

Q. & A. Phased return of Primary Education: Phase 3, March 1st 2021
CPSMA February 25th 2021

This Q. & A. document refers specifically to the phased return of Primary Schools (Junior Infants to Second Classes), the full return of Special Schools, and the continuation of fulltime in-person education for pupils attending Special Classes in Mainstream Schools, effective from 1st March 2021.

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-19 Response Plan (August 2020) in its entirety, then it can be replaced with the [February 2021 Covid-19 Response Plan](#) 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-19 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-19 Response Plan.

It is also included in a [Return to Work Form \(Word document\)](#) in the “[return to school](#)” section of the CPSMA website.

Leagan Gaeilge ar fáil [anseo](#).

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.

CPSMA has updated the [self declaration form](#) for those undertaking substitute work in the school. This is also located in 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](#) when children are returning to the setting after any absence.

Leagan Gaeilge ar fáil [anseo](#)

5. Should all staff return to school on March 1st, or will the “in-person” requirement only apply to staff who are allocated to the pupils/classes returning under Phase 3?

The Guidance states that staff members teaching and supporting Junior mainstream and Special classes will return to school.

With the exception of those on flexible arrangements and on approved leave as provided for in the Information notes on temporary staffing arrangements [[Information Note 0005/2021 for Teachers](#) and [Information Note 0006/2021 for SNAs](#)], all SETs and any other teachers who do not teach mainstream classes should also return to schools from 1st March. This also applies to all SNAs. Some SETs and SNAs may also be required to continue to support pupils in senior classes remotely.

6. If the school has a mixed class, e.g. 2nd/3rdClass, will all the class return on March 1st, or will the return to school only apply to the 2nd class pupils?

In the case of mixed classes, which include both Junior [Junior Infants – 2nd Class] and Senior [Third – Sixth Class] pupils, all pupils in the mixed class will attend.

In the case of a one-teacher school, all pupils will attend.

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, either the Principal or Deputy Principal would also be onsite as DLP or DDLP, even if they were not the special class teacher.

The same requirement to have a Principal or Deputy on site as DLP or Deputy DLP would also apply to the partial return of mainstream classes from March 1st 2021.

8. 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, Special Education Teaching Staff and Bus Escorts 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, which could include 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 following email address: covid19_alert@education.gov.ie

9. How will I know if the masks that are now required by SNAs, SETs and Bus Escorts 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 or funding of PPE should be raised immediately with Department of Education email: covid19_alert@education.gov.ie

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

The Department has issued [Information Note 0005/2021 for Teachers](#) and [Information Note 0006/2021 for 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.

11. What additional provision has been made for Teachers/SNAs who are pregnant?

The Information Notes referenced in Q. 10 state that during this period of partial re-opening, a pregnant Teacher/SNA should consider themselves in the High Risk category and the Teacher/SNA should temporarily continue to work remotely.

This does not preclude the pregnant staff member from working “in school”, if that is their preference.

12. What additional provision has been made for Teachers/SNAs who are over 60 years of age?

A Teacher/SNA who is over 60 years of age has the option of working remotely during the period of phased re-opening.

This does not preclude the staff member who is over 60 from working “in school”, if that is their preference.

13. How are these absences recorded on the Online Claims System?

A teacher/SNA who has been categorised as High Risk by Medmark, a teacher/SNA who is pregnant or a teacher/SNA who is over 60 years of age, who is facilitated to work remotely during this period of phased return to school, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category ‘Personal Leave’, sub-category titled ‘Covid-19: Very High Risk

Group'. The employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department to replace the High Risk teacher/SNA in the classroom.

In the case of over 60s and for pregnant staff, where the OLCS system asks for Medmark Certification (yes/no), the inputter should just tick "Yes", as formal certification is not required during this interim period.

Note: The HSE has recently published guidance for the education sector in respect of pregnant employees. Upon the full re-opening of schools, this HSE guidance will be implemented in the education sector. The Department will provide employers with details of these new arrangements in advance of a full re-opening of schools.

14. Do the temporary arrangements outlined in [Information Note 0005/2021 for Teachers](#) and [Information Note 0006/2021 for SNAs](#) apply to special schools, given that they are fully open from 1st March?

Yes, these temporary provisions continue to apply to all primary schools and special schools until education has fully reopened. The current expectation is that a full re-opening will be on the 15th March 2021.

15. 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.

16. 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. 10 - [Information Note 0005/2021 for Teachers](#) and [Information Note 0006/2021 for 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.

17. What substitution will be provided for during the Phase 3 re-opening?

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

18. Will substitution be provided for individuals availing of provisions of [Information Note 0005/2021 for Teachers](#) and [Information Note 0006/2021 for SNAs](#)?

In the first instance schools should look to temporarily redeploy another member of the teaching staff/SNA staff to provide the in-school provision and facilitate that staff member availing of the temporary provisions working from home. Where deployment of another member of staff to facilitate these temporary arrangements is not possible, the school may employ a substitute teacher/SNA.

19. If a parent chooses to keep their child at home, is the child to be marked present or absent on the roll?

Normal attendance records should be kept. If the class has returned and the pupil is not in the very high risk category, then they should be marked absent.

20. If a parent chooses to keep their child at home, what education provision is the school required to provide?

Schools are not required to provide dual provision, with the exception of existing arrangements for children in the very high risk category.

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

Parents should be advised of the following additional 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-19 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.

22. Under current public health advice (Level 5, 24/02/2021), are schools permitted to hold face-to-face Board of Management meetings?

Where possible, Board of Management meetings should be held remotely.

In relation to CPOR (Child Protection Oversight Report), current Department of Education direction is as follows:

“A face to face meeting of the board must be held at least once in every school term in order for the CPOR report along with required supporting documentation to be provided to the board and for the board to resume and continue to carry out its important oversight role in respect of the reporting of child protection concerns in accordance with the procedures. A Board meeting for these purposes is considered essential work”.

If there are no child protection issues or documents to share in respect of child protection, then Board Meetings can continue to be held remotely.

Otherwise, if there is an issue that requires a face to face meeting, then that meeting could be arranged to deal with this one item – therefore a shorter meeting – and in a socially distanced manner, wearing masks and following all other public health advice.

23. Are schools permitted to engage in face-to-face recruitment in this current period?

Where provided for in the relevant recruitment procedures (including Information Notes [0002/2020](#), [0003/2020](#), [0006/2020](#)), shortlisting meetings and interviews may be conducted using digital technology.

When contacting the Patron’s office in relation to the appointment of an independent assessor, Boards should seek direction in this regard.