

CPSMA Webinar February 9th 2021 – Q. & A.

The content of this webinar and this Q. & A. document refers specifically to the phased return of Special Schools on 11th February and Special Classes in Mainstream Schools on the 22nd February.

Guidance in relation to the In-person Supplementary Programme to Support the Education or Care Needs of Pupils with Complex Needs during this interim period, will issue separately.

1. What changes must we make to our Covid-19 Response Plan?

Appendix 3 of the Framework Plan sets out the changes that need to be made to the plan before the phased re-opening.

If schools adopted the original Covid Response Plan (August 2020) in its entirety, then it can be replaced with the [February 2021 version](#) issued by the Department.

If schools have made amendments to the August 2020 version, they just need to copy and paste the updates from Appendix 3 into the relevant section of their existing Response Plan.

The updates include guidance on ventilation, School Management checklists, checklists for cleaning and updated advice on the protocol for dealing with suspected Covid-19 cases.

2. Does the new Covid-19 Response plan have to be ratified by the board of management in advance of school reopening?

The school already has a Covid Response Plan in place. Appendix 1 of the Covid 19 Response Plan, i.e. the Covid-19 Policy Statement, will have already been signed by the Principal and the Chairperson. This essentially states that the school is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all staff and a safe learning environment for all pupils.

In the event that a Board Meeting cannot be held before the phased re-opening of schools, the relevant amendments should be brought to the attention of the Board, staff and parents.

The updated Response Plan should then be formally adopted at the next meeting of the Board.

3. Should staff complete a new Return to Work Form in advance of this phased re-opening of schools?

Yes. The Return to Work form has been amended, and the updated form can be found at Appendix 2 of the Covid Response Plan.

It is also included in a [stand-alone Word document](#) in the “return to school” section of the CPSMA website.

Once this new form is completed and returned in advance of the return to work, any further absence later in the school year, will only require confirmation verbally or in writing that the details in the original form remain unchanged. We would recommend that staff complete an updated RTW form after each school closure/holiday period.

Just an additional note: CPSMA has updated the [self declaration form](#) for those undertaking substitute work in the school. This is also located on the “return to school” section of our website.

4. Can the school request a similar declaration from pupils, before they return to school?

Yes. Schools should use the [Return to Educational Facility Parental Declaration Form](#) at the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website – www.hpsc.ie

This form is also available on the CPSMA website & schools should use this form when children are returning to the setting after any absence.

5. What options are available for Special Schools with regard to attendance of pupils and the deployment of staff?

The Guidance states that for this interim period, special schools may provisionally reduce the attendance of pupils at their school at any given time, by up to 50% of the total school enrolment. This may be done by providing for pupils’ attendance on alternate days.

The Department of Education has confirmed that special schools will have the flexibility to interpret the guidance documentation on the basis that the school ensures that all children who wish to return to in-school learning will be accommodated in the safest way possible.

It must be acknowledged that the special school is best placed to decide on the appropriate arrangements and deployment of staff, based on a broad range of school specific factors, e.g. the number of pupils who will be returning to in-school learning; the configuration of classes; transport arrangements etc.

The priority is to cater for all of the children who wish to return to in-school provision, while also continuing to provide support for those who choose to stay at home (and not just the children who are medically compromised).

6. Can special classes return on a phased basis from February 22nd?

The Guidance states that for this interim period, special classes will return for full days and full weeks from February 22nd.

Where a parent does not want their child to attend the school during this interim phase, staff working from home will continue to support remote provision for that child. The child will not be marked absent, but the parent must inform the school in good time of their intentions.

As the special class teacher will be onsite for the full school day, schools should use whatever support is available from the cohort of staff working from home, for this remote provision.

7. Is a school required to have DLP / Deputy DLP on site during this interim phase?

Yes.

In the circumstances where special schools are open, it would be expected that the Principal and Deputy Principal would be onsite (generally the DLP and Deputy DLP).

The Department of Education has also confirmed that in the case of the return of special classes, given that schools are open as places of work, that either the Principal or Deputy Principal would also be onsite as DLP or DDLP, even if they were not the special class teacher.

8. Can schools redeploy SNAs in mainstream to assist in special classes to reduce demands on special class SNAs/assist with yard etc.?

Yes, school management has the flexibility to deploy SNA staff where the need is greatest.

9. What changes have been made to PPE provision?

Currently, funding is in place to support implementation of all Infection Prevention Control measures required by Health Protection Surveillance Centre, including the provision of appropriate PPE for SNAs and Special Education Teaching staff.

In terms of changes, the updated guidance states that all SNA's and Special Education Teaching Staff must be provided with surgical grade masks.

For staff working in immediate proximity with children with additional intimate care needs, the Board of Management has a responsibility to ensure that staff are provided with the appropriate levels of PPE, such as surgical masks, visors, gloves and aprons.

Staff have a responsibility to observe all appropriate infection control measures when using PPE and in the disposal of PPE after use.

The guidance has cautioned that the use of visors should only be as a last resort, as they do not provide protection equivalent to a mask.

The Department has indicated that any queries in relation to PPE supply should be raised directly with them at the email address provided at the end of this presentation.

10. How will I know if the masks that are now required by SNAs and SETs are the appropriate grade?

The appropriate grade is set out in in the [Department of Education Guidance note on PPE , Consumables and Equipment](#).

The medical face masks required should be to EU Standard EN 14683.

Any issues relating to supply should be raised immediately with Department of Education email: covid19_alert@education.gov.ie

11. What additional provision has been made for *high risk* teachers and SNAs during this interim period?

The Department has issued two Information notes [TC 0001/2021 \(Teachers\)](#) and [TC 0002/2021 \(SNAs\)](#) to offer some flexibility to these employees for the duration of the phased return to school.

The following provision has been made for Teachers and SNAs, who have been assessed by the OHS as being High Risk of serious illness if he/she contracts COVID-19.

These staff may be facilitated to continue to work remotely, through reassignment of teacher/SNA roles within the complement of teachers/SNAs available to the school. This applies ONLY to the period of phased re-opening.

12. Has any additional provision been made for *high risk* ancillary staff during this interim period?

The Department has indicated that no additional provision applies for *high risk* secretaries, caretakers, bus escorts and cleaners during this interim period.

The special arrangements set out in [Circular 0054/2020](#) apply to ancillary staff who are at very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19 continue to apply.

13. What interim changes have been made to parental leave and unpaid leave for staff who wish to consider these leave options?

Under the two Information notes already referenced in Q. 11 - [TC 0001/2021 \(Teachers\)](#) and [TC 0002/2021 \(SNAs\)](#) - changes have been made in relation to Parental Leave and Unpaid Leave:

- The 6 week application period may be waived to facilitate the granting of either type of leave.
- Applications for Parental Leave can be made for blocks of less than seven days.

All applications should be made in writing to the board of management.

It is important to note that the temporary changes outlined in these Information Notes only apply during the phased reopening period. All other provisions of the Leave Schemes apply. These circulars should be brought to the attention of the relevant Teaching/SNA staff.

As with all staff absences under different types of leave schemes, when considering any application for leave, the welfare and care needs of the pupils must take precedence over all other considerations.

14. What substitution will be provided for during the phased re-opening?

Special Schools

Staff Members on approved leave can be substituted, in accordance with the substitution provisions that are currently in place.

Principals of special schools are being provided with contact details of principals of supply panel base schools for the duration of the interim programme. Supply panel teachers must give priority to special schools for the duration of the interim programme. Guidance on this will be provided by the Department of Education to principals of base schools.

Special Classes in Mainstream Schools

Staff Members on approved leave can be substituted.

However, where mainstream schools have special classes which also have additional SNA provision in their schools, they should assign one of their other SNAs temporarily to the special class in the first instance.

Similarly, schools may temporarily redeploy another member of the teaching staff to the special class to maintain the operation of the special class if the special class teacher is on leave.

The substitution arrangement will then apply to the reassigned SNA/mainstream class teacher.

15. What additional information should be communicated to parents/guardians in advance of the phased reopening?

Parents should be advised of the following four points:

- Parents of children returning in this phase will be asked by the school to complete the declaration form, as previously outlined in Q. 4.
- They should be reminded of the Infection Prevention Control measures to prevent the introduction and spread of Covid 19 in schools (These measures are set out in Section 5 of the Covid Response Plan).
- Parent communications from the school should emphasise that there should be no congregation outside schools during this interim phase or at any stage.
- Staff engagement should be requested through the school and will be provided by telephone or online.