adversely affected by the lack of classroom contact time.

The Department has prepared a series of guidance documents for schools – for primary schools, post-primary schools, schools providing Transition Year and schools and centres for education offering the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in 2020/21. The purpose of the guidance documents is to ensure that pupils/students can settle back into school, that all of the school community can stay safe and well and pupils/students can pick up and progress their learning, experiencing as full and enjoyable a curriculum as possible.

The principles underpinning the guidance documents are:

- Adherence to the relevant health and safety requirements;
- Supporting the wellbeing of learners and school staff;
- Ensuring equity and consistency in curriculum provision and pupil/student learning experiences;
- Supporting pupils/students where they are at in their learning and providing them with what they need in order to flourish and be successful;
- Establishing curriculum and instructional priorities and planning accordingly;
- Developing and supporting collaboration with parents and agencies, in order to maximise outcomes for pupils/students in a fair and equitable way;
- At post primary level there are additional principles to recognise the autonomy of schools to determine how the curriculum is planned and mediated; and

- An approach to planning that is learner centred, balanced, adaptive and responsive to pupil/ student needs.

Primary Level

As most primary pupils will not have been in their school building for a period of over five months, the focus at the start of the school year will be on managing the transition period of returning to school from home. While the return to school offers a welcome opportunity for children to revive social connections it is also recognised that it will be an anxious time for some. Schools will be encouraged to allow time for pupils to develop the relationships necessary so that they are available and ready to participate in a meaningful way with their learning.

There is a focus in the documentation on welcoming junior infants to schools and a wide range of resources and support materials have been provided by the Department of Education as well as the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration to support this group.

The guidance outlines the learning approaches which schools should take and the need to allow for revisiting and revising of areas of the curriculum to reinforce and consolidate learning. Schools will also be required to reprioritise certain areas of the curriculum, especially during the initial weeks of the first term, to give greater time and attention to areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education, Physical Education, Language and Mathematics. It is intended that as schools form comprehensive pictures of where pupils are in their learning they will work towards a more typical curriculum plans [The guidance can be found here](#)

Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

It is recognised that pupils with SEN will require particular support at the time of transition back to school including supporting their well-being, reducing potential anxiety and planning learning experiences that take account of the effect of school closures on their progress. Approximately 15,000 pupils with SEN will have availed of the Department supported summer provision and all records of progress for these children, whether the programmes were delivered in school or home settings will be available to their schools to support planning for their needs in the new term.

The guidance provides additional strategies to support children with ASD where it is likely that the impact of school closures will have been significant so that learning experiences, routines and sensory needs should be carefully planned.

Post-Primary Level

In the guidance at post-primary level, the Department recognises that welcoming first years and supporting their transition is a critical task for schools. The Education Passport for these students should have been received from their primary school to assist in planning for their educational needs. Prioritising curriculum in the key skills at Junior Cycle such as managing myself, managing information and thinking and staying well is proposed to support these students. Maintaining the same and subject teachers and tutor groups where possible may be considered by schools as an effective way to support other post-primary student group transitions. Schools are asked in particular to be flexible in their procedures around facilitating subject selections at fifth year. [The guidance can be found **here**.](#)

The importance of student wellbeing in the return to school is recognised and schools are required to consider these matters in a “whole of school” and “whole of staff” approach. Notwithstanding the focus on wellbeing, the Department is aware that some schools are experiencing challenges in increasing the provision for wellbeing from 300 hours to 400 hours at Junior Cycle, so schools can defer the increased provision until the 2021/22 school year.

Assessment for certification

There is significant autonomy in schools in deciding how to sequence and pace learning for students in their schools and therefore the Department does not propose to centrally prescribe adjustments of the curriculum. It is considered that the most appropriate way to reflect the challenges that have occurred for students in 2019/20 and potentially in 2020/21 is to incorporate adjustments into the certificate examinations in 2021.

Junior Cycle

- The number of classroom based assessments to be completed by those entering third year has been reduced and the dates for completion of some elements extended into the new school year.
- Detailed arrangements in relation to the Junior Cycle certification examinations in 2021 will be made available before the start of the school year.

Senior Cycle

The Department recognises that some changes will be required to the assessment arrangements for the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes.

A key consideration in making these adjustments is the need to maintain familiarity with the structure of the questions and assessment components for students and teachers. There will be no need to issue sample papers to reflect the changes.

The changes will be broadly proportionate but may vary, taking into account specific context across modules, subjects and programmes. In all cases they will involve some combination of:

- Students will be provided with greater choice in written examinations; this will be supported through the provision of additional questions and/or adjustments to mandatory sections on written examination papers
- The dates on which coursework briefs are issued will be brought forward to allow for additional preparation time for students and teachers
- In some subjects, adjustments to the requirements for practical examinations will be made; these adjustments will reflect the need to manage access to equipment to complete the preparatory aspects.

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The Department's guidance document sets out the curriculum and assessment arrangements for the LCA Year 1 and Year 2 students for the school year 2020/21. In the case of LCA Year 2 students it outlines the revised arrangement for the satisfactory completion of modules, student tasks, and final examinations. [The guidance can be found here.](#)

Transition Year (TY)

The Department, through this guidance information sets out how much of what is valued in the TY programme can continue to be a central feature in the 2020/21 school year. The programme is ideally placed to build on progress at junior cycle, allowing additional time as needed to identify priority areas for knowledge and skill development in senior cycle. It is also ideally suited to the use of digital technology and the guidance identifies ways that experiences in TY can be enhanced through practical planning tips. It also reminds schools to minimise the costs associated with this programme in the current environment. [The guidance can be found here.](#)

Pausing Curricular Reform

Taking account of the loss of in-class time at the end of the 2019/2020 school year, the potential challenges facing schools at the outset of the new school year, and the workload of principals at this time, it is acknowledged that this is not a suitable time for significant curriculum change, particularly at the start of the new school year.

In order to support schools in the practicalities of re-engaging with students, a number of key decisions have been taken to pause elements of curriculum change that were due to commence in September 2020.

At **primary level** the consultation period on the the new primary curriculum framework is being extended to at least end year with completion expected by end Q2 2021. The effect of this will push out the timeframe for the Primary Mathematics Curriculum and the curricula for each of the other subject areas. Support for the Primary Languages Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile will restart in early 2021.

The NCCA will continue to undertake development work in the area of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and traveller history and culture; and the Department will continue to undertake development work in relation to the Education for Sustainable Development strategy, the Literacy and Numeracy strategy and the STEM education implementation plan.

At **post primary level** this pause includes the following:

Junior Cycle – Schools were originally required to increase the number of hours of Wellbeing provision at Junior Cycle from 300 to 400 hours from September 2020. They will now be able to defer this until September 2021.

Senior Cycle – A number of schools were due to introduce new optional subjects from September 2020, including Leaving Certificate Computer Science, Physical Education, and the Leaving Certificate Foreign Languages of Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese. These schools will now be provided with the option to defer implementation until September 2021.

Implementation in schools of the revised specification for Leaving Certificate Art will be deferred by one year to September 2021. The implementation of a number of new Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Module Descriptors will be deferred by one year to September 2021.

Also at Senior Cycle planned consultation on new specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish is being deferred from the second half of 2020 to the first half of 2021. Consultation on a number of other Leaving Certificate subjects will also be deferred, including Physics, Chemistry and Biology, Arabic, and Latin and Ancient Greek.

Work on the NCCA's review of Senior Cycle has continued throughout 2020 and it is envisaged that Council's Advisory Report to the Department will be finalised around the end of the year.

The Department will continue to work with schools to enable them to be agile and responsive in ensuring that pupils/ students can continue to experience the curriculum as fully as possible and to progress in their learning in an online environment in the event of an individual school closure or localised closure of schools. Additional guidance and online materials for schools in this regard will be issued before the start of the new term.

Provision for Very High Risk Staff and Students and arrangements in the event of school closure in the future

While the Roadmap provides for the reopening of all schools to all students, each school must be ready to:

- provide for pupils who cannot attend for health reasons related to COVID-19, or
- a situation where a school may be faced with closure (in whole or part) for a period during which the curriculum will need to be delivered remotely.

This will necessitate an alternative provision approach in both circumstances, with relevant guidance set out below.

Schools will also be provided with resources to replace staff who have been assessed as unable to return to the workplace due to Covid-19. These staff will be facilitated to work from home in line with arrangements that are consistent with the approach of the civil and public service more widely. This may include supporting very high risk students who cannot attend school.

Supporting pupils at “very high risk” of COVID-19

The Department is conscious that there may be some pupils for whom return to school at the end of August may not be appropriate because the relevant public health guidelines indicate they are at “very high risk”.

Responsibility to ensure that these pupils receive appropriate support to engage adequately with learning remains with each school.

Good communication is key to supporting these pupils and to ensure their ongoing connection with their classmates and school community.

Additional supports will be provided for these pupils/students through designated teachers from within the staffing resources of the school. Schools will have discretion to manage and redistribute their teaching support resources in order to best meet the learning needs of their pupils/students, including pupils/students at ‘very high risk’ to COVID-19.

Under the direction of the School Principal the designated teacher should:

- Liaise with the class teacher and special education teacher on relevant curricular content and classwork;

- Access relevant learning resources;
- Provide the pupil/student with individualised support for his/her learning;
- Increase the pupil/student autonomy, motivation, agency and wellbeing;
- Improve the pupil/student capacity to become a self-directed learner;
- Support the development of the pupil/student digital competency;
- Avail of the communication/learning platform used by the school to ensure ongoing contact with classmates and class teacher.

Supporting Teaching and Learning in the home where there is localised school closure

During the period of school closures the Department provided schools in the primary and special school sector and at post-primary level with a series of [“Continuity of Schooling Guidance”](#) documents to help education professionals and parents to support children learning in a remote environment. The events surrounding COVID-19 and the public health restrictions which resulted in the emergency closure of schools to learners has highlighted the absolute necessity for schools to be agile in how they can provide for continuity of teaching and learning in the future.

The continuity of teaching and learning during the emergency period was achieved with significant additional effort from all school staff working remotely to ensure students were supported during this time. Most schools put in place arrangements to communicate with students and parents demonstrating innovation and resilience by providing flexible local responses.

As a contingency for any such reoccurrence of closures whether localised or at a bigger scale to ensure compliance with any public health restrictions, it is vital that schools are prepared. The Department is updating its Continuity of Schooling Guidance documents to support schools in responding in an agile way in the event of localised school closure.

Specifically schools will be provided with guidance and support to put in place arrangements to facilitate communication with and between staff, between staff and learners and to facilitate development of online approaches to remote and blended learning in the event that such is required.

In circumstances where there is clear public health advice from HSE Public Health that a school should close, schools will be supported to:

- Make best use of guidance materials which were already provided to all schools during the period of school closures and will be further updated to reflect learning during the emergency period,
- Alert parents/guardians to where pupils/students are at in terms of their learning,

- Develop daily contact lesson activities to be carried out at home for primary pupils
- Develop subject specific lessons at post primary level to be carried out at home by students,
- Contact parents regularly to offer support and feedback,
- Have a system in place to engage with pupils/students daily; and where possible to make arrangements to support students who do not have access to digital technology,
- Make best use of digital technologies to allow continued engagement with pupils/students and their learning.

Ongoing Communication Arrangements

The communications for school reopening focuses on ensuring that schools, school communities and all stakeholders have clear, relevant and timely information to support the reopening process and continued operation of schools.

This section sets out the arrangements for

- Continued Stakeholder Engagement;
- Provision of Support Materials for Schools
- Provision of Support Materials for students, parents and school communities; and
- Direct access to the Department for Schools during the Re-opening process

Continued Stakeholder Engagement

Planning for school re-opening has been undertaken in collaboration with stakeholders. Detailed stakeholder engagement has been a critical factor in identifying the complex challenges that will arise for schools and school leaders across a number of areas, including logistical challenges in meeting cleaning and physical distancing requirements, curriculum and assessment matters, and the wellbeing and welfare of the school community on reopening.

The process has included both meetings of the stakeholders together, and individual bilateral meetings with the department with specific groups on pertinent issues. The Department would like to acknowledge the constructive and collaborative approach taken by the education partners and wider stakeholders, including other Government Departments and Agencies.

Stakeholders are fully engaged with the Department to develop the shape and design of solutions that are both workable and supported by sufficient and appropriately targeted resources.

A shared goal of all stakeholders is to provide certainty wherever possible, to communicate fully and in a timely fashion, and to have the wellbeing of the school community in mind in all communications.

The Department will continue to engage closely and intensively with education partners and other key stakeholders on the refinement of remaining elements of guidance related to the reopening and operation of schools, and the implementation of the measures set out in this Roadmap.

Provision of Support materials for schools

The Department is preparing and will disseminate a series of materials for schools to use in planning for reopening and in communicating with their communities in advance of schools reopening. These will include:

- Induction training programmes for school staff produced by the Department – webinars on health and safety, returning to work safely, managing school return and wellbeing.
- Tailored training is in development for different categories of school staff: teachers, lead worker representatives, SNAs, cleaners etc.
- Guidance and support information on curriculum matters;
- Distribution to schools of printed posters with age-appropriate key health messages: hand washing, sneeze and cough etiquette etc. Provision to schools of digital versions of these for additional supply to be sourced locally if required.
- Distribution to schools of the materials for their school communities.
- Guidance for schools and ideas on communicating effectively on school reopening to their pupils and families.

Materials to support students, parents and school communities in returning safely

The Department is preparing and will disseminate a series of materials for schools to provide to their returning students and their families in advance of schools reopening. These will include:

- Short guidance for parents at both primary and post-primary level for children's return to school, emphasising public health and wellbeing information
- Age-appropriate communications material for students on returning to school, emphasising public health and wellbeing information.
- Schools will be provided with material for distribution, and distribution will also be augmented by the Department using digital channels.
- All materials will be produced with an emphasis on wellbeing, accessibility and inclusion.

Schools will be asked to disseminate school-specific information to their pupils' families and provided with templates to do so.

Appropriate use will be made of media channels and gov.ie to ensure that the school-community and their families have been reached with the important information that they need in returning to school.

Direct Communication Channels for Schools

The Department will implement a number of specific communication initiatives to directly support schools in the reopening process including:

- A dedicated webpage to enable the sharing of information and updates in an open and transparent manner; and
- A dedicated team within the Department to detail with specific queries of schools in relation to the Roadmap, available supports etc.

The dedicated team within the Department will provide a one-stop shop for queries of school management on all elements of the implementation of the Roadmap as it pertains to their school.

What will schools be like when they reopen?

Schools will reopen for all students from the end of August.

While everyone wants schools to operate as normally as possible from August this year, it is recognised by all that it will be a different environment to how schools operated in March of this year.

Physical distancing, much less interaction between classes and class groups, staggered breaks and lunch times and a lot of flexibility within schools to maximise school spaces (including the use of PE Halls and GP Rooms as classrooms) will be a feature.

Recognising that there will be a broad range of responses when the school community goes back to school, ranging from children and their parents being happy and relieved to get back to school to some children being fearful and nervous, there will be specific emphasis on the well-being of the school community and our students and pupils as schools navigate through the reopening process. Specific supports will also be available for those children who struggle to come back to school, vulnerable groups and those children who may experience loss, grief and bereavement during the period of school closure.

A significant cultural shift in the behaviours of students, their families and staff is expected with each playing their roles in keeping the virus out of their school by ensuring

- those who have symptoms or suspect they have the virus stay out of school,
- by maintaining best practice in terms of hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette in school, and
- as well as by minimising social contacts and respecting physical distancing practices.

As part of the school re-opening process, extensive communication by the school with the school community on the specific arrangements that will apply in the school is expected to support their cultural shift.

Reopening our schools is not just a matter of achieving a certain minimum physical distancing. It is also about getting students re-engaged fully with learning, socialising with their peers, and for some preparing for examinations, for others transitioning to school life or a different level in terms of moving from primary to post-primary. Students will need the support of their families, teachers and school staff in readjusting to school life and physical learning environments again.

School communities will rise to this challenge, and the key themes of the Public Health Advice necessary to keep us all safe will permeate throughout the school community, with everyone:

**Applying common sense,
Adopting a balanced approach,**

Doing everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school,

Being Aware of

- **what we can all do to protect ourselves and each other,**
- **how to recognise and report the symptoms of COVID-19, and**
- **the need to stay at home if we feel unwell, and**

Continuing to observe physical distancing, good hand hygiene and good respiratory etiquette.

Abbreviations

EPS	Education Procurement Service
HPSC	Health Protection Surveillance Centre
HSA	Health & Safety Authority
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NTA	National Transport Authority
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SEN	Special Educational Needs