



12th June 2020

School reopening and summer provision

Dear Principals, teachers and staff

A report on the planning which is taking place regarding the reopening of schools for the next school year was considered by the Government today. The report sets out the clear ambition to develop a sustainable plan to fully reopen schools at the start of the next school year in late August/September in line with normal timeframes.

It is clear that the risks and impacts on children and society where access to education is significantly reduced are considerable particularly for the more vulnerable students in our society, like students with special education needs and those already at risk of educational disadvantage.

There is ongoing engagement between the Department and the education partners to work together to ensure that the return to school is safe for children and staff, which is an essential part of the planning for reopening. A key component to reopening schools safely is the development of guidance in relation to infection prevention and control in schools. In developing these plans it is the intention of the Department that as much work as possible will happen centrally to help reduce the burden of implementing the requirements for safe re-opening at an individual school level. Details of the key activities underway are set out in the appendix to this letter. The full report published today is available at the following link:
<https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/planning-for-reopening-schools.pdf>

The Government also announced a joint Education and Health arrangement for a summer programme to support children with complex needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. Details of the arrangements are available at www.gov.ie/summerprovision. There will be ongoing engagement with partners on this, mindful of the fact that there are new aspects to the arrangements for this year.

I am very conscious of the significant effort to support the continuity of education and learning that has happened since schools closed in March. As a society we are moving carefully and in line with the health advice to new phases and the safe re-opening of our schools is a critical element of the Government's plan for society.

As a Department we will continue to work to give as much certainty and guidance as possible to schools, staff, students and parents over the coming weeks to make a safe reopening possible for all.

Yours sincerely

Seán Ó Foghlú
Secretary General



Appendix

The following are the key activities that are now underway to implement the optimum model for reopening schools:

1. **Overall objective** - to open schools in accordance with the normal start of the new school year to the fullest extent while minimising the risks from a public health perspective. Arrangements will allow for new routines to be established and bedded in within schools.
2. **Public health guidance** – Detailed engagement is underway in relation to development of public health guidance for school settings. This will be provided in time to facilitate operation of summer programmes and to enable detailed planning and preparatory work for the re-opening of schools. The public health guidance will be kept under on-going review and refinement if necessary in advance of the re-opening of schools at the end of August.
3. **Guidance and templates** - to enable schools comply with the requirements of the national Return to Work Safely Protocol are being developed centrally in consultation with education partners. These guidance documents and templates will be published later in June and July. Draft guidance and templates will be available in time for use by schools planning to operate summer programmes.
4. **Awareness raising and training** – Guidance and on-line training modules, webinars etc. will be developed centrally and available for use by schools, parents and students.
5. **Enhanced cleaning regime** – Additional resources will be provided to schools to enable enhanced cleaning regimes to be put in place for operation of schools.
6. **Good hand hygiene** – The existing handwashing facilities in some schools are not designed for the enhanced level of handwashing envisaged necessary in Covid-19 environment without significantly impacting on educational class time. A drawdown framework will be established by the Department to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers for use in the school and classroom. The procurement process for this framework is commencing immediately and it will also deal with any other potential PPE requirements. It is not envisaged that significant PPE will be required in school settings. Details on the additional funding for schools will be provided in due course.
7. **Mental health and Wellbeing** – There will be a strong focus on supporting mental health and wellbeing of students and staff during the initial phase of re-opening schools. Central guidance will be provided.
8. **Teaching and learning and curriculum** -The Department is working with the NCCA, the Inspectorate and other experts as appropriate to tailor teaching and learning appropriately to the needs of students as they reengage with school.
9. **Blended learning/alternative provision** - Notwithstanding our overall objective, planning for a blended learning approach (on-line/in school) will be a feature of the approach to planning to reopen schools as there may be circumstances where schools will have to have the necessary agility to respond quickly to changed circumstances at local, regional or national level. Planning is underway with the NCCA, the Inspectorate and other experts as appropriate on how best to manage and operate blended learning model.
10. **Consultation and Communication** – The Department will continue to engage closely with education partners and other key stakeholders on the development of guidance and supports for the re-opening of schools. A dedicated webpage will be provided to enable the sharing of information and updates in an open and transparent manner.