



29 January 2021

Dear Principal

As you are aware, the Government has made a decision on foot of public health advice to extend the level 5 restriction measures in place to suppress the spread of Covid-19, and as part of these measures to continue this phase of school closure at present.

This decision has been made in the context of wishing to avoid the movement of the full one-million strong school-going population daily. The closure of schools will be kept under ongoing review by Government.

It is a priority for Government to address the needs of children with special educational needs and provide additional supports for these children during this period of closure, in line with public health advice.

The Department of Education is engaging closely with stakeholder representatives during this limited period, to work towards achieving consensus on a satisfactory way forward to ensure a safe phased return of children with special educational needs to in-school learning. This remains a high priority for all partners.

The Department is also continuing to work with education partners to ensure that all schools can safely fully reopen, in line with public health advice.

You will have received updated information and guidance in recent bulletins, and it may be helpful to summarise these here, along with some further items that may be useful to parents and the wider school community.

Yours faithfully

Deirdre Shanley
Assistant Secretary



Appendix – Information and guidance for School Community in the context of remote Learning

Guidance on Remote Learning

During this period of closure, schools are required to support students with remote learning plans.

The Department has provided a suite of guidance materials, agreed with the education partners, to enable schools to mediate the curriculum safely for all pupils/students in a Covid-19 context. Those guidance materials were issued to schools and centres for education as they were published and are available at gov.ie and at the links below.

- [Guidance on Remote Learning in a COVID-19: Context: September –December 2020 For primary schools and special schools](#)
- [Guidance on Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning in a COVID-19 Context For post-primary schools and centres for education.](#)

These documents have been complemented by [Circular 0074/2020](#) which required all schools to put in place appropriate contingency measures to ensure that they are prepared to continue to support teaching and learning in the event of a partial or full closure of schools arising from Public Health advice.

It is crucially important that the learning of all pupils/students, especially those with special educational needs (SEN) and those at risk of educational disadvantage and/or early school leaving, are supported at this time. TUSLA Education Support Services will engage with principals to promote connectedness to schools for children who are at risk of educational disadvantage and there will be direct liaison by education welfare officers to Direct Provision accommodation centres, refuges for families experiencing domestic violence and homeless hubs to ensure students are linked with their schools.

Updated guidance on supporting children with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage was issued to schools and is available here:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-support-pupils-at-risk-primary.pdf>

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-continuity-of-schooling-supporting-pupils-with-sen-primary.pdf>

The following requirements in relation to remote teaching and learning of all pupils/students are particularly important:

- **Regular engagement with pupils/students:** It is important that teachers engage with their pupils/students; in a primary setting this should, ideally, be on a daily basis; in a post-primary context teachers should, as far as possible, engage with students as per the normal school timetable.



- **A blend of guided and independent learning tasks/experiences:** Teacher-pupil/student engagement should involve both direct teaching by the teacher and the assignment of independent learning tasks for completion by the pupils/students.
- **Appropriate and engaging learning opportunities:** Teachers should ensure that the chosen learning tasks give pupils/students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a clear and concise way.
- **Learning tasks:** The tasks chosen should be specifically aligned to the needs of the pupil/student, including pupils/students with SEN, and should enable the teacher to monitor progress and give constructive, developmental feedback to support the next stages in their learning.
- **Two-way feedback between home and school:** Schools should ensure that two-way feedback between teachers and parents/guardians and between teachers and their pupils/students is encouraged and supported. Schools should provide manageable and accessible opportunities for all pupils/ students to regularly share samples of their work with the teacher(s) throughout each week. Teachers should ensure that work received is corrected and relevant feedback is provided.
- **Support for pupils/students with SEN:** Special education teachers (SETs) should continue to engage with the pupils/students on their caseloads and class/subject teachers should differentiate teaching and learning in line with their pupils'/students' needs to minimise disruption to their learning and progression.

Please note that, given the importance of ensuring continuity and progression in pupils'/students' learning, teachers are permitted to travel and attend their place of work to provide continuity of **teaching and learning if they are unable to do so from their home and school buildings remain** accessible for teaching and learning and other essential services. This includes for the provision of school meals. It also includes schools where childcare services for children of essential workers and vulnerable children are to remain open.

Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

Extensive support and advice for teachers and schools on provision of remote learning is available to through the PDST at <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning>. Schools can also apply to www.pdst.ie/schoolsupport for the assistance of a PDST advisor for tailored school support in all subject areas at Primary and Post-Primary levels including support with the use of Digital Technologies to support remote learning. The PDST Leadership team is also available to support school leaders through direct school support, national programmes and localised networks.

Extensive information and guidance on online safety is available to schools at www.webwise.ie. Resources include a summary of key considerations for schools



when using digital technologies in the remote learning environment available at <https://www.webwise.ie/trending/distance-learning-safety-advice-and-considerations/>

Guidance Supports

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) has developed a variety of resources, including, articles, recorded webinars and information notes about guidance counselling, incorporating remote and online support which available at <https://www.ncge.ie/resources>

Inspectorate arrangements to June 2021

The Department's Inspectorate has published recently its Circulars for primary and post-primary schools 0001/2021 which set out inspection arrangements for the remainder of the school year to June 2021.

Primary and special schools:

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001_2021.pdf

Post primary schools:

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0002_2021.pdf

The PowerPoint presentation below accompanies these circulars.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Inspectorate%20Supporting%20Schools%20and%20the%20Department%20January-March,%202021.pdf>

Supports for parents

Continuity of schooling guidance

Continuity of schooling guidance for parents is available at this link in several languages:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/965639-continuity-of-schooling/>

Online safety

Extensive information and guidance on online safety is available to for parents and students at www.webwise.ie. The information contained at <https://www.webwise.ie/parents/covid19-online-safety-advice-for-parents/> might be particularly useful.



Curriculum Tagged Resources

The Department's Education portal Scoilnet (<https://www.scoilnet.ie/>) contains some 21,000 curriculum tagged resources that can be used by teachers, students and parents to support the continuity of learning in the remote environment.

Wellbeing supports

The National Educational Psychological Service of the Department of Education, NEPS, has developed an updated series of resources and animation videos for parents and students during this period of school closures.

These build on previous materials that proved popular with parents.

The videos feature important updated wellbeing advice and guidance, and include tips on how students can stay positive, active and connected, and how parents can support their child's daily routine.

Irish language and sign language interpretation versions are also available and are posted on the Department's twitter feed on @Education_Ire and on gov.ie/schools.

The pdf resource guides are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/af24b-wellbeing-guidance-documents-for-parents-students-and-schools/e>

The videos are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a04fc-advice-for-students-and-their-families/#wellbeing-advice-for-parents-during-covid-19>

Supports for parents of children with special educational needs

The National Council for Special Education has a range of resources for parents of children with special educational needs, including useful material on a broad list of supportive topics, and short focused video materials designed to provide advice and guidance to parents. These are available on ncse.ie and disseminated through their twitter feed @ncseirl.

The NCSE is also operating a dedicated phone line for parents of children with special educational needs during this period of school closure, offering support and guidance; the number is 01 603 3456 and it is open during office hours.

Support for Traveller parents:

The Department has produced a video in partnership with Pavee Point for Traveller parents on supporting their children during school closures, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a04fc-advice-for-students-and-their-families/#support-for-traveller-parents-while-schools-are-closed>