



Information Note SD 0001/2022

To: The Managerial Authorities of all recognised Primary and Special Schools

COVID-19: Updated Arrangements for all recognised Primary and Special Schools – January 2022

1. Introduction

The purpose of this information note is to provide an outline of the operational supports that are available to primary and special schools to minimise the risk associated with COVID-19 and in light of the prevalence of the Omicron variant. Full details of all the arrangements and supports which are available to schools are available on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie). The arrangements outlined in this information note cover the period between reopening on 6th January up to Wednesday 23rd February 2022. Arrangements in respect of teacher substitution during this period are also outlined.

Throughout the pandemic and over the Christmas period, the Department has continued to engage with public health authorities. Public Health has fully reviewed the measures in effect in schools. Public Health continues to advise that the two most important actions to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 (and other respiratory viruses), are:

- ensuring no-one with new onset symptoms attends school, and;
- that all recommended infection prevention and control measures are in place in line with school COVID-19 response plans.

The key infection prevention and control measures that are focused on keeping COVID-19 out of schools and reducing the risk of spread of infection in schools are the use of appropriate hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning, good ventilation practices, mask wearing (for relevant age cohorts), maximising physical distancing and antigen testing. Public Health has confirmed that there is no change to these infection prevention and control measures.

2. Hand Hygiene, PPE and Enhanced Cleaning supports

The COVID-19 capitation grant will continue to be the mechanism through which funding will be provided to cater for school costs related to hand hygiene measures, PPE requirements and enhanced cleaning supports. Information has issued to schools in respect of payments for term 2 – January to March 2022



and further information will issue to schools in advance of future payments of capitation grants. Schools may use this funding to provide PPE for their staff.

3. Ventilation

As has been advised previously, in supporting schools in undertaking ventilation improvements, good guidance is available at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad236-guidance-on-ventilation-in-schools/> on:

- Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices;
- Carbon Dioxide Monitors (Your Questions Answered)
- Air Cleaners (Guidance for schools including HEPA Air Cleaner Technical Guidance, Your Questions Answered).

As per Section 1 of the above Guidance, it should be noted that windows do not need to be open as wide in windy/colder weather in order to achieve the same level of airflow into the classroom. This will assist in achieving the appropriate balance between ventilation and comfort levels during periods of colder weather. Opening windows fully for a short period at the end of each school day avoids the need to do the same again before the start of classes in the morning and further assists in managing comfort levels in the classroom in the mornings (partially opened windows should enable good ventilation to be achieved when classrooms are occupied).

Given that each school setting is different, individual schools are best placed to decide on the appropriate measures for their school and have flexibility in this regard. Enhanced Minor Works Grant funding has been provided to schools to support any improvement works, including ventilation improvements where needed. Schools can apply under the Emergency Works Grant Scheme if larger scale ventilation improvement works are required.

As previously advised, specialist advice/assistance of a Chartered Engineer or Registered Architect is an important source of support for schools.

An engineer or architect who is currently, or has previously, worked on a project at the school may be well placed to give a school some initial advice on ventilation matters. In circumstances where poor ventilation continues to exist in a particular room/area after the recommended measures in the *Practical Steps* have been applied, this may include advice on the appropriate HEPA Air Cleaner Unit to be used as an additional measure in conjunction with other methods of ventilation. Account will have to be taken of how the appropriate HEPA Air Cleaner unit is matched to the specific room size, volume, and existing ventilation arrangements.



A dedicated team has been established in the Department of Education to support schools that may have concerns about ventilation. Contact can be made by email to Schools_Ventilation@education.gov.ie. The team is also available to contact schools where required, walking through the steps that schools should take to deploy good ventilation practices etc. Where it is not possible for a school to access the expertise of an engineer or architect, and where necessary, a technical assessment to assist the school can be facilitated through the Department.

4. Children and COVID-19 (Primary Schools)

When a Principal is notified that a child who has been in school during the infectious period has a positive (detected) COVID-19 PCR test result, school principals are asked to text the other parents in the pod to let them know how they can access free antigen tests for their children in the identified pod. If there is more than one PCR positive case in a class then antigen tests can be arranged for the entire class. The Antigen Freephone number is: 1800 110055 or parents may order antigen tests online via www.hse.ie/schooltest

All children in the pod/class can continue to attend school as long as they remain asymptomatic and they do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.

Children who have symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home, isolate and arrange to have a PCR test, either online or through a GP.

Note – If a pupil is identified as a CLOSE CONTACT of a case in their HOUSEHOLD they will have to restrict their movement as per national guidelines for household close contact and get a PCR test as soon as possible.

5. Children and COVID-19 (Special Classes and Special Schools)

Where a positive case occurs in a special educational setting (special schools and special classes), Public Health will undertake a public health risk assessment.

The purpose of this public risk assessment is to identify the appropriate next steps in the best interests of all of the children in these settings. This is in recognition that within these settings there is a higher probability that there are children with medical vulnerabilities and children who may have greater difficulties with infection prevention and control measures.

Principals in these settings should not ask parents to access antigen testing but should continue to be guided by the public health advice received in the specific instance.



6. HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line

For specific queries relating to confirmed cases of Covid-19 within a school, please continue to use the '**HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line**' on **(01) 240 8785**. The phone number will operate 7 days a week, from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 4.30pm Saturday and Sunday. The operator will take basic details and provide these directly to the relevant Public Health department. Each Public Health Department will have designated clinical staff to respond to queries that are escalated from the principals' line to the departments.

7. Substitution for primary teachers

Given the current high case numbers the Department recognises that schools will continue to require additional substitute cover in the period leading up to the mid-term break to assist in dealing with absences during this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sequence for covering **all teacher** absences:

- Supply panel if the school is part of a supply panel cluster arrangement,
- School's own panel of regular substitutes,
- National substitute service/Subseeker,
- Student teachers – see appendix 1 regarding the additional flexible arrangements for students on placement to provide substitute cover,
- Other local arrangements such as the administrative principal/administrative deputy principal if applicable, or other non-classroom teachers,
- It is also recognised that there may be a substantial number of children absent due to COVID-19 or as a result of being a close contact in household situations and therefore class numbers may be smaller.

Following a decision of the Teaching Council in December 2021, it is anticipated that student teachers in their 3rd and 4th years of study in primary education course will also be registered with the Teaching Council and they will then be available to carry out substitution without the five-day rule restriction.

Schools should continue to make every effort to obtain a substitute for all teacher absences, as outlined above. Where a school has done so and continues to experience difficulties in sourcing sufficient substitute cover, schools are advised to contact the Department of Education in these circumstances by email covid19_alert@education.gov.ie or telephone 057 9324461 and an Inspector will provide further support. This helpline will operate from Monday-Friday 08.00-19.00 and Saturday and Sunday 14.00-19.00 during this period.



Schools should maximise the provision of in-person teaching and learning for as many students as possible in these circumstances. In all situations the school should as a minimum remain open for in-person teaching for children with special educational needs in both special schools and special classes and for children with special educational needs in mainstream classes. Within other class groups schools should prioritise younger children for in-person teaching as they are less able to adapt to remote teaching and learning. Where it is not possible to make contact in advance, school management may use their discretion but are advised to make contact with the Department as soon as practicable thereafter.

Where teachers are required to self-isolate or restrict their movements, they will avail of special leave with pay, in line with [Information Note TC 0027/2021](#) and [Circular 0042/2021](#). These teachers should follow the advice outlined in the Circular and adhere to any new public health guidance. Any teacher who is medically fit for work but has been advised to restrict his/her movements should be available to work remotely.

8. Supporting pupils' learning and wellbeing during this time

Schools should continue to support pupils' learning and wellbeing during this time. If classes are not attending in person, every effort should be made to provide remote learning for pupils.

Teachers should continue to use their understanding of pedagogy and their knowledge of the curriculum and the pupils in their class to provide meaningful learning experiences for them during any periods of remote teaching and learning. To this end, the key expectations are:

- **Daily engagement with pupils**

The teacher(s) assigned responsibility for supporting pupils learning remotely should provide daily teaching and learning experiences for pupils, using the school's agreed communication methods. Opportunities for pupils to engage daily with their teacher(s) and their peers will increase pupils' motivation, support their wellbeing and strengthen their learning progress.

- **High quality teaching, using a blend of guided and independent learning tasks/experiences**

Teacher-pupil engagement should involve both direct teaching by the teacher and the assignment of independent learning tasks for completion by the pupils. Teachers should ensure, as far as practicable, that daily direct instruction is provided for aspects of learning that require it, using a variety of approaches including live lessons, pre-recorded video, audio, presentation software and written instructions.



- **Simulating the classroom through appropriate and engaging learning opportunities**

Careful consideration should be given to the tasks that are set for pupils, given that levels of home support for the pupils' learning may vary. Workbook and textbook tasks should not be the main focus; greater emphasis should be placed on interactive learning. Teachers should ensure that the chosen learning tasks give pupils an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a clear and concise way.

- **Support for regular two-way feedback between home and school**

Schools should plan for and facilitate regular two-way feedback between teachers and parents/guardians in relation to how pupils are getting on in the remote learning context.

9. Department Helpline for school principals

For further queries in relation to this information note, please contact the Department's Helpline **057 9324461**. The Helpline This helpline will operate from Monday-Friday 08.00-19.00 and Saturday and Sunday 14.00-19.00 during this period.

Queries can also be sent by email to covid19_alert@education.gov.ie

Deirdre Shanley
Assistant Secretary
5 January 2022



Appendix 1 - Adapted School Placement arrangements

In order to ensure that student teachers at primary level can continue to support schools up to the February mid-term break, adapted School Placement arrangements' have been developed by the Department of Education and the Teaching Council together with the relevant primary ITE providers.

The arrangements apply to school placement for Year 3 and Year 4 student teachers on concurrent (Bachelor of Education) programmes of Primary Initial Teacher Education and student teachers on consecutive (Professional Master of Education) programmes of Primary ITE for the period from when the schools reopen in January 2022 and may extend up to the mid-term break in February 2022.

During the period of planned school placement, student teachers will continue to be located in their host school for school placement, but will also be available to support other schools:

- a) Where the student teacher is on placement in a school which is linked to a supply panel, the student teacher will be available to support the cluster of schools linked to that supply panel.
- b) Where the student teacher is on placement in a school which is not linked to a supply panel, the student teacher will sign up through a designated portal to be available to support other schools in that area.

Student teachers can undertake substitution work to support their host school or other schools. Where a student teacher does not receive any request to provide substitution in any school on a particular day, he/she must remain in their host school.

It is not expected that HEIs will assess student teachers during this period of adapted school placement arrangements.

During this period of adapted school placement arrangements, student teachers will continue to have access to supports available through their HEI, including access to student services.

Student teachers will be paid for substitution work undertaken during these adapted school placement periods.

The Teaching Council confirms that these adapted school placement arrangements will not adversely impact ITE programmes professional accreditation status nor will they be an impediment to the professional registration of the future graduates described in this framework.



It is intended that assessed school placement arrangements will resume after the February mid-term break. Where possible, and subject to further discussion between the Department of Education, the Teaching Council and the HEIs, assessed school placement arrangements may recommence at an earlier date for some or all student teachers. From March 2022, student teachers graduating in 2022 will be prioritised for on-site observations and assessed school placement.

The Department of Education, the Teaching Council, the HEIs and other stakeholders will monitor these adapted school placement arrangements on an ongoing basis and provide additional clarity if and when required.

Schools are expected to continue to play an active role in supporting student teachers during the period of these adapted school placement arrangements.