



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Home Based Summer Provision 2020

Reconnecting with Education

Guidance for a Home-Based Summer Programme to Support Children with
Special Educational or Care Needs

Introduction

This guidance from the Department of Education and Skills provides a framework for a home-based summer programme provided by teachers to support children with special educational needs (SEN)¹. The summer programme is provided in the context of school closures associated with Covid-19 and it is an expanded provision compared to the July Provision programme which has been offered in previous years. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the [FAQ document](#) prepared by the Department to guide the operation of the summer programme.

Teaching and learning has been disrupted for all children during the closure period. While most teachers and learners have, reportedly, adapted reasonably well to the new circumstances, the absence of school is, reportedly, having a negative impact on the lives and wellbeing of some children with significant special educational needs and their families. To address some of these issues the Department is offering a school-based summer programme for a range of children with SEN, and where this is not available locally, a home-based programme may be accessed instead.

The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance note are intended to assist parents in instructing the teacher (tutor) they choose to deliver the home-based programme to address wellbeing, continuity of learning, aspects of educational regression, reconnecting with school and transitions. Parents opting to avail of the home-based programme should ensure that the teacher (tutor) is provided with a copy of this guidance note and access to the child's most recent support plan.

Key Themes of the Guidance Document

- Programme content
- Use of technology to support student engagement
- Learning to learn
- Teaching approaches
- The role of parents and teachers (tutors)
- Student voice

Rationale for providing a home-based Summer Programme

The Department is offering a home-based Summer Programme for a range of children with SEN. This home-based Summer Programme will focus on providing a foundation to address regression

¹ Alternatively, parents may choose to avail of the services of an SNA to provide a programme of care to a child who meets the eligibility criteria. Further details relating to this aspect of the home-based Summer Programme are to be found in appendix 1

and will also work towards ensuring the successful reintegration/ transition of children with their peers into their planned education setting for the next school year. The home-based model of delivery will enable the teacher (tutor) to take account of children's individual needs and to effectively engage children who may have difficulties in engaging with learning in a school environment.

Aims of the home-based Summer Programme

The aims of the home-based Summer Programme are to:

- Re-establish a connection with learning and pave the way for children to reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting
- Provide a foundation to addressing and limiting regression
- Support families and provide respite
- Support children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- Provide children with the practical and technological skills they may need to engage and communicate in a meaningful way with blended learning in the future

Which children should be invited to participate in the programme?

Children in the categories listed below are eligible for the home-based summer programme, where the child's school **is not providing** the school-based programme or **does not have the capacity** to include the child in the school-based programme.

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in a special class or special school
4. Children transitioning into a special class from early years settings
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
 - Children with Down syndrome
 - Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
 - Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
 - Children who have a moderate general learning disability
 - Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Programme Content

In line with the aims of the programme the following guidance is provided to help the teacher (tutor) to prioritise children's key learning needs while supporting their wellbeing as they start their journey toward re-engagement with learning and prepare for a return to school.

Promoting a sense of SAFETY

Some children may be worried about re-engaging with learning activities and preparing for returning to school. Promoting a sense of safety helps children believe that their needs will be met now and in the future and that they are protected from harm.

The following can help promote a sense of safety:

- ‘Slow down to catch up’ - It is important not to rush into a focus on academic learning and ‘catching up’ before first re-establishing safety and calmness, thus ensuring children’s readiness to learn.
- It is recommended beginning with low level learning activities and revision before introducing new materials.
- There should be a focus on re-establishing familiar routines in relation to engaging in learning activities (e.g. following a timetable / schedule/ work system) to facilitate a sense of safety for the child. It will be important to explicitly re-teach routines via clear and reassuring instruction.
- Teaching, modelling and consolidating the guidelines and norms which apply based on current Covid-19 related public health advice (e.g. hand washing, coughing / sneezing etiquette etc.) will be important. This should help prepare children for new norms and routines when they return for the new school year.

Promoting a sense of CALM

Some children may experience a heightened sense of anxiety about re-engaging with learning and preparing for return to school. Acknowledging and addressing this anxiety will help support them with this.

The following can help promote a sense of calm:

- Children should be given opportunities to communicate or share their understanding and experience of school closures related to the Covid-19 pandemic in a safe and supportive way. Activities like art may also support children in sharing their experiences and tell their story.
- Children’s responses to school closures and stressful events are unique and varied. Some may verbalise their concerns, others may withdraw or present with challenging behaviours. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that a wide variety of reactions can be expected and these are normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Working with parents, consider ways to create a calm, structured space for learning within the home. A relaxation space or corner can be created which the child use to take a break or self-regulate if needed.
- The opportunity to engage in quiet rhythmic activities like walking, or yoga can be calming for some children. Consult with parents in relation to the types of activities which help to calm and settle their child.

Promoting a sense of SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Promoting social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships with others provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.

The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:

- Teacher (tutors) should focus on building good relationships with children by greeting them warmly, listening to them, finding out about their strengths and interests, and letting them know they are there to help and support them.
- Creating opportunities for children to engage with creative, fun, high preference activities with the teacher (tutor) will be important. Family members may be able to support this process. Important social and life skills can be targeted as part of same.

Promoting a sense of EFFICACY in SELF and COMMUNITY

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that you belong to a broader community that includes the school which will do what it needs to thrive and take care of its members.

The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

- Learning activities should be tailored to children's needs, linked to their interests, underpinned by teaching strategies that take account of children's learning style and individual needs and allow them to experience success. Positive feedback, encouragement and affirmation will enhance children's sense of self efficacy. This supports wellbeing and should enhance connectedness with learning and help prepare children for returning to school.
- Teaching strategies to regulate emotions and manage anxiety will help children to cope with any worries and anxieties that they may feel about re-engaging with learning and preparing to return to school. The emphasis here will be dependent on individual children's needs based on their experiences during their absence from school. Work to support children in regulating emotion and managing with anxiety should build on and complement previous work to support children in this regard as detailed in their school support plan².
- Develop a sense of community may be facilitated by including the child in the planning of an enjoyable activity in liaison with parents (e.g. a trip to a local playground or coffee shop). This may also provide an opportunity to practice and develop important social or life skills.

² [NEPS advice & resources for keeping children and young people well during Covid-19](#)

Promoting a sense of HOPE

A sense of hope is related to fostering resiliency and the expectation that things will work out for the child in relation to their engagement with learning and future return to school.

The following can help promote a sense of hope:

- Teachers (tutors) should reassure children with calming, hopeful messages about how the work done as part of the home-based summer programme will help to prepare them for their return to school in the new school year.
- Positive reflection on things that children participated in and enjoyed during school closures and enjoyable activities during the home-based summer programme itself should be encouraged. Talking about these examples of resilience can be healing and reassuring.
- Children's re-engagement with structured and predictable learning activities with the support of their teacher (tutor) will help prepare them for returning to school in the new school year. Re-engagement in routines where there is an emphasis on fun, high preference learning activities can help shift the focus away from any feelings of distress and allow children to enjoy the present moment and look forward with optimism.

Teachers should adopt a flexible and child-centred approach when planning a programme for participating children. Therefore, it is paramount that the programme planning builds on the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each participating child by collaborating with parents and enabling the voice of the child.

Where children are transitioning to a new educational setting, support for the transition should be a specific focus within the summer programme support plan. Guidance on supporting effective transition is available [here](#) and guidance on the continuity of learning [here](#).

Technology

Some children may use assistive technologies and devices such as alternate keyboards, voice recognition software, monitor magnification software and text to speech options, to maintain, or assist them with learning, communicating and interacting. If appropriate, teachers (tutors) working with children as part of the home-based Summer Programme, may use assistive technologies and devices to:

- Support learning (e.g. using a laptop to take research, take notes, use spellcheck, text reading or speech recognition software, provide practice and consolidation opportunities)
- Assist transitions to post primary settings (e.g. calendars, schedules, alarms, organisational apps)
- Encourage communication (e.g. various software, messaging apps)
- Increase social opportunities (e.g. social media apps)
- Reduce stress (e.g. music players, calming apps)
- Promote recreational interests (e.g. researching and pursuing areas of individual interest)

Learning to learn

In order to support children in reintegrating into school life, it will be very important for teachers on the home-based programme to focus on skills associated with learning to learn.

Suggestions for supporting children with SEN:

- Work to re-establish school routines that help children to succeed in daily school life and practise any new hygiene routines that will exist in schools as a result of Covid-19.
- Re-establishing children's social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context.
- Focus on developing effective task and organisational skills.
- Reinforcing communication skills and approaches to ensure that children can indicate choices and give their opinions.
- Reflect on past successes (particularly those documented in the student support files) and how these were achieved to help children to become more aware of their existing good strategies.
- Model the use of metacognitive strategies by providing children with opportunities to talk about how they are learning, what helps them learn best and give them opportunities to present learning in a variety of ways.

Assessment of children's needs

A pre-programme questionnaire should be issued to children and their parents/guardians to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported. This would then enable teachers to individualise support by devising a Summer Programme Support Plan, adapted from Continuity of Support plan (CoS) for each child to target the identified needs.

At the end of the programme, children and their parents/guardians are provided with an overview of each child's progress and a record of their learning (adapted from CoS support plan). This information should be retained by the child's parents/guardians and provided to their class teacher/year head when schools reopen in September to help inform future educational planning for the 2020/21 academic year.

The role of the parent

It is envisaged that parents of children with SEN who qualify for the home-based programme will register on the Department of Education of Education and Skills website and follow the instructions for choosing a teacher (tutor). The teacher (tutor) must be currently registered with the Teaching Council as a condition of their payment. Registration with the Teaching Council also indicates that the teacher has been vetted for the purpose of Child Protection. When the teacher has been chosen, the parents should provide him/her with access to the child's most recent educational support plan to enable the teacher to start planning suitable content and approaches for the Summer Programme. When the programme ends, the teacher should provide a progress

report for the parent which should be shared with the child's school at the start of the new school year.

Parental engagement is critical in enhancing outcomes for children and for achieving the aims of the home-based Summer Programme. When engaging with parents around the Summer Programme teachers (tutors) should:

- Involve parents in the identification of their child's unique strengths, interests and needs, and in setting learning objectives
- Engage with parents in planning for transitions and routines, including transitions which are part of the home-based Summer Programme
- Seek and encourage the views of parents when selecting activities and teaching approaches.

The role of the teacher (tutor)

Teachers chosen by parents to participate in the home-based scheme are required to give parents confirmation of their Teaching Council registration and to sign the Statutory Declaration. When the home-based programme is being prepared, the teacher (tutor) should seek access through the parents to the most recent support plan for the child (as outlined in the assessment of children's' needs section of this document) to help with establishing learning priorities. They should also consult the parents and conduct the pre-programme questionnaire to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported. When the teacher (tutor) has designed a plan for the programme, this should be communicated clearly to the parents and progress on the plan should be discussed regularly. Teachers (tutors) should also maintain a record of content and skills taught during the summer programme and provide a summary of this to the parents at the end of the programme

Teaching approaches

When devising the programme effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting learners to achieve and to experience success.

Guidelines for effective teaching approaches:

- Use of visual structured teaching approaches, including schedules to help students' understanding of the structure and sequence of the day
- Focus on play and activity based learning
- Clear identification of the needs of the learners
- Provision of clear learning intentions and time for reflection on learning
- Incremental scaffolding of knowledge and skills
- Letting children know that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake but it is a fundamental step in the process of effective learning
- Asking of open questions
- Provision of wait time for thinking and answering questions
- Use of graphic organisers and mind maps

- Use of technology wherever possible and appropriate
- Provision of opportunities for the learner to work collaboratively with peers in the digital setting
- Promotion of autonomous children's learning
- Provision of regular feedback to encourage the child to the next steps
- Use of quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and make learning fun
- Provision of opportunities to consolidate and reflect on learning

Student Voice

Involving children in setting learning targets and in monitoring their progress, can be empowering and motivating for them. Some children may have language and communication difficulties, therefore it is important to use appropriate means for children to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. use of visual supports, choice boards, assistive technology). Adopting a child-centred approach which places the individual child at the centre of educational planning and helps ensure that their specific learning and wellbeing needs are addressed. This process enables the child's voice to be included in the planning and decision-making process of the home-based Summer Programme.

When engaging with the children who are availing of the home-based programme, teachers (tutors) should listen to their input regarding the:

- Activities in which they engage
- Nature and level of adult support
- Use of technology to support learning and communication
- Social aspects of the home-based programme (ie managing their emotional state, managing transition or change). This may also involve working with the child to develop their understanding of the way that the Covid 19 pandemic affects them.

Conclusion

The document is designed to provide schools with guidance on the design and delivery of a home-based summer education programme which supports children with SEN prior to their return to school. The desired outcomes for the learners are that they will experience a sense of reconnection with the school, a better sense of their own wellbeing and an increased confidence to continue with their education. Through the delivery of this home-based Summer Programme teachers should strive to enhance wellbeing and reduce educational regression to prepare children with SEN for their safe and smooth return to school in September.

Appendix 1

SNA support for children

It is expected that, in most instances, parents will seek the services of a teacher to implement a programme of learning as outlined above. Alternatively, some parents may choose to avail of the services of an SNA to provide a programme of care to a child who meets the eligibility criteria. In these circumstances, parents are advised to engage with their child's school on the additional care supports which are included in their personal pupil plan and which could be provided by the SNA for the summer programme.

SNA Supports

Circular 30/2014, outlines the role of an SNA in a school context. The following are examples of care needs which the SNA may assist with in the home environment under the direction of the parent:

- Assistance to attend or participate in recreational activities, walks, or community-based outings, under the direction of parents.
- Assistance with mobility and orientation: where a child with special needs requires adult assistance.
- Implementing activities drawn, as appropriate, from the plan for the child

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT

It is envisaged that parents of children who qualify for this care programme, will register on the Department of Education and Skills website. The parent must satisfy themselves that the chosen SNA has been Garda vetted for the purpose of Child Protection. When the SNA has been chosen, the parents may provide him/her with access to the child's most recent personal pupil plan (available from the school). Parents should share relevant information with the SNA, for example the likes, interests and care needs of the child. Parents and the SNA should agree on daily routines and activities that would support the child's care needs. Parents are encouraged to maintain a record of completed activities which can be shared with the child's school.

THE CHILD'S VOICE

Children's views should be central in decision-making regarding their care because this can be empowering and motivating for them. When engaging with the children who are availing of the home-based care programme, SNAs should listen to their input regarding the:

- Nature and level of adult support in relation to care needs
- Recreational activities, walks, or community-based outings in which they engage