



24 February 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian

Yesterday the Government published the plan for the next phases of return to in-school provision for students at both primary and post-primary level. These further phases have been developed following continuous engagement with unions and other education partners and ongoing engagement with the Department of Health and HSE Public Health.

The Department of Health and the HSE have reaffirmed that schools in themselves are low risk environments and that a gradual phased reopening can occur at this time. Public health has reviewed the measures put in place to ensure safe operation of schools and is satisfied that these infection prevention and control measures, when rigorously adhered to, will keep the school community safe during this period.

There will be a period of time between each phase to assess the impact of reopening on aspects of community transmission.

- On Monday 1 March the first four classes at primary level – junior and senior infants, first and second class – and final year Leaving Certificate students will return to in-school provision. This phase will also see a return to full attendance for children in special schools.
- Monday 15 March is the target date for the return to in-school provision of the rest of primary school children - third to sixth class students - and fifth year Leaving Certificate students. This date will be reviewed during the period following 1 March.
- Monday 12 April, following the Easter break is the target date for the return to in-school education for the rest of post-primary students - first to fourth year students
- Remote teaching and learning provision for students in each category will cease once in-person teaching and learning provision commences for each group of students.

Safety is paramount in our schools, and all provision within schools will continue according to public health advice developed for educational settings. The Department will continue to fund and support as necessary infection prevention and control measures in schools to ensure the safety of the school community.

Public Health in the HSE is fully committed to supporting schools. Schools teams that have been put in place to support schools since October will support schools during the phased return and beyond.



We all know of the hugely adverse consequences at individual, family and societal level of not having in-person learning available to students. The safe return and sustained safe re-opening of our schools is a key priority for Government.

I acknowledge that a phased re-opening is challenging for many people, with children of different age groups in the same families returning at different times. The purpose of managing this cautious phased return is to continue to limit the mobility of the population and curb the spread of the virus.

I ask all parents to please review the symptoms of Covid-19, to ensure that children with symptoms do not attend school and that all children know and understand the procedures in place in school.

Please continue to abide by all social distancing guidance and stay home apart from essential journeys. Parents can help schools by being individually responsible and not lingering outside school at drop off and collection times. It is welcome that children will see their friends in school, but please do not organise playdates or home visits.

We all understand how essential school reopening is and we need to give it the best possible chance to get all students back as quickly as possible.

I would like to thank you, your families and school communities for continued adherence to the guidelines and for helping us all to curb the spread of the virus. I wish all students and staff a safe return to in-person learning over the coming weeks.

You may find the below useful:

Links to posters and videos here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5572b-back-to-school-advice-for-parents-students-and-families/>

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norma', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Norma Foley, TD
Minister for Education