



1st July 2020

Supporting Schools in planning for re-opening for the 2020/21 school year

Dear Principals, teachers and staff

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the significant efforts that you have made to provide for continuity of teaching and learning to all primary school pupils since schools closed at the start of the COVID-19 crisis. The Department recognises that providing education in an online environment has been challenging. We have worked closely with the education partners in order to provide guidance and support to you over this period.

In my letter to you on the 12th June I outlined to you the work underway to develop an approach for the reopening of schools for the next school year in a way that protects the health and safety of staff and pupils by putting in place practical measures for infection prevention and control.

The work underway is intended to reduce the burden on schools by developing guidance and documentation centrally, in close co-operation with the education partners. This will provide a consistency of approach across the sector and will allow schools the time needed to support pupils on their return to education in the autumn.

I am conscious that you are anxious to have information about the arrangements for school re-opening in autumn and this update is intended to provide you with further information that I hope will be of assistance.

All schools will need to have a Covid-19 Response Plan in place for the new school year. I attach a **Draft School COVID-19 Response Plan at Appendix 1**. This plan will be subject to refinement with the education stakeholders over the summer and a finalised version will then be issued to all schools. The Draft Plan includes details of a number of key areas which schools will need to have in place to re-open safely, including:

➤ **DRAFT - School COVID -19 Policy Statement**

This policy statement highlights the school's commitment to implement the school COVID-19 Response Plan and help prevent the spread of the virus.

➤ **Knowing and understanding what COVID-19 is and the measures to be taken in a school to prevent infection**

This area deals with symptoms of COVID-19 as well as good practices on hand and respiratory hygiene and physical distancing. The Department has been working closely with the HSE and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) to develop health advice which has been tailored to the needs of schools and we are today publishing this information to support schools in planning for reopening in autumn. The link to the Interim Public Health recommendations for the reopening of schools can be found here

<https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/interim-recommendations-for-the-reopening-of-schools-and-educational-facilities.pdf>

The advice will continue to be updated in line with public health advice generally and will inform the development of more detailed guidance for schools by the Department of Education.

➤ Planning and preparing to reopen schools

The policy statements outlines measures that need to be put in place to support staff and pupils returning safely to school, including a return to work form, risk assessments and school contact tracing log for visitors – sample templates are provided in the draft plan. These will be finalised, agreed centrally and provided to schools.

➤ Induction Training

The Department will develop induction training which will be available for all school staff. The link to the training programme in the draft plan was prepared to support summer programmes in schools but it may be helpful as an example of the training which will be provided for return to school. The Department also intends to provide guidance and support materials for parents and pupils.

➤ Cleaning/Hygiene

The Department recognises that enhanced cleaning will be required to support schools to prevent COVID-19 infections. The Department is engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the requirement to provide funding to support enhanced cleaning needs and we will provide further details of the support available once the arrangements are finalised.

The Department has also arranged for a drawdown framework to be established to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers for use in the school and classroom. The procurement process for this framework has already commenced and it is intended these materials will be available in early August.

The Department will continue to engage closely with education partners and other key stakeholders on the plan for re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 school year with the aim of reducing the burden on schools at a local level by providing central guidance and supports to the greatest extent possible.

Yours sincerely



Seán O' Foghlú
Secretary General