



23 February 2021

Dear Principal,

Further to the Government decision and the Taoiseach's address this evening, I am pleased to advise that the next phase of school reopening will commence from 1st March 2021. This is in line with the public health advice received by the Government from NPHET.

Intensive engagement and input from education partners representing parents, students, unions, management bodies and principal networks on the plans for reopening of schools has also been ongoing.

It is recognised by all of the partners that remote teaching and learning is difficult for all and the return of all children at the earliest opportunity remains a high priority for Government in line with public health advice.

The framework (attached) is an interim arrangement to outline the arrangements for the safe reopening of schools.

Under the framework the following return to in-school provision on 1 March 2021 has been agreed:

- Special schools to return to full time attendance on-site for all pupils.
- Special classes to continue full time.
- Primary Classes for – Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First and Second class including early start pre-school classes will reopen fully from Monday 1 March 2021.

In order to support schools to plan and prepare for this phase of reopening I want to bring a number of things to your attention as follows:

1. Appendix 1 Framework document
2. Appendix 2 - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance on the reopening of schools
3. Appendix 3 -Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plan required by 'Work Safely Protocol. A link to the word version of the COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools can be found [here](#).
4. Circulars on temporary changes to the parental leave scheme and unpaid leave and other temporary arrangements for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in recognised primary schools – these circulars will follow under separate cover.

Special education needs children in 3rd to 6th classes:

In recognition that not all children with special education needs will be back in school in this phase from 1 March, primary schools are asked to prioritise deployment of their SET resources to facilitate the engagement of those pupils with SEN who are in 3rd-6th classes.



This will necessitate further collaboration between the SETs and class teachers to establish current priority learning needs among those pupils.

- Teachers should utilise the guidance provided by the Department on remote teaching and learning to support this work.
- Where schools have a shared SET the timetable of prioritisation of support for children in 3rd to 6th class should occur following consultation between principals in the cluster.

Additional arrangements for children with SEN in 3rd to 6th class in respect of the supplementary programme:

- The Department is anxious to further support those children with SEN in 3rd to 6th class who are unable to return to in-school teaching and learning until March 15th.
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- The supplementary programme for these senior primary school pupils will be extended by a **further two weeks** to allow these students access in-person support at a time when the public health advice does not support the full reopening of all schools.

There is a wide range of materials available for schools to support the communication with parents and students and re-inforce public health messaging. These include [video messages from public health doctors](#) on the safety of schools, [posters](#) and [digital animations and videos](#).

These can be uploaded to school channels such as Aladdin connect or seesaw as well as social media channels. Further material is being added to this list and further updates will issue in the coming days as new material is added. All materials will be available [here](#) and on the Department's twitter feed @Education_Ire

The Department is very appreciative of the ongoing efforts of the school community working to limit the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in schools and ensuring that the infection control measures put in place in line with the school COVID-19 response plans are effective in making schools safe for children and staff. Discussions are ongoing about the further reopening of schools at the earliest opportunity in line with public health advice.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley
Assistant Secretary