



12 August 2021

Dear Principal

I hope that you have enjoyed some time off during the summer in advance of the new school term

This letter highlights the guidance and resources to support you as schools reopen for the next school year and as we continue to live with COVID-19. The Department is very conscious that schools need to be clear on the arrangements and guidance that remain in place for the 2021/22 academic year to support schools during COVID-19.

When they reopen, schools should continue to operate the infection prevention and control measures in place in the previous term. Schools will be supported in doing so.

The aim of all COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures that are in place is to support schools to operate safely and prevent the introduction of COVID-19 and the onward transmission of COVID-19 among the school community. These measures protect pupils/students, their parents and school staff. It is acknowledged that this has resulted in some changes to normal school practices and traditions but school communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience and innovation.

**COVID-19 Response Plan:**

As notified to you in June, a new template COVID-19 response plan will issue to schools on 18 August 2021. The new template is updated to reflect the information in the Governments [Recovery and Resilience: The Path Ahead](#) plan and the [Work Safely Protocol](#).

The purpose of the School COVID-19 Response Plan is to provide clear and helpful guidance for safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in schools. It provides key information on the infection prevention and control measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 for staff, pupils/students, families and the wider community while recognising the importance of education for the health and wellbeing of children and society as a whole.

The approach to COVID-19 in schools is led by the advice and guidance of HSE Public Health. Public Health has stated that the current new variants of the disease do not change the infection prevention and control measures required in schools.

The updates to the plan do not require schools to take action in advance of normal reopening. As outlined above schools should continue to operate the arrangements that



were in place during the last school term when they reopen. The COVID-19 Response Plans should be brought for noting to the next planned Board of Management meeting.

**Return to Work Form:**

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a Return to Work (RTW) form. A copy of the form is available [HERE](#)

Arrangements should be made for the RTW form to be completed and returned to the school before staff return to work. Existing staff can complete a new form or confirm that the details in their original RTW remain unchanged following the summer period.

**Training:**

Details of the training resources related to COVID-19 for any newly appointed staff in school are provided at Appendix 1.

**Ventilation and CO<sub>2</sub> monitors:**

Managing ventilation is just one of a suite of public health measures in place to keep our schools safe. Updated guidance for schools on [Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools](#) was provided at the end of May following the work of an expert group that carefully considered the role of ventilation in managing COVID-19.

A copy of the guidance is published at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad236-guidance-on-ventilation-in-schools/>

The over-arching approach in the guidance is for schools to have windows open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use.

The guidance outlines that Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors can play a part in providing a useful general indication that areas/rooms may not be adequately ventilated. They can enable occupants to become familiar with the impacts of activities, outdoor weather and window openings on levels of good ventilation.

In this regard, the Department is procuring a number of portable monitors that will be distributed to schools in August and September – between 2 and 20 at primary level and between 20 and 35 at post-primary level depending on school size at an estimated overall cost of €4 million. This will ensure that a CO<sub>2</sub> monitor will be available for use in every classroom in Ireland.

The monitors are portable, simple to use, and will give a digital reading. The provision of portable CO<sub>2</sub> monitors provides schools with the flexibility to focus their use to those rooms where most beneficial to inform strategies for optimising ventilation in the school.



**Lennox Laboratory Supplies Ltd** ([www.lennoxeducational.ie](http://www.lennoxeducational.ie) e-mail address: [customerservice@lennox.ie](mailto:customerservice@lennox.ie) ), an existing supplier under the *Multi-Supplier Arrangement for the Provision of PPE, Consumables & Equipment to the Irish Education Sector*, will be delivering the CO<sub>2</sub> monitors to schools.

Deliveries of the full allocation of CO<sub>2</sub> monitors to each school will be made in either one or two batches. Lennox will be contacting schools directly from the 16<sup>th</sup> of August to arrange delivery details.

The first batch delivery of monitors **will start week commencing 23<sup>rd</sup> August**. The second batch will be delivered early September, with schools receiving their full allocation of monitors by mid-September. This approach ensures that schools will have access to monitors as soon as possible. User guidance will be provided with the monitors.

**Staff information:**

Information on working arrangements for Teachers, SNAs and other school staff is contained in a new staffing circular, [Circular 0042/2021](#) “*Coronavirus (COVID-19): Arrangements for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants employed in recognised Primary and Post-Primary Schools*”. This circular replaces Circular 0021/2021 and Information Note TC 0025/2021. This circular is published [HERE](#).

**School Transport**

School Transport Scheme services for the 2021/2022 school year will fully operate but, similar to the 2020/2021 school year, services will operate with additional measures and hygiene requirements in place. In line with Public Health advice, post-primary services will continue to operate at 50% capacity in the 2021/2022 school year. This capacity limit will be subject to ongoing review.

Communications will be issued to parents/guardians and children before the week ending 20 August 2021, with detailed guidelines on what they are expected to comply with when using School Transport Scheme services.

For those of you who have children with Special Educational Needs attending your school and for whom a School Bus Escort is employed by your school to assist children on school transport services, where an additional School Bus Escort is required arising from the requirement to provide additional Special Educational Needs School Transport Services at 50% capacity for children of post-primary school going age, Bus Éireann and the School Transport Section will be in contact with you in regard to any such arrangements and the required sanction for the additional Escort or Escorts as required.

**Funding:**

Extensive additional funding was provided for the 2020/2021 school year to support schools to operate safely in a COVID-19 context. Funding will continue to be provided for



the new term. A new circular covering the funding arrangements will issue in the coming weeks with details of forthcoming dates and rates of grant payments.

**Communications:**

A range of communication materials aimed at preparing pupils and students and their parents for the return to school are outlined in Appendix 2. These will be widely distributed by the Department on social media. Direct links for each individual video will also be sent to schools by email before the week ending 20 August 2021.

I hope you find the above information useful in your preparations to support the safe sustained operation of our schools over the coming year.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley  
Assistant Secretary



### Appendix 1 Training Resources (for any new staff)

	Item	Topic	Where you can find it
1.	Induction Training Webinar	Induction Training for staff any new staff prior to school-reopening	<a href="#">Primary school staff</a> <a href="#">Post-primary school staff</a>
2.	Lead Worker Representative Webinar	Training for Lead Worker Representative – for any new LWR, .	Training available <a href="#">here</a>
3.	Training for SNAs, staff working in special classes and SEN teachers.	Training for SNAs, staff working in special classes and SEN teachers – required for any new staff	Training available <a href="#">here</a>
4.	Training for Cleaning Staff	Training for any new Cleaning Staff	Training available <a href="#">here</a>

### Appendix 2 Communication resources which will be provided before schools return

1	Animation videos for students and parents English, Gaeilge and ISL	Advice and information on return to school – concentrating on public health messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gov.ie/backtoschool</li> <li>Linked from Esinet</li> <li>Direct links for each individual video will be sent to schools by email</li> <li>Will be disseminated on Department social media</li> </ul>
2	Text-based information for parents in 30+ languages	Advice and information on return to school – concentrating on public health messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gov.ie/backtoschool</li> <li>Linked from Esinet</li> <li>Direct links for each individual language item will be sent to schools by email</li> <li>Will be disseminated on Department social media</li> </ul>
3	Poster Format guidance for Parents	Advice and information on return to school – concentrating on public health messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gov.ie/backtoschool</li> <li>Linked from Esinet</li> <li>Direct links for each individual video will be sent to schools by email</li> <li>Will be disseminated on Department social media</li> </ul>