Returning to school
Guidance for teaching and learning
3rd class - 6th class
March 2021

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

This document provides practical advice for teachers as schools recommence face-to-face learning for pupils from third class to sixth class. It should be read in conjunction with previously published guidance on teaching and learning in a COVID-19 context available at gov.ie/backtoschool, including *Returning to School: Guidance for teaching and learning Junior Infants - 2nd class (March 2021)*

As pupils return to school, teachers should:

- Allow time for pupils to settle back to school and adapt to school procedures and routines

- Take time to identify needs arising from varied remote learning experiences: consolidate and revise; adapt lesson length; scaffold and support

- Use active and engaging methodologies to support the transition back to learning in school

- Create a calm, reassuring atmosphere for pupils with positive language and praise and opportunities for pupils to communicate their needs

- Promote active listening and concentration skills and encourage peer learning and reflection

- Use observation and parent/pupil views when considering pupils' needs in literacy and numeracy.
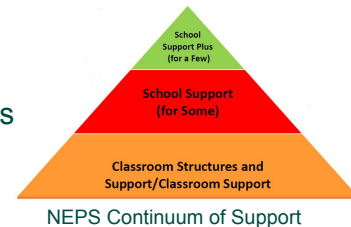
Teaching and learning approaches

Ensure pupils have opportunities to socialise and reconnect, in line with public health guidance

Create opportunities for pupils to talk and discuss, in order to re-establish relationships and to support learning across the curriculum

Avoid the over use of teacher-directed and didactic approaches to teaching and learning in an effort to 'catch up' or 'cover lost ground'

Engage pupils in inquiry-based / hands-on learning experiences to stimulate interest, motivate them to learn and support positive learning outcomes

Tabhair deiseanna do dhaltaí (i scoileanna Gaeltachta, scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge agus scoileanna Béarla) dul i dtaithi ar an nGaeilge arís agus í a chloisint, a úsáid agus a shealbhú trí mhodheolaíochtaí teagaisc idirghníomhacha (rólimirt, drámaíocht, ceol, dánta, éisteacht le hamhráin agus cuir i láthair)

Bring pupils outdoors for engaging, creative and investigative learning opportunities that support social distancing, promote physical activity and help positive wellbeing. Webinars produced by the NCCA on outdoor learning are available here

Promote collaborative learning in a socially distanced manner: provide opportunities for pupils to engage with and learn from the ideas, perceptions and opinions of others (for example, use technology or individual whiteboards/markers to allow pupils to share ideas)

Use integrated and thematic approaches to deliver the full curriculum, to support creative and enjoyable learning experiences and to blend literacy and numeracy skills with creative expression and scientific exploration; consider using the local environment and project work

Supporting emerging learning needs

To inform teaching and learning and identify pupils for additional support, teachers should make use of:

- Teacher observation
- Questioning
- Pupil conferencing
- Teacher-designed tasks
- Reports from parents
- The views of pupils

School Support Plus (for a Few)

School Support (for Some)

Classroom Structures and Support/Classroom Support

NEPS Continuum of Support

For most pupils, priority needs emerging from the period of remote learning will be addressed at the *Classroom Support Stage* of the Continuum of Support through carefully monitored and differentiated learning activities and targeted team-teaching. SETs should collaborate with class teachers to adjust and reprioritise their timetables to ensure support is targeted at pupils with greatest need

Screening and/or diagnostic tests to identify the needs of pupils who require more intensive and individualised support at the *School Support Stage* should only be carried out when the pupils have had adequate time to settle back to school routine

Where possible, engage with teachers and SNAs who delivered the in-person supplementary programme to gather appropriate information about the needs / progress of relevant pupils

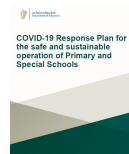Practical supports and guidance for special education teaching are available from the National Council for Special Education at: https://ncse.ie/online-resources

ncse
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

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Promoting safe working and learning environments

COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools

School leaders and teachers should familiarise themselves with the revised COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of schools (updated February 2021), available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a0bff-reopening-our-primary-and-special-schools/#covid-19-response-plan-for-the-safe-and-sustainable-operation-of-primary-and-special-schools

Reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 within the school by:

- Promoting awareness of symptoms for all school personnel, pupils, families and visitors
- Advising teachers and staff not to attend work and to self-isolate if unwell or identified as a close contact
- Thoroughly cleaning frequently used surfaces such as table-tops, door handles and frequently used items such as concrete materials and digital devices
- Restricting the number of visitors to the school to essential visits that have been pre-planned
- Creating / reinforcing pod and bubble systems to avoid unnecessary interaction between pupils

- Continuing to remind parents not to send their children to school if they or other household members have suspected/confirmed COVID-19
- Continuing to promote good hygiene, face coverings where needed, and respiratory etiquette with reminders throughout the school
- Carefully managing shared spaces such as staffrooms and corridors, and reminding staff and pupils of social distancing requirements
- Being vigilant and promoting social distancing at arrival and pick-up times and discouraging the congregation of pupils / parents at the school gates at any stage during the day.

Digital technologies

Digital skills acquired as a result of remote learning experiences should continue to be developed and enhanced as pupils return to school.

- Use digital portfolios developed during school closures to provide constructive feedback for improving learning outcomes for pupils, and to support self-assessment strategies
- Maximise opportunities to develop digital skills to enable pupils to use the features of online platforms to their full potential
- Create opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively on digital tasks which involve locating, selecting and critically analysing relevant information and then creating, sharing and discussing their work
- Continue to use digital technology to support partnership and communication about learning between the school and the home
- Consider using digital recordings of learning materials, including songs, rhymes, poems, phrases and reading samples to encourage and facilitate learning at home

Further support at: pdst.ie/DistanceLearning/DigTech

Frequently asked questions

? How should special education teachers best organise support for pupils with SEN?
SETs should provide support for those with greatest need, including those who have emerging needs arising from school closures, and make optimal use of the available space and teaching resources, while adhering to all social distancing and hygiene requirements.

? How can the performance strand of the music curriculum be safely progressed?
Singing and playing wind instruments (including tin whistle and recorder) in the classroom should be avoided. They can take place outside, weather permitting, when pupils are socially distanced from each other.

? Can external coaches support learning in PE?
Not during Level 5 restrictions. When restrictions are eased, the board can approve these visitors once satisfied that they are Garda vetted, adhere to public health advice, trained by their governing bodies with regard to COVID-19 and fully implement the school's COVID-19 response plan.

? How should break and lunch times be managed?
Pupils should remain in bubble structures, separate from other bubbles. Schools should be very vigilant in this regard. If necessary, breaktimes should be staggered to support this.

? Can student teachers continue to work with classes?
Yes, subject to board approval. They should follow the same health and safety guidance as all school staff.

Curriculum support:
inspectorateadvisory@education.gov.ie