
Reopening our schools
CPSMA Frequently Asked Questions
11th September 2020



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INTRODUCTION

*Please note that the content of this Frequently Asked Questions document is based on Guidance, Circulars and Information Notes, published by the Department of Education and Skills, as of **11/09/2020**. The FAQ will be updated on a regular basis as additional guidance/information issues from the Department. Please check www.cpsma.ie for any update on this document.*

TRAINING

1. When will the Department of Education and Skills training/Induction videos be made available and where can we access these resources?

The following induction training videos have been posted on www.gov.ie/backtoschool and are available at the following links:

1. [Primary School Induction](#)
2. [Cleaning Induction](#)
3. [Lead Worker Representative Induction](#)
4. [Bus Escorts Induction](#)
5. [SNA Induction training](#)

Informational videos for students, parents and teachers will be shared online to provide important updates on Covid-19 arrangements.

SIGNAGE AND POSTERS

2. When will the signage/posters be available?

The Department of Education and Skills will send a resource pack with multiple copies of age-appropriate posters on handwashing, face coverings and other hygiene measures to all schools. The resources will be available in English and Irish. Additional copies can be downloaded from www.gov.ie/backtoschool and are available at the following link: [Posters for the re-opening of schools](#)

Access to signage for floors, entrance/exit routes etc. is available from suppliers under the multi-supplier arrangement. While it is not anticipated that large amounts of signage will be required, it can be accessed by schools using the funding provided under the Covid Capitation Grant – see [Guidance for Primary Schools & Special Schools on PPE, Consumables and Equipment](#).

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

3. What is the advice on school uniforms?

There is no reference in the public-health guidance to the daily washing of school uniforms. No advice has been issued by health authorities in relation to this, nor has the Department of Education issued any specific advice in this regard. [Click here for Department of Education and Skills' advice re. Uniforms](#)

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORT

4. Can Special Education Teachers (SETs) withdraw pupils and can SETs still deliver in-class support?

The answer to both questions is “yes”.

The allocation of Special Education support will be decided in the same way as every other year – in consultation with the Special Education Teaching team, and with minimisation of interaction as a core consideration. Access to resources, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and the provision of cleaning materials so that staff can clean their own desk & workspace after each “bubble” interaction should also be factored in to the agreed arrangements.

The decision on how Special Educational Needs (SEN) support is delivered will depend on a school’s own particular circumstances.

For example, some schools may not have a full time Special Education Teacher (SET) whilst other schools may have 8-10 SETs.

Some schools may have dedicated Special Education rooms that would facilitate socially distanced withdrawal support whilst other schools may require to have a considerable amount of in-class support

[Covid-19 Response Plan the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools](#) states that “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”. This document also states that “Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible”.

In the case of the deployment of Special Education Teachers, movement must be minimised, but in some cases it cannot be avoided.

5. Will Special Needs Assistants be permitted to move from class to class?

Yes. The deployment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) must address the needs of the cohort of pupils who require support. When allocating SNAs to pupils minimisation of interaction is a core consideration. Access to resources, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and the provision of cleaning materials so that staff can clean their own desk & workspace after each “bubble” interaction should also be factored in to the arrangements.

6. What are the procedures for teachers who are shared between two schools?

Schools should look at delivering support to the schools involved on a whole day basis. e.g. a teacher shared equally between two schools would attend each week for either 2 or 3 full days. When delivering support in any of the shared schools, the minimisation of movement between bubbles should be a consideration.

[Click here for Department of Education and Skills’ advice re. Movement of staff between schools and within schools](#)

7. Can I redeploy my Special Education Teacher(s) to mainstream teaching to reduce class size?

No, a school cannot redeploy Special Education Teacher(s) to mainstream classes to reduce class size.

[Circular 0013/2017](#) is the circular that sets out the allocation process for Special Education Teachers (SETs) to mainstream primary schools. It states that schools should ensure that the additional SET supports are used in their entirety to support pupils identified with special educational needs.

The additional Teaching Resources which are being provided under this model cannot be used for mainstream class teaching, or to reduce the pupil teacher ratio in mainstream classes.

8. Can pupils attending Special Classes continue to be integrated into mainstream classes each day?

As integration is a core element of the Special Class model, it should continue. The priority is the education of the pupil. Consequently, the pupil can be part of two bubbles for this purpose, and the integration should be in line with the social distancing provisions in place for the mainstream classes involved.

9. Do staff members have to wear face-coverings?

It is a requirement that staff in primary schools wear a face-covering when a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff or children cannot be maintained. In addition, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be required when Special Needs Assistants attend to the intimate care needs of a pupil.

SUBSTITUTION

10. If I have no option but to redeploy a Special Education Teacher to a mainstream class for substitute purposes, how can I make up the lost Special Educational Needs’ tuition time?

Under the provisions of [Circular 0045/2020](#), Section 5.4, if a school has exhausted all options for employing a substitute mainstream class teacher – either through a supply panel, their own panel, national substitute service – without success, then they can redeploy a Special Education Teacher (SET) to cover that absence. Those SET hours should be recorded on the Online Claims System (OLCS), as the school may be in a position to employ a substitute teacher to cover these SET hours on a different day.

The term “substitute” is a misnomer in this instance, as the teacher employed on the different day will not actually be covering an absence. Essentially, the “lost” hours will be banked on the Online Claims System for delivery by a “substitute” at a later stage.

On that subsequent day, the mainstream classroom teacher will undertake non mainstream teaching and the substitute will teach the mainstream class.

For non-mainstream teachers, if a substitute cannot be employed to cover the absence, then a substitute may be employed on a subsequent date when one is available.

It is important to note that a Special Class Teacher (e.g. ASD class, Specific Speech and Language Disorder Class), should not be redeployed as substitute cover for a mainstream class teacher's absence.

11. What is the national substitute service referred to in [Circular 0045/2020](#)?

This refers to national substitute services established by the INTO ([TeacherConnect](#)) and the IPPN ([Sub Seeker](#)) to facilitate the filling of brief absences.

12. Will substitute cover be provided for the first day of a teacher's sick leave, which is not Covid-19 related?

Under the provisions of [Information Note 0008/2020](#), for the 2020/2021 school year, the first day of a teacher's absence on self-certified sick leave and the first day of force majeure leave and illness in family leave are substitutable.

The number of self-certified absences and Illness in family absences provided for under the respective schemes (Sick Leave and Brief Absences) continues to apply.

In addition, [Information Note 0008/2020](#) confirms that the following brief absences will be also be substitutable for 2020/2021 school year:

- Marriage/Civil Partnership Leave
- Ordination/Profession of Immediate Family
- Conferring of Teacher/Immediate Family
- Wedding of Immediate Family/Near Relative/In-Law
- Witness in Court
- Legal Separation
- Candidate in Local Election
- Membership of Public Bodies
- Exam Leave
- Study Leave

13. Will substitute cover be available for Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days?

As per [Information Note 0008/2020](#) the following are the arrangements for EPV days in the coming school year.

The Department of Education will provide substitute cover for the first day of EPV Leave taken by a teacher in the school year.

Any subsequent EPV days may only be taken where the effect on the school's operation, including its Covid-19 Response Plan, is minimal and without disruption to the teaching of the class and without the division of the class group between other classes.

Where it is not possible for a teacher to take their total accumulated EPV days during the 2020/21 school year, the days will be carried over to the following school year 2021/2022, subject to a teacher having a maximum of 5 days in the 2021/22 school year.

For example, if a teacher carries over two EPV days to the next school year, they can only take a maximum of 5 EPV days in the 2021/22 school year, regardless of the number of recognised courses they complete in the summer of 2021.

Boards of Management are advised to review their policy/practice in relation to the granting of Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days. When considering a request for an EPV day, the health and safety of the pupils and staff should take precedence over all other considerations. If the granting of EPV days is not possible in the 2020/2021 school year, there is a provision in [Information Note 0008/2020](#) for the teacher to carry the EPV days forward to 2021/2022.

14. Will substitute cover be available Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) absences?

All SNA absences are currently substitutable, so each school will be permitted to recruit a substitute as normal. SNAs who have not previously worked in a particular school, must be vetted by that school authority prior to commencing work in the school. Consequently, it would be prudent for schools to identify possible SNA substitutes and to process their Vetting Disclosure applications as soon as possible, to ensure that they can be included on the school's SNA substitute panel. The Garda National Vetting Bureau has confirmed to the Department of Education and Skills that valid vetting applications can be processed within 2 to 3 working days.

VULNERABLE STAFF

15. How do we know if staff are in the Covid-19 *very high risk* category and what do we do?

[Circular 0049/2020](#) sets out the arrangements that have been put in place in relation to teachers and SNAs.

The Circular defines those who are *at very high risk* from contracting Covid-19. It is really important that school management draws the attention of staff to this Circular.

Teachers and SNAs who believe that they are in this category should, as soon as possible: -

Get a report from a treating consultant and complete and submit the online OHS risk assessment. The links to both are available in [Circular 0049/2020](#) and at the following link: [Click here](#).

If the Occupational Health Services (OHS) report advises that they are in the very high-risk category and should not attend work, the employee should forward the report and Appendix C of [Circular 0049/2020](#) to the school authority.

The school then enters the new Covid-19 related leave category on the OLCS and appoints a paid substitute.

A similar scheme applies to those who have been diagnosed with Covid-19, recommended to self-isolate or to restrict movement medically or by the HSE.

16. What about those who are not *very high risk* but are still concerned about attending school for various reasons?

Those who are *not* considered at *very high risk* are expected to attend work. These include:

Employees who are pregnant, unless they have an underlying heart condition;

Employees defined as high risk and not ill;

Employees who live with individuals who are high risk or *very high risk*;

Employees who have childcare or Covid-19 caring responsibilities

However, these employees who have concerns may apply to take other leave, if appropriate such as carer's leave or parental leave in the usual manner.

17. Are *very high-risk* staff members still available for work?

Employees who are in the *very high-risk* group or those advised to restrict their movements, while on special leave with pay, are still considered available to work from home and suggested duties are outlined in [Circular 0049/2020](#).

18. What about Ancillary staff who are in the Covid-19 *very high risk* category?

[Circular 0054/2020](#) sets out the arrangements that have been put in place for ***very high risk ancillary staff – grant funded caretakers, secretaries, cleaners and bus escorts***. The criteria associated with this *very high risk* group should be brought to the attention of all ancillary staff, so that they can take the appropriate action. Schools with ancillary staff paid from the Ancillary Services grant will be funded to employ a replacement staff member, if they satisfy the terms and conditions of the Circular. Ancillary staff in the *very high risk* group will have access to the Occupational Health Service (Medmark) to assess their risk and to provide the employer with a Covid-19 Risk Assessment Report, to determine the action to be taken. The school is not liable for the payment of this Occupational Health assessment, as the free Medmark service for the purpose of assessing *very high risk* employees has been extended to grant funded caretakers, secretaries, cleaners and bus escorts.

Where a *very high risk* ancillary staff member has been advised by the OHS that he/she is at a very high risk of serious illness from contracting Covid-19 and is not attending the workplace, the employee remains on their normal salary. The school may employ a replacement for this staff member. Details of how payment of a replacement can be recouped from the Department of Education and Skills can be found in [Circular 0054/2020](#).

19. What if staff are in the very high-risk category but do not inform the Board of their vulnerable status?

If staff are in the very high-risk category, they will not be able to complete the Pre-Return to Work form, as it specifically asks for information relating to the very high-risk category in question 6.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005, staff are legally obliged to inform their employer if they are aware of anything which affects their performance of work activities that could give rise to risks to the safety, health and welfare of others at work.

It is important that relevant staff are made aware of the provisions of both [Circular 0049/2020](#) and [Circular 0054/2020](#), and the procedures therein, so that they are fully aware of their responsibilities and entitlements.

20. Is school management entitled to ask staff about their personal medical condition?

The medical health of staff is information which is personal to them. Boards are *not required* to take on an investigative role in this regard.

VULNERABLE PUPILS

21. Who decides if a pupil is in the very high risk category and what evidence is required?

The Department of Education and Skills has published a guidance document *'Continuity of schooling: Supporting primary pupils who are at very high risk to COVID-19'* in relation to supporting *very high risk* pupils. The document states that pupils should be medically certified as being at very high risk to Covid-19, and that they cannot return to school for this reason, if they are to be avail of the adapted education provision. This document can be accessed on www.gov.ie/backtoschool.

22. How does a school provide educational support to children who are medically assessed as being at *very high risk* to Covid-19?

'Continuity of schooling: Supporting primary pupils who are at very high risk to COVID-19' Section 2, sets out the options available to schools for the support of remote learning.

Schools should refer to Section 2 of 'Continuity of schooling: Supporting primary pupils who are at very high risk to COVID-19', for guidance in facilitating continuity of schooling for pupils who are medically certified as being at very high risk to Covid-19.

23. Is a school obliged to provide support for remote learning to pupils who are not medically certified as being at very high risk to Covid-19?

Section 4 of the Department of Education and Skills' publication 'Continuity of schooling: Supporting primary pupils who are at very high risk to COVID-19' addresses the issue of pupils who are not medically certified as being at very high risk to Covid-19, and who fall into the following categories:

- Pupils at risk of early school leaving
- Pupils/parents who are experiencing COVID-related anxiety about their child returning to school
- Pupils who have been requested by a medical doctor or the HSE to self-isolate.

The usual guidance for attendance records for these pupils applies and therefore these pupils should only be marked present when they are in attendance at school.

TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS) will work with schools in September and October to ensure that pupils receive support in relation to their return to school and school attendance.

The National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) Return to School webinar and Toolkit provide information and resources to support pupils' return to school. In addition, NEPS have developed resources for parents, teachers and pupils on anxiety.

GRANTS

24. We are a school of 60 pupils. Our cleaning budget for term 1 is €1,260. Is there an additional grant for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) materials etc.?

Yes. This grant was paid in two separate amounts. Your cleaning costs (€1,260) was paid first. The second part of the Covid Capitation Grant provides a budget for the purchase of PPE, Sanitiser and other consumables. For the first term, your school will receive an additional €1,500 for the purchase of same. Click here for [Guidance for primary and special schools on PPE, consumables and equipment](#).

25. Which grant covers the cleaning detergents etc. - the cleaning or capitation one?

The Covid Capitation (PPE, Sanitiser & Consumables) provides for the purchase of detergent. See [PPE & consumables supply user guide](#).

26. Can we source our requirements from our local supplier of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

The awarded supply arrangement for the purchase of appropriate PPE, consumables and equipment does not mandate schools to purchase from the contracted 14 suppliers. However, greater savings and efficiencies may be achieved by following the procedures set out in the [PPE & consumables supply user guide](#)

CONTRACTS

27. What contract should be given to a cleaner a) whose hours have been extended and b) a new cleaner who has been appointed?

- a) For existing cleaners, a letter can be added to their contract detailing the additional hours/ rate of pay and the anticipated period of time such extended hours of work will be required, subject always to the proviso that the continuation of such extended hours of work is conditional upon the continuation of the provision of additional funding for such additional work by the Department of Education and Skills
- b) For newly appointed cleaners, a Specified Purpose Contract that sets out the purpose for which the contract is required, and which states that the contract will terminate when the specified purpose expires

28. What contract is offered to substitute/replacement staff who are covering special Covid related leave?

Replacement/Substitute staff should be given a Specified Purpose Contract that sets out the purpose for which the contract is required, and states that the contract will terminate when the purpose expires.

PRINCIPAL RELEASE DAYS.

29. How are principal release day clusters established?

A maximum of five schools need to cluster and nominate a base school which will be the employer of the fixed-term teacher. The schools in the cluster need to agree a timetable for the appointed teacher. The *Principal Release Time Post for 2020/2021* form, [Appendix A, Circular 0019/2020](#) needs to be submitted without delay to the Teacher Allocations section in the Department of Education.

30. How do I find out how many release days I have?

Under the provisions of [Circular 0045/2020](#), Section 5, the previous allocation of principal release days has been adjusted for the duration of the 2020/2021 school year, to bring each teaching principal's allowance to one day per week which amounts to 37 days in total for the 2020/2021 school year.

31. How do these release days for principals operate?

[Circular 14/01](#) sets out the terms and conditions under which release days can be taken. This circular sets out the duties to be undertaken during the periods of release time and sets out the requirement for the principal to be in attendance in school on the day.

32. Will this post count towards my allocation of leadership and management positions?

At this time, there is no provision for these posts to count towards a school's authorised posts for the allocation of leadership and management positions, or towards the creation of an administrative principal post.

33. If the school year is 183 days, there won't be enough days to give each principal 37 days in total. How will that work?

The additional days required may be filled from the other substitution provisions, including the school's own panel of regular substitutes.

34. I have special classes - do I still get my extra principal release days?

Yes, a teaching principal with a school that has special classes is entitled to an additional four release days.

35. Can I still take my release days as a block of days during the course of the school year?

Yes, the flexibility as to how the release days are taken, whether in blocks or separate days at a time, still remains. This is at the discretion of the Board of Management, and where a school is part of a principal release day cluster, with the agreement of all schools involved. Release days should be taken in a measured way over the course of the whole school year, to provide for the administrative demands of each term.

36. Is there a cluster for Deputy Principal release days, where schools have an Administrative Principals?

There are no cluster arrangements for Deputy Principal release days. These days may be filled from the other substitution provisions i.e. Supply Panel (if the school is part of a Supply Panel cluster arrangement), the school's own panel of regular substitutes, and the national substitute service (See Q.11).

SUPPLY PANELS

37. How is a school to fill Supply Panel posts?

Once the Department of Education has approved the post, then the base school can fill this position under the provisions of [Circular 0059/2019](#) (*Primary Schools Supply Panel Pilot Scheme for the 2019/2020 School Year*).

The post should be filled in accordance with recruitment procedures set out in Circular 0044/2019. The changes in timelines in Information Note, [TTC 0006/2020](#) will assist schools in the timely filling of these positions.

38. What are the new timelines in terms of recruitment of teachers/Principals/Deputy Principal (open competition)?

The Department of Education has provided for shortened timelines for the recruitment of Teachers/Principals/Deputy Principals (open competition) in [TTC 0006/2020](#): For advertising, the period of 14 days is now reduced to 7 days. For notice of interview, the period of at least 7 days is now reduced to at least 5 days.

39. Can the internal panel from an earlier recruitment process be used to fill these positions?

Yes, these posts can be filled from an internal panel, within the four month timeframe, providing that the internal panel was established following interviews for a fixed term teaching position of one year's duration.

40. Can I use the Supply Panel posts in calculating my allocation of leadership and management posts?

Yes, Supply Panel posts are authorised teaching positions for establishing the school's entitlement to leadership and management posts, in compliance with the provisions of Chapter 3, Section 2, [Circular 0044/2019](#).

41. Can I appoint a newly qualified teacher who wants to complete Droichead to a Supply panel role?

A newly qualified teacher may be appointed to a Supply Panel position, but cannot complete Droichead in this role. However, if a school can redeploy one of their existing staff to the Supply Panel position, then the newly qualified teacher can be redeployed to a mainstream class, to facilitate the Droichead process.

42. How many teachers are there on each Supply Panel?

This depends on the location of the panel. There are up to four teachers on the Supply Panels in urban areas, whereas there may be just one teacher on a Supply Panel in a rural area.

43. How will I know if my school is part of a Supply Panel and that we are a "receiving" school?

Primary Allocations Section, Department of Education and Skills will make direct contact with all schools involved in Supply Panels.

44. Can I fill my Principal release days from the Supply Panel?

Yes. If you are not in a cluster for Principal release days, then you may access the Supply Panel, if you are a receiving school i.e. if you are one of the schools that has access to a Supply Panel.

Supply panels will cover all substitutable absences, including release days.

Covid-19 RESPONSE PLAN FOR SCHOOLS

45. What is the Covid Response Plan?

The Covid Response Plan details the policies and procedures necessary for a school to reopen safely. It supports Boards in putting measures in place that aim to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the environment. The Covid Response Plan includes all of the operational measures the school is taking in this regard.

46. What is the difference between the Policy Statement and the overall Covid Response Plan?

Schools must have a Covid-19 Policy Statement in place prior to the reopening of schools. This outlines the commitment of the school to implement the plan, and a template can be accessed at Appendix 1 of the [Covid-19 Response Plan for Primary & Special Schools](#). The Policy Statement is just part of a suite of documents in the Covid Response Plan. Schools also are required to review their existing risk assessment to consider the new risks posed by the virus. Schools need to ask themselves “What are the Covid-19 safety risks, and how will we mitigate these risks?”

The measures undertaken to mitigate the risks should be recorded, and form part of the school’s Covid Response Plan. These will be recorded under the following headings:

- The return to work form which must be completed by all staff 3 days before returning to work.
- Training for all staff
- The appointment of a lead worker representative
- Signage requirements
- Changes to the school layout to facilitate spacing and social distancing of pupils and staff
- Arrangements for access to school building by visitors
- Control measures re hygiene and physical distancing
- Cleaning procedures for schools
- Procedures for dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19
- Staff responsibilities and duties
- Special Education considerations
- Absence management and wellbeing programmes.

Appendix 6 of the [Covid-19 Response Plan for Primary & Special Schools](#) provides a Checklist for school management, which covers all of the measures taken by the school authority, in preparation for the return to school.

47. Should substitute staff members complete a Return to Work form?

A [Covid-19 self-declaration form](#) is available on www.cpsma.ie. This form requires replacement/substitute staff to make the same declaration that any returning member of staff is expected to make in relation to Covid-19 symptoms, contacts etc. to ensure that school management are compliant with their obligations under Public Health requirements.

LEAD WORKER REPRESENTATIVE

48. How is the Lead Worker Representative selected?

It is recommended that Board of Management or the principal advises staff members of the requirement for this role to be filled, and furnishes the details of the role, as set out in Section 4.3 [Covid-19 Response Plan the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools](#). Staff are then invited to volunteer for the role of lead worker. If there is more than one volunteer, then a vote can be taken among the staff.

49. What happens if no one volunteers?

A member of staff or a member of the management team could be approached directly and asked to undertake the role.

50. How is the lead worker formally appointed?

Following selection by staff, the Lead Worker Representative (LWR) can be formally appointed at a Board of Management meeting and the name of the LWR noted in the minutes

51. What training is available for the Lead Worker Representative?

A specific training module has been devised by the Department, and can be accessed on www.gov.ie/backtoschool at the following link: [Lead Worker Representative Induction](#)

52. Does the school need to pay for this training, as we have been approached by companies offering Lead Worker Representative training at a cost?

No. The Department of Education's training module is sufficient and it is free of charge.

53. Is there an Assistant Lead Worker Representative?

In schools of more than 30 staff, an *Assistant* Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in the same way as the lead worker is appointed. Their role will be to assist the lead worker at all times and to deputise for the lead worker if absent.

In schools with less than 30 staff, a *Deputy* Lead Worker will be appointed. Their role will be to deputise for the LWR if necessary.

54. Can the Lead Worker Representative or the Assistant / Deputy LWR be an SNA or a secretary for instance?

Yes, this is provided for in the Covid Response Plan. If a teacher is selected for the role of Lead Worker Representative, then the Assistant or Deputy LWR should be selected from the non-teaching staff. This also works in reverse. This is to ensure that **all** staff are represented in terms of matters relating to the management and prevention of the spread of Covid-19 in school.

55. Can the principal be the Lead Worker Representative?

As this is a liaison role between staff and management, it is not recommended that the principal take this position.

56. Can a shared resource teacher or part time secretary or part-time Special Needs Assistant be a lead worker?

Due to the importance of the role in terms of the oversight of school procedures in relation to Covid-19, it is preferable that the lead worker be a member of the full time staff.

57. Is there an allowance for Lead Worker Representative?

- Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is a teacher (including a postholder), the 10 Croke Park hours which can currently be used for planning on other than a whole school basis will be utilised by the LWR and Assistant LWR to carry out their duties in that role.
- Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is an SNA, 10 of the “72 hours” will be utilised by the LWR and Assistant LWR to carry out their duties in that role.
- Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is a Secretary or Caretaker, a re-prioritisation of duties by school management should be carried out to afford the staff member sufficient time to carry out their duties in that role.

COVID AIDE

58. Who do you employ as a Covid Aide?

There is no specific guidance in relation to who the Covid Aide should be, only a description of what his/her role is, i.e. *“to assist with the physical and logistical arrangements necessary for school reopening including physical reconfiguration measures in schools setting up hand sanitising stations, signage, training, engaging with parents and staff etc.”* ([Circular 0045/2020](#))

59. Can a Board Member be employed as an aide?

As the Covid Aide will be an employee of the Board of Management (albeit for a short period of time), the position should not be filled by a Board member. (Section 7.3 [Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019-2023](#))

60. Is the Covid Aide grant paid in to the account directly, whether or not we employ an aide?

All of the Covid grants are paid directly into the school accounts. The Covid Aide grant is calculated on the basis of a daily rate of €143.32. The table below sets out the number of days funding which is being provided by the Department of Education and Skills based on school size.

| Enrolment Range | | No. of Days |
|---------------------|-----|-------------|
| From | To | |
| <300 | | 2 |
| 301 | 600 | 5 |
| >600 | | 10 |
| All Special Schools | | 10 |

61. If we don't employ an aide, do we have to return the money?

If the grant is not spent, it should be recorded as such in the accounts. Currently, there is no information available in relation to a requirement to return an unspent grant. Schools must ensure that the expenditure of all grants is reflected accurately in the annual accounts.

SCHOOL INSURANCE

62. What is the position in relation to insurance cover, if we have case of Covid-19 in the school?

Allianz have confirmed that there is no Covid-19 Exclusion under the Allianz Custodian School Protection policy and that they will indemnify schools in respect of Covid-19 claims provided reasonable precautions are taken to stop the spread of Covid-19. What constitutes reasonable precautions is following all of the Department of Education guidelines in relation to the safe reopening of schools.

63. What Risk Assessments should the school undertake?

The Department's [Covid-19 Response Plan the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools](#) provides a risk assessment template and checklists.

These risk assessments should be retained, as part of the school's [Covid-19 Response Plan](#).

RECONFIGURING CLASSROOMS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

64. Our classrooms are too small to facilitate 1m distance as per the Department of Education formats. What can we do?

It is important that this is addressed in the context of your own school. Schools should undertake an evaluation or audit of the school premises to ascertain what reconfiguration is required to maximise your capacity to social distance.

The Department of Education published a document, [Maintaining Physical Distance in the Classroom - Checklist for Primary Schools & Special Schools](#), which should assist schools in completing this assessment. If you have already conducted this audit, it is still recommend that you complete the checklist, date it & retain it as a list of measures undertaken by the school in advance of the new school year.

It includes the following measures:

Allocating the largest classroom to the largest class, removing unnecessary furniture to maximise space in the classroom, reconfiguring classrooms to replicate the Department of Education illustrative layouts (80 sq. m., 60 sq. m. and 40 sq. m.) and note the maximum distance that this will afford you. Bear in mind that the provision for 1m social distancing is recommended in 3rd to 6th classes (and is not a requirement from Junior Infants to 2nd class) and that face coverings are now required to be worn by staff when a physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.

The document also includes a provision to consider accessing available spaces in the local community if practicable.

If after the implementation of all the above measures, you still have difficulties in maintaining physical distancing in the classroom in line with the public health advice, you should call the Department of Education dedicated school reopening helpline on 057 9324461 or email at reopeningschools@education.gov.ie

65. How can we arrange for the effective arrival and dismissal of pupils?

[Circular 11/95](#) sets out the typical breakdown of the school day. Under this model, a period of 20 minutes is allocated to "Assembly, supervision, preparation etc. "

In terms of the assembly and dispersal of pupils, schools may use ten minutes of this in the morning and evening to give them that flexibility in terms of the organisation of pupils for arrival and dismissal. In the initial week or so, it might take longer than that, but as the school community become more accustomed to the new procedures, it should become more efficient. It is very difficult to envisage what the new arrival and dismissal procedures will look like, and schools may have to re-visit their plans if they feel that an alternative arrangement would work better. Every effort should be made to ensure that tuition time is not eroded unnecessarily.

As with all aspects of the Covid Response Plan, the arrangements will depend on the size of the school, the number of access points, whether pupils' arrival depends on school transport etc.

66. How can I organise breaktimes to ensure that I minimise contact between bubbles and still ensure that my staff get a break?

[Circular 11/95](#) also provides for a 10 min. break and for a 30 min. break.

Discretion can be used in the application of this provision and two 20 min. breaks may prove more appropriate, allowing a greater additional flexibility for supervision and for staff breaks.

If the yard is big enough to accommodate different class bubbles at the same time (in different sections of the yard, using cones etc. for designated play areas), there is no reason why different classes cannot share the same break facilities.

However, breaks will need to be staggered where there is a risk of overcrowding at entrances and exits.

67. Can we resume activities before and after school and can after school clubs and activities take place on the school premises as normal?

The priority for the beginning of the new school year is to facilitate a safe return to school for all pupils and staff.

There is no reference to after school activities in the draft Covid-19 Response Plan. It would be prudent to consider this question in the context of essential school based programmes (e.g. breakfast clubs) and outside provider activities, with the priority consideration being given to the essential programmes in the first instance.

Schools can consider other activities when they are satisfied that the core measures for the return to school are working effectively. Any extra-curricular activity must comply with the requirements of the school's Covid Response Plan.

TRAVEL ABROAD

68. I am aware of at least two families who are returning from a non “green list” country within 14 days of our school’s full re-opening. What should I do?

Government policy, which is based on official public health advice, continues to advise against non-essential travel overseas for everyone.

It is a requirement for anyone coming into Ireland, from locations other than those with a rating of ‘normal precautions’ (“green”), to restrict their movements for 14 days, and this includes school staff, parents and children or other students coming from abroad to attend school in Ireland. Restricting your movements means staying indoors in one location and avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.

The school has a duty of care to all of its pupils and staff members. If a school has reasonable grounds for believing that its duty of care toward its staff and pupils is being undermined in circumstance where a person – staff member or pupil - has not observed the mandatory requirement to self-isolate for 14 days following return from a non-green list country, it is reasonable for the school to refuse access to the pupil or staff member during this period.

It would be prudent to remind all members of the school community of the Government’s policy in this regard.

69. What restrictions, if any, apply to pupils whose parent(s) travel abroad for work on a regular basis?

The general public health advice outlined above for people returning to Ireland having worked abroad should be followed by the person who has worked abroad (e.g. a parent/guardian).

Living with a parent/guardian who travels abroad for work does not prevent children from attending school. The parent/guardian should follow all of the HSE guidelines on their return home.

[Click here for Department of Education and Skills' guidance re. Travel Abroad](#)

70. Are parents required to complete a "Return to School" form, similar to what is required for employees?

No, there is no requirement under the Department of Education and Skills' Return to School Guidance for parents to sign a return to school form.

However, it is important that any communication that issues from schools should focus on informing parents of their responsibilities in relation to the operation of the School's Covid Response plan, rather than a requirement to sign an agreement.

VISITORS TO SCHOOLS

71. Our school has always had an "open-door" policy in relation to welcoming and engaging with Parents; how can we implement a "no visitor" approach at a time when we are welcoming back the school community?

Clear communication is key to the successful implementation of this important Covid-19 safety measure. Parents/Guardians need to be assured that the welcome will still be forthcoming, but that the school is required to put these restricted measures in place for the safety of the school community.

Advise parents/guardians that only essential visitors can be admitted to the school during the course of the school day. Arrangements for necessary visitors will be:

Restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the principal.

Arranged by prior appointment and should be received at a specific contact point.

Recorded using the contact tracing log (Appendix 5 [Covid Response Plan for Primary and Special Schools](#))

Visitors should perform proper hygiene on arrival at school.

Visitors should maintain 2 metres physical distancing from pupils/students and staff while in school.

[Click here for Department of Education and Skills' advice re. Visitors to Schools](#)

VENTILATION

72. How can we improve ventilation in classrooms without causing discomfort? What steps can a school take to ensure good ventilation practices in a school?

The Department of Education and Skills has published [Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools](#), which outlines practical measures for the deployment of good ventilation practices in schools, in the context of COVID-19 Response Plans.

PUPIL APPOINTMENTS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

73. If a pupil leaves school to attend an appointment (medical/dental etc.) during the school day, are they allowed to return to school after the appointment?

Pupils may return to school after their appointments. The usual public health guidelines apply when leaving the school and returning to school afterwards, i.e. Compliance with public health advice, social distancing and hand hygiene.

TEMPERATURE CHECKS

74. Should schools be carrying out temperature checks?

There is no provision in the Department's guidance for routine temperature checks in a school setting.

[Click here for Department of Education and Skills' advice re. Temperature Checks and Covid-19 Symptoms](#)

DEALING WITH A SUSPECTED CASE OF COVID-19

75. How should a school deal with a suspected case of Covid -19?

Section 8, [COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools](#) sets out the protocol for dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19 in a school setting.

[Schools Pathway for COVID-19: The Public Health approach](#), (a paper prepared by the Office of the Clinical Director, Health Protection, HSE) offers further advice on the management of a suspected case, as well as guidance for a school in the event of a confirmed case.

When a case has been confirmed, the Medical Officer of Health and teams will liaise directly with the school and inform them of the confirmed case as necessary and will undertake a Public Health Risk Assessment to inform any further actions and recommendations.