Covid-19 School Response Plan

St David's NS

All schools will need to have a Covid-19 Response Plan in place in order to reopen safely in the new school year.

This document has been prepared on the basis of current public health advice and will continue to be updated throughout the summer/autumn as further public advice is received.

1. Introduction

This *Covid-19 Response Plan* is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in St David's NS.

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's '*Return to Work Safely Protocol*', the Department of Education and Skills plan for school reopening and to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment. The plan incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET).

It is important that the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities comply with the protocol to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued by NPHET continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address may also change.

The response plan will support the sustainable reopening of our school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the children in the school.

In line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and continued return to work, and re-opening of our schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents.

This document aims to provide details of:

1. **COVID-19 School Policy**
2. **Planning and Preparing for Return to School**
    a. **School Building**
    b. **Signage**
3. **Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**
4. **Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative(s)**
5. **Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**
6. **General advice to prevent the spread of the virus**
    a. **Wash your Hands Frequently**
    b. **Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitiser**
    c. **Avoid Touching your Eyes, Nose and Mouth**
    d. **Physical Distancing**
    e. **Practice Respiratory Hygiene**

   f. Do
   g. Do Not
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7. Managing the Risk of Spread of Covid-19
8. Control Measures
   a. Return to Work Form
   b. Induction Training
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   d. Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette
   e. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
   f. Wearing of Gloves
   g. Cleaning
   h. Access to the School Building / Contact Log
   i. First Aid / Emergency Procedure 9. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19
10. Staff Duties
11. Covid related absence management
12. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme

The assistance and cooperation of all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this document. However, should errors or omissions be identified, please notify us so that appropriate measures can be taken to rectify same.

Note: The plan is a live working document and may be reviewed and amended to take into account new guidance from www.Gov.ie, www.dbei.ie www.hse.ie, www.hpsc.ie, www.hsa.ie; www.education.ie.

2. St David's NS COVID-19 Policy

This COVID-19 policy outlines our commitment as a school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management and brought to the attention of staff, pupils, parents and others.

COVID 19 Policy Statement

St David's NS is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID19 Response Plan. The BOM and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan in relation to summer provision
- inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education and Skills
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education and Skills advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representatives: Mrs G Neill & Mrs M Tomkins

Signed: _____ Date: _____

3. Planning and Preparing for Return to School

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff. The return to the work must be done safely and in strict adherence to the advice and instructions of public health authorities and the Government.

Details for the reopening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

a. School Buildings

Before re-opening schools in the new school year schools are reminded to check the following:

- Does the water system need flushing at outlets following low usage to prevent Legionella disease;
- Has school equipment and mechanical ventilation been checked for signs of deterioration or damage before being used again;
- Have bin collections and other essential services resumed

b. Signage

Schools will be required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene. The following is a link to the dedicated area of the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website where there are a number of posters, including those appropriate for primary school pupils, located. Irish versions are also available here

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/ Schools can download the posters and display in prominent areas such as offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilets. Schools do not need to do this now as the posters may be updated during the summer and further information will issue on signage closer to planned reopening.

4. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW)** form, which is available electronically or from the Principal. A hard copy is attached also at **Appendix 1.**

A RTW form should only be completed **at least 3 days** prior to any proposed date of return to the workplace.

On receipt of the completed form the Principal will provide: details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff prior to the return to the workplace and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

Note: Induction Training for staff will be developed by the Department in consultation with stakeholders and made available for all schools and staff.

5. Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and the School Leadership.

The Return to Work Safely protocol provides for an agreed procedure between management and staff to appoint a Lead Worker Representative to carry out a specific role.

The role of the worker representative) is to ensure that Covid-19 measures are adhered to in the workplace as follows

- Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19.
- Promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice.
- Assist with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Make representations on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 Response Plan and control measures or the adherence to such control measures by staff, parents/guardians, contractors or visitors, he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

Name(s) of Lead Worker representative:	Contact details
Mrs Gladys Neill Mrs Miriam Tomkins	045 874087

All staff, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

6. Safety Statement and Risk Assessment

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. A template risk assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in school settings is attached at ***Appendix 2.***

It is important that schools review their emergency procedures involving, fire safety, first aid, accidents and dangerous occurrences to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Summer Provision Response Plan. Any changes to the schools existing emergency procedures should be documented.

Schools should also review their existing risk assessments to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the school's current risk assessments should also be documented.

7. General advice to prevent the spread of the virus

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a school is to minimise the risk of introduction of the disease into the school setting in the first place.

This can be achieved through the following measures:

- Promote awareness of COVID-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have symptoms of COVID-19 or other acute infectious diseases not to attend school, to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as contact of a person with COVID19 not to attend schools and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
- Ensure that staff and pupils know what to do if they develop symptoms at school.
- Everyone entering the school building should be required to perform hand hygiene with hand sanitiser.
- Visitors to school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point.

Staff, pupils and visitors should at all times adhere to the up to date advice and instructions of the public health authorities in relation to protecting oneself and others against the risk posed by the Covid-19 virus.

Updated advice from the HSE is available on its website – https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/

The Department of Education and Skills will ensure all updated advice is circulated to schools. St David's NS will arrange for this advice to be circulated to staff, pupils and visitors in a timely manner.

8. Managing the risk of spread of COVID-19

a. *Wash your Hands Frequently*

Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-19.

Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing:

For advice from HSE on how to wash your hands the following link will be helpful:
https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html

b. *Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitisers*

Hand hygiene can also be achieved by the use of a hand sanitisers (when hands are clean).

Hand sanitisers are more readily deployed in school settings to avoid disruption to teaching and learning and to avoid congestion of staff and pupils waiting to use hand washing facilities.

They will be available at entry and exit points and in each classroom.

c. *Avoid Touching Eyes, Nose and Mouth*

Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth.

d. *Physical Distancing*

Physical distancing is recommended to reduce the spread of infection in the workplace.

e. *Practice respiratory hygiene*

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

Good hygiene practices and washing your hands properly and regularly can help stop the spread of the virus. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff adhere to this advice and adopt the following practices as strictly as possible.

f. *Do*

- Wash your hands properly and often
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

g. *Do Not*

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- Share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups, cutlery, etc.

h. People at Very High Risk (Extremely Vulnerable):

Current public health guidelines have identified groups who are defined as being at very high risk. The HSE has set out these groups, which include people who:

The list of people in very high risk groups include people who:

- are over 70 years of age - even if you're fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- have a condition that means you have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition and you are pregnant

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Staff who are in this group should self-declare on the Return to Work form if they believe that they are at very high risk. Details of the leave arrangements that will apply will be updated by the Department of Education and Skills.

If the Board/Principal is unsure whether or not staff fall into the very high-risk category, advice will be sought from the Occupational Health Service.

9. Control Measures

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors as far as possible within the school .

These control measures are outlined in this document.

The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

It is critical that staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements.

Staff, in particular, should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.

The following control measures have been put in place:

a. *Return to Work Form*

Staff will be required to complete a RTW form at least 3 days prior to any return to the school facility (see section 2 above). The purpose of the RTW form is to get confirmation from staff that, to the best of his/her knowledge, he/she has no symptoms of Covid-19 and is not self-isolating or cocooning or awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test.

b. *Induction Training*

All staff will undertake and complete Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health
- Covid-19 symptoms
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school
- Outline of the Covid-19 response plan

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities.

If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the Covid-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal.

c. *Induction Training for Return to School*

The Department has prepared short induction training for schools operating the summer provision this year. It is intended that this training will be updated and become more comprehensive to cover all aspects of the return to school safely protocols. The Induction training for the Summer Provision may be of interest in the context of the kind of training which staff will need to undertake is available at the following link.

https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme2020.html#SchoolBased

d. *Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette*

It is crucial that all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors are familiar with, and adopt, good hand and respiratory hygiene practices.

Guidance documentation and Information posters will be available at various locations within the school facility. Information posters will be prominently displayed at appropriate locations within the school facility including offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilet areas. Such are intended to inform but also remind everyone about the importance of hygiene in preventing the spread of Covid-19 virus and protecting health and safety.

Handwashing facilities and/or hand sanitisers are available at multiple locations within the school facility and should be available in each classroom.

e. *Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*

PPE will not be required to be worn within the school facility according to current occupational and public health guidance. However, for a limited number of staff, PPE will need to be used occasionally or constantly due to the nature of certain work activities or work areas.

Such include roles where:

- Performing intimate care
- Where a suspected case of Covid-19 is identified while the school is in operation

Appropriate PPE will be available for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid. This will be updated in line with advice from the HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre)

Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

The use of a face covering will conceal facial expression and can make communication difficult and as such may not be practical in a school setting. However, the wearing of a visor as an alternative to a facial covering may be considered where there is a concern that physical distancing cannot be maintained, there will be prolonged close contact and/or that exposure to fluid/respiratory droplets is likely.

f. Wearing of Gloves:

The use of disposable gloves in the school setting by pupils or staff is not appropriate. It does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves. Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene.

g. Cleaning

Arrangements for more regular and thorough cleaning of areas and surfaces within the school will be made.

Regular and thorough cleaning of communal areas and frequently touched surfaces shall be conducted, in particular, toilets, lifts, door handles and kitchens. Cleaning will be performed regularly and whenever facilities or surfaces are visibly dirty.

All staff will have access to cleaning products and will be required to maintain cleanliness of their own work area. Under no circumstances should these cleaning materials be removed from the building.

Staff should thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day.

There will be regular collection of used waste disposal bags from offices and other areas within the school facility.

Shower facilities shall not be available for use by staff or pupils due to the increased risk associated with communal shower facilities and areas. This shall be reviewed in line with government guidance.

Staff must use and clean their own equipment and utensils (cup, cutlery, plate etc.).

h. Access to the school building /contact log

Access to the school facility will be in line with agreed school procedures.

Arrangement for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents/guardians with be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities should be maintained. The school should maintain a log of staff and students contacts. In addition see visitor contact log at **Appendix 3.**

i. First Aid/emergency procedure

The standard First Aid/Emergency procedure shall continue to apply in St David's NS.

In an emergency or in case of a serious incident, call for an ambulance or the fire brigade on 112/999

Contact the principal or nearest first aider giving details of location and type of medical incident.

10. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19. The following outlines how St David's NS will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of work.

A designated isolation area should be identified within the school building - (part of Mrs Tyrrell's classroom cordoned off). The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of Covid-19 should be considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases put in place. The designated isolation area should be behind a closed door and away from other staff and pupils.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at work in St David's NS the following are the procedures to be implemented:

- If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately
- Isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from the symptomatic person at all times
- Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms if one is available. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises
- Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents and call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home
- Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided
- If the person is well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used
- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect.
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery □ Arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved.

The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff confidentiality is essential at all times.

11. Staff Duties

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. In order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adhere to the School Covid-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined. The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of Covid-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play
- Coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of Covid-19 and monitor their own wellbeing
- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of Covid19

- Not return or attend school if they have symptoms of Covid-19 under any circumstances.
- If they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work
- Must inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to Covid-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace
- Must complete Covid-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

12. Covid related absence management

The management of a Covid-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with DES.

13. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme

The Board of Management aims to protect and support the health and wellbeing of all staff (physical, mental, spiritual etc.) both at work, whether in the school facility or at home and outside of work. The Board of Management is mindful that the support and promotion of staff health and wellbeing is particularly important in the current context where the Covid-19 pandemic has caused considerable challenges for, and disruption to, people's personal, family and social lives as well as their work arrangements.

The Board of Management aims to foster a culture and work environment that support healthy behaviours and staff wellbeing and shall continue to make health and wellbeing tools and guidance available to staff as well as organising suitable support programmes, initiatives and events.

These are challenging times for everyone. Should a staff member experience any stress or anxiety in respect of work or work arrangements, he/she should feel free to speak to the principal.

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

23 February 2021

Dear Principal,

Further to the Government decision and the Taoiseach's address this evening, I am pleased to advise that the next phase of school reopening will commence from 1st March 2021. This is in line with the public health advice received by the Government from NPHET.

Intensive engagement and input from education partners representing parents, students, unions, management bodies and principal networks on the plans for reopening of schools has also been ongoing.

It is recognised by all of the partners that remote teaching and learning is difficult for all and the return of all children at the earliest opportunity remains a high priority for Government in line with public health advice.

The framework (attached) is an interim arrangement to outline the arrangements for the safe reopeninig of schools.

Under the framework the following return to in-school provision on 1 March 2021 has been agreed:

- Special schools to return to full time attendance on-site for all pupils.
- Special classes to continue full time.
- Primary Classes for – Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First and Second class including early start pre-school classes will reopen fully from Monday 1 March 2021.

In order to support schools to plan and prepare for this phase of reopening I want to bring a number of things to your attention as follows:

1. Appendix 1 Framework document

2. Appendix 2 - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance on the reopening of schools

3. Appendix 3 -Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plan required by 'Work Safely Protocol. A link to the word version of the COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools can be found here.

4. Circulars on temporary changes to the parental leave scheme and unpaid leave and other temporary arrangements for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in recognised primary schools – these circulars will follow under separate cover.

Special education needs children in 3rd to 6th classes:
In recognition that not all children with special education needs will be back in school in this phase from 1 March, primary schools are asked to prioritise deployment of their SET resources to facilitate the engagement of those pupils with SEN who are in 3rd-6th classes.

Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí, N37 X659
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 X659
www.education.ie

This will necessitate further collaboration between the SETs and class teachers to establish current priority learning needs among those pupils.

- Teachers should utilise the guidance provided by the Department on remote teaching and learning to support this work.

- Where schools have a shared SET the timetable of prioritisation of support for children in 3rd to 6th class should occur following consultation between principals in the cluster.

Additional arrangements for children with SEN in 3rd to 6th class in respect of the supplementary programme:

- The Department is anxious to further support those children with SEN in 3rd to 6th class who are unable to return to in-school teaching and learning until March 15th.
-
- The supplementary programme for these senior primary school pupils will be extended by a **further two weeks** to allow these students access in-person support at a time when the public health advice does not support the full reopening of all schools.

There is a wide range of materials available for schools to support the communication with parents and students and re-inforce public health messaging. These include video messages from public health doctors on the safety of schools, posters and digital animations and videos.

These can be uploaded to school channels such as Aladdin connect or seesaw as well as social media channels. Further material is being added to this list and further updates will issue in the coming days as new material is added. All materials will be available here and on the Department's twitter feed @Education_Ire

The Department is very appreciative of the ongoing efforts of the school community working to limit the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in schools and ensuring that the infection control measures put in place in line with the school COVID-19 response plans are effective in making schools safe for children and staff. Discussions are ongoing about the further reopening of schools at the earliest opportunity in line with public health advice.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley

Assistant Secretary

Appendix 1

Framework Plan for phased return of primary school education

1. Introduction – Phase 3

Following intensive engagement and input from primary stakeholders this framework has now been developed in order to achieve a phased return to in-school provision for children in junior classes in primary schools (Junior Infants - Second Class). This builds on the earlier phases which saw a return for children in special schools and special classes. Supporting these children remains a high priority for all partners.

The Framework is an interim arrangement as the Department of Education (DE) and the education partners' work together to ensure that special schools, junior classes in primary schools and special classes in primary schools can open fully in line with public health advice from **Monday, 1st March 2021**.

The framework sets out three broad areas intended to support planning and clarify certain issues that have arisen since schools closed in late December.

Those areas are:

A. Public health supports, messaging and risk mitigation measures in the classroom and in schools.
B. A model for special schools, junior classes in primary schools (junior infants, senior infants, first class and second class) and special classes in mainstream primary schools including flexible provisions for staff.
C. The current sequencing and timeframe for March 2021.

Section A

Public health supports, messaging and risk mitigation measures in the classroom and in schools.

The following actions must be implemented to support the phased return to primary and the full reopening of special schools.

Risk Mitigation Measures

1. COVID-19 Response Plans:

The **COVID-19 Response Plan** for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools have been re-examined by DE to ensure that they remain fully in compliance with the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19 and the 'Work Safely Protocol' which has been developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

The 'Work Safely Protocol' is a revised version of the 'Return to Work Safely Protocol' containing the same elements and features of the original guidance but is updated to reflect the latest advice issued by Government and National Health Emergency Team (NPHET) to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dd7fb-induction-training-for-reopening-schools/

The list of required new additions/revisions are highlighted in the summary document '*Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plan required by Work Safely Protocol*' in section order as they appear in the school COVID-19 response plans. This list will make those changes easily identifiable, and overall they do not introduce significant changes to the current school COVID-19 response plans.

2. On 3 February 2021 a specific guidance note (Appendix 2) issued to special schools (and schools with special classes) in advance of opening, providing information on the infection prevention and control measures of particular relevance to those settings in line with the HPSC guidance. These measures are also applicable in mainstream class settings.

Public Health position

3. Public Health has confirmed in discussion with DE and stakeholder representatives that while the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is keeping risk mitigation measures in general under review in the context of emerging new variants that the infection prevention control (IPC) measures in place for schools since September are still considered highly effective for risk mitigation against transmission of COVID-19. The HPSC have not advised any change in the infection prevention and control measures in the context of the new variants. However, they emphasise the importance of rigorous adherence by members of the school community to existing measures.

4. It has been further affirmed by Government that this phased approach to the reopening of schools is in line with the current public health position.

5. Weekly reports provided by the HSE on the results of mass testing of close contacts in schools consistently show low detection rates in adults in schools for COVID-19. These reports will continue to be produced and published on the HPSC website generally every Wednesday in line with the phased reopening of schools.

6. Clear public health messaging will continue including the circulation and broadcasting via social media and other means of short videos focussed on the need to protect schools by staying at home if anyone has symptoms of COVID-19 or is a close contact of a confirmed case.

Information for parents

7. Short videos for parents from public health doctors will be circulated to reaffirm the importance of keeping COVID-19 out of education facilities by keeping symptomatic children at home. Parents should err on the side of caution in this respect and follow the school's sickness policy.

8. Parents of children attending during this phase from March 1 will be asked by the school to complete the declaration form which can be found here.

9. Parent communications from the school should emphasise that there should be **no congregation outside schools** during this phase or at any stage, and that staff engagement should be requested through the school and will be provided by telephone or online.

School Planning and compliance

10. Details of the changes required to update school COVID-19 response plans in advance of the proposed phased reopening are highlighted in the '*Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plan required by Work Safely Protocol*'. These take into account updated protocols agreed with the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). The need for full compliance with the updated plans is emphasised.

11. Funding is in place to support implementation of all infection prevention and control (IPC) measures required by HPSC including the provision of appropriate PPE for SNAs and Teaching staff in special schools and special classes. Any school who needs additional funding for PPE can get in touch with the Department at the following email address: *covid19_alert@education.gov.ie*

It is recommended that medical grade masks of the standard EN14683 are provided for SNAs and Special Education teachers. Schools may access the current PPE framework where there are supplies of masks at this grade.

12. It is agreed that where the Lead Worker Representative or the deputy/assistant Lead Worker Representative are not returning to school in this phase they should make themselves available if required to deal with any concerns arising re compliance with the guidance for the phased reopening.

13. Schools are being issued with an information note setting out time-bound temporary flexibilities in staffing arrangements in advance of the phased re-opening of primary schools and the full reopening of special schools.

Vaccinations

14. The Department of Education has engaged with the Department of Health on the vaccination schedule who have confirmed that those essential to Education are estimated at this time to be in the first one third of the population captured by the Vaccine Allocation Strategy. The Department has further engaged with the Department of Health requesting that consideration is given to school community as the vaccination programme is rolled out in order to accommodate front line school staff (i.e. those working with SEN students) within the vaccination programme at the earliest possible opportunity.

School Public Health Risk Assessments, testing and tracing

15. The Department has confirmed with Public Health that:

- the enhanced/ augmented Public Health schools teams will be available to fully support schools that are opening in this interim phase,
- full contact tracing and bulk fast-track testing within the school setting will resume immediately for schools as they reopen,
- the numbers to contact public health teams or alert the HSE if a principal is notified of a positive case connected with the school are available to principals to respond. This helpline is not for other Covid-19 queries.

HSE has also confirmed that close contact testing has resumed in the community. Close contacts will now be tested at day 0 (or as soon as possible after identification) and again at day 10. If the second test results in no detection of the virus, then staff or students can return to school.

16. Detailed data in relation to transmission of COVID-19 within school settings will continue to be published and made available to DE and stakeholders during this phase. Reports also contain the numbers and % of confirmed cases by age group and week in the overall population.

17. In all instances where COVID-19 is positively confirmed in a school age child in community testing (referred by G.P) or as part of close contact testing in the community, Public Health are immediately notified and a Public Health Risk Assessment is initiated with the school by local HSE public health Schools Teams. Where COVID-19 is detected in an adult in the community, either through symptomatic or close contact testing and when initial contact tracing confirms that they work in a school setting, Public Health are immediately notified and the Public Health Risk Assessment is initiated with the school by HSE School Teams in a similar way. A principal may also notify the HSE Schools Teams directly if s/he is notified by a teacher or other staff member, however this is not necessary as the process described above will take place in any event.

18. The current position of the HSE is that serial antigen or PCR testing is not recommended as a public health measure to keep schools safe. The HSE has examined the use of rapid antigen testing in different settings and the logistical requirements to implement such testing. The World Health Organisation does not currently recommend the use of antigen testing in schools. The HSE will continue to use the more accurate PCR tests for testing all index cases and close contacts within the school community and will prioritise the mass swift queue PCR testing which has proven highly effective to date. This position will be kept under review. Currently serial testing is recommended only in settings where is evidence of significant COVID-19 transmission taking place and in healthcare settings where all results are backed up by the more accurate PCR tests.

PPE

19. Revised HPSC guidelines for SNAs published on 7 January 2021 recommended surgical grade masks for all SNAs '*Guidance for Schools Regarding Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) Supporting Children and Young People with Additional Care Needs in the Context of COVID-19'*. **The Department is confirming this level of PPE should be provided for all teachers in special schools and special classes also.** As set out above, medical grade masks in EN16483 category should be provided to this staff cohort.

20. Certain staff working with children who require Aerosol Generating Procedures will be provided with PPE in line with HSE advice as set out here at this link:

21. The Department confirms that funding for all required PPE is being provided for the coming school term. Any school who needs additional funding for PPE can get in touch with the Department. In addition any issues relating to supply should be raised immediately with DE at the following *covid19_alert@education.gov.ie*

22. Masks and visors should be donned and doffed and disposed of as demonstrated in videos available here

Temporary time-bound staffing arrangements

23. DE has set out the temporary flexibilities that may be utilised by schools to provide for the provision of remote learning to pupils at home by staff working remotely from their home. This in no way constitutes a precedent for high risk or other staff being facilitated for remote working in subsequent phases.

24. All flexible arrangements must be approved by Board of Management (BOM).

Childcare

25. Childcare facilities remain open to provide childcare for children of essential workers. The Department of Children has provided FAQs and information on subsidies that may be available for education sector staff is available on www.ncs.gov.ie. Greater flexibility in the use of existing parental leave days has also been put in place during this phase.

Classroom ventilation

26. Updated guidance on ventilation in schools has been provided by DE. Schools are reminded that this should be applied in all phases and when schools reopen in full. Guidance is available here.

Other supports to schools by DE

Inspectorate

27. The COVID-19 helpline has a dedicated option to contact the Department's Inspectorate. This line is open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday during this phased return to school. This team has access to Inspectors from the special education area who will be available to engage with schools on any aspect of the education provision where their advice and support is sought. The Inspectorate are available to assist schools in working through the education guidance materials and will provide advice on how best to use them in the return to in-school teaching and learning.

NEPS

28. Now that schools are moving to a broader reopening phase, NEPS will commence a return to an in-school casework service, in line with the blended model of service delivery that was in place prior to the current school closures. NEPS return to an in-school casework service will take place in the context of adherence to public health advice, and with school and parental agreement. This has commenced from February 22nd. Psychologists will be asked to pay particular attention to casework that may be needed in order to ensure special education placements for children and young people for next year.

The NEPS Wellbeing resources to support the wellbeing of school communities as schools reopen are available on gov.ie here.

NCSE

29. The dedicated phone line which the NCSE currently operates for schools is continuing and calls from special schools or schools with special classes will be prioritised for engagement with an NCSE advisor on any aspect of support during this period. SENOs will also be available to support parents where children are experiencing any challenges in returning to school.

Section B

A model for special schools, junior classes in primary schools (junior infants, senior infants, first class and second class) and special classes in mainstream primary schools including flexible provisions for staff.

This phase of re-opening from March 1 will provide for a full return to on-site provision for children with special educational needs in special schools, special classes and junior classes in mainstream primary schools

This section sets out the agreed model which is underpinned by the following:

- On-site provision for children in special schools, special classes and junior classes in mainstream primary schools;
- Managed flexibility for staffing arrangements

Special schools

1. When special schools fully reopen from March 1, all staff, including all teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) who work in special schools should return to work, other than in circumstances provided for in updated staffing circular, or where staff are on approved leave.

2. In circumstances where staff members cannot attend due to illness, substitution arrangements will apply. Subs may be needed for exempted staff too including from supply panels.

3. Schools have been given some flexibility to facilitate remote working for certain staff members as set out in the updated information note on temporary staffing arrangements. Staff members working from home must support children remotely.

4. Those on flexible arrangements or on approved leave can be substituted.

Special classes and Junior classes in primary schools.

1. All junior classes and all special classes, including early intervention special classes for children with autism or hearing impairment, in primary schools will attend school from Monday 1st March 2021. In the meantime school staff and BOMs will familiarise themselves with the guidance and liaise with parents.

2. From the 1st March those staff members teaching and supporting junior mainstream and special classes will return to school. **In instances where teachers are teaching mixed classes that include some pupils from senior classes, those children should also return to school**. With the exception of those on flexible arrangements and on approved leave as provided for in the Information note on temporary staffing arrangements, all SETs and any other teachers who do not teach mainstream classes should also return to schools from 1st March. This also applies to all SNAs. Some SETs and SNAs may also be required to continue to support pupils in senior classes remotely.

3. Staff on approved leave and where necessary on flexible arrangements can be substituted. Where schools with special classes have a short term need for SNAs and the school has SNAs elsewhere in the mainstream setting, they should assign one of their other SNAs temporarily to the special class in the first instance.

4. Similarly, schools may temporarily redeploy another member of the teaching staff to the special class to maintain the operation of the special class if the special class teacher is on leave.

5. The substitution arrangement will then apply to the reassigned SNA/mainstream class teacher.

Other relevant arrangements:

1. School transport services will be fully operational with the continued additional hygiene and other measures that were introduced on school transport services at the start of the school year. Bus Eireann local offices continue to engage with local HSE schools teams to ensure that any concerns on school transport are addressed.

2. Enhanced cleaning regimes should resume in schools during this phase.

3. School inspectors working with enhanced HSE school teams will be available to assist and advice principal teachers during this interim phase.

   Enhanced teams will be in place to ensure full support for schools as they open.

4. If an issue arises a school may only temporarily cease on site provision with the permission of Department of Education and on the advice of Public Health.

Section C

The sequencing and timeframe for March 2021.

Special schools will fully reopen from Monday March 1st 2021

Junior Classes (junior infants, senior infants, first class and second class) and Special Classes in primary schools will attend school from Monday March 1st 2021

Planning will continue about the further reopening of the remainder of primary school class groups during March with reference to public health. A target of mid-March for the return to school of these class groups will be worked towards.

Appendix 2

Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance on the re-opening of schools

The HPSC has set out detailed advice in respect of the infection prevention and control measures required for the safe and sustainable operation of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This advice, aspects of which have been updated throughout the period since from September 2020 to January 2021 has become the basis of the *"School COVID-19 Response Plans"*. The schools plans are also based on the guidance provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in compliance with the protocols established by Departments of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Health on *"Returning to Work"* safely. The Department of Education's ongoing oversight and management of schools during this pandemic is also in line with the Government *"Resilience and Recovery: 2020 – 2021: Living with COVID-19 Plan"* and the successor to the *"Return to Work Safely"* protocols entitled *"Work Safely"*.

Full details of the range of supports and guidance available to schools, staff and students can be found on **gov.ie/backtoschool.**

General Management of COVID-19 in Schools

- All schools have and will update as appropriate their school COVID-19 Response Plan and COVID-19 Policy;
- Staff will be reminded to review again the training materials provided by the Department to include knowledge of symptoms, hand and respiratory hygiene, how to manage a suspected COVID-19 case as well as the specific module for SNAs, cleaners and lead workers;
- Schools should request staff to confirm that the details in the pre-return to work form remain unchanged following subsequent periods of closure such as school holidays.
- Schools should review their Risk Assessment Template and ensure that it continues to comply with the health and safety requirements as set out in the COVID-19 Response plan;
- Schools will continue to implement the control measures set out in Part 5 of the School COVID-19 Response plan (as updated) to include minimising the risk of introduction into schools, knowing the symptoms and how to respond if you have those symptoms, respiratory and hand hygiene, physical distancing within the classroom, physical distancing outside the classroom and within the schools, use of PPE as appropriate including face masks;
- Schools will pay particular attention to the management of the risk of COVID-19 in relation to school activities such as those associated with art, toys, books, sports equipment etc;
- Schools will implement the cleaning and hygiene arrangements at Part 7 of the School COVID-19 Response plan and the management of suspected cases of COVID-19 at Part 8 of the Plan.

Additional Measures for Supporting Children with Special Educational Needs

The School COVID-19 Response Plan recognises that additional consideration is required to support children with special educational needs and the staff who engage with them. These considerations are referenced in the HPSC advice on the Re-opening of Schools (June 2020). These include:

For children with special educational needs (SEN) maintaining physical distancing in many instances will not be practical or appropriate to implement. The focus should therefore be on emphasising that parents/guardians should have a heightened awareness of signs, symptoms or changes in baseline which suggests illness/COVID-19 infection and where symptoms are present children should not attend school. A precautionary approach should be taken. Similarly staff should be aware of their responsibility not to attend work if they develop signs or symptoms of respiratory illness. A precautionary approach should be taken.

Hand hygiene

Children who are unable to wash their hands by themselves should be assisted to clean their hands using soap and water or a hand sanitiser (if their hands are visibly clean) as outlined previously.

Equipment

Some children may have care needs (physical or behavioural) which requires the use of aids and appliances and/or medical equipment for example toileting aids, moving and handling equipment, respiratory equipment. Where cleaning of aids and appliances is carried out in the school it is recommended that a cleaning schedule is provided, detailing when and how the equipment is cleaned and the cleaning products to be used in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.

The following points can guide the development of such cleaning schedule:

- *Equipment used to deliver care should be visibly clean;*
- *Care equipment should be cleaned in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions. Cleaning is generally achieved using a general purpose detergent and warm water.*
- *Equipment that is used on different children must be cleaned and, if required, disinfected immediately after use and before use by another child e.g. toileting aids;*
- *If equipment is soiled with body fluids:*
  - *First clean thoroughly with detergent and water;*
  - *Then disinfect by wiping with a freshly prepared solution of disinfectant;*
  - *Rinse with water and dry.*

Specific Advice relating to the work of SNAs in close contact settings and mitigation measures to be observed in those settings

Specific advice has been provided by the HPSC for the work of SNAs (updated January 2021) and it is intended that while directed to SNAs it can also be applicable to all school

staff who work delivering personal care or attention within 2metres to a pupil. This advice does not materially differ to the original guidance issued in June 2020 but as it is recently provided by HPSC with a particular focus on special education settings, it is set out below.

It notes that the "***guidance is not a rulebook that must be followed to the letter. The appropriate use of this guidance requires the use of compassion and good sense and a reasonable judgment of the level of risk in most situations. If the general principles of this guidance are implemented, the risk that any given pupil or staff member in the educational setting on any given day has infectious COVID-19 is very low. All additional measures are applied as practical to the context with a view to further lowering the risk of transmission to staff or pupils in the event that a person with infectious COVID-19 is at school".***.

The guidance goes onto say:

The role of the Special Needs Assistant and Associated Risks of COVID-19
People living with certain disabilities associated with increased medical vulnerability may be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. The measures taken to control the spread of COVID-19 can also have a very serious impact on people with disability. Some disabled children and young people have additional care needs that must be met to support them in achieving their full potential. Children have a right to education and ensuring continued access to education for people living with disability is critical to managing the public health emergency in an inclusive way.

Special Needs Assistants play a vital role in supporting the additional care needs of some children and young people.

- *Some parts of the work performed by SNAs are similar to tasks performed by healthcare workers and in particular, the nature of the work is such that it is often not possible to maintain distance;*
- *Some children and young people concerned may display behaviours that are associated with an increased risk of virus transmission if they are infectious;*
- *Some children and young people concerned may have limited ability to self-report symptoms therefore recognising infection may be more difficult;*
- *In this context, there is a requirement for specific guidance to support the work of SNAs and any other people who may provide similar support for children and young people with additional care needs.*

Transmission
Like other respiratory viruses, the transmission of SARS-CoV-2 occurs mainly through respiratory droplets generated from the mouth and nose of an infected person during activities such as coughing, sneezing, talking or laughing. The droplets may carry virus directly to the mouth, nose and eyes of person standing nearby or may land on a nearby surface. Under certain circumstances, airborne transmission may occur (such as when

aerosol generating procedures are conducted in health care settings or potentially, in indoor crowded poorly ventilated settings elsewhere).
In general, higher levels of virus are present around the time of first onset of symptoms. Some people who never notice any symptoms may be infectious to others (asymptomatic transmission). Recognising infection is likely to be more difficult in people who are not able to describe their symptoms or communicate easily that they feel unwell however parents, SNAs, teachers and others who am very familiar with the baseline function of a child or young person may notice changes that suggest infection and may warrant medical assessment.
Virus can remain on the surface for some time and be transferred to the mouth, nose and eyes of another person on their hands after they touch the contaminated surface. The virus does not penetrate through the skin.

Survival in the environment
Virus on surfaces is easily removed or with common household cleaning products (detergent) and in those circumstances where disinfection is needed common bleach and a number of other disinfectants are effective

Duration of Infectivity
People may be infectious for up to two days before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic transmission). In Ireland, people with COVID-19 are generally considered infectious for up to 10 days after the date of onset of symptoms or for 10 days after the date of their first positive test if the date of onset of symptoms is not clear. A longer period may apply to people who were hospitalised with COVID-19. After 10 days, the person is no longer considered infectious if they have been free of fever for 5 days. Doing another test at the end of the ten days is usually not useful and should only be done if specifically requested by a doctor.

Practical Measures for Harm Reduction Related to COVID-19 when addressing Additional Care Needs in the educational Setting
The following practical measures for preventing harm related to COVID-19 when addressing additional care needs in the education setting are organised under 3 main headings, reducing the risk of introduction of COVID-19, reducing the risk of spread of COVID-19 and reducing the impact of COVID-19 infection if it occurs.

Reducing the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the Educational Setting
The virus that causes COVID-19 cannot spread in any setting unless it is introduced. Although there is significant anxiety about introduction of virus on objects in practice the virus is essentially always introduced by a person who is infectious and is shedding the virus. Although some people with no signs or symptoms can be infectious, people are generally most infectious for others when they have symptoms and signs of infection.
1. School staff should be familiar with the main symptoms and signs of COVID-19 (see above) so that they may be able to recognise if a pupil develops obvious signs of infection.

2. Pupils (as appropriate to their ability) their parents, guardians and families should be informed of the main symptoms and signs of COVID-19 (see above) so that they may be able to recognise if a pupil develops obvious signs of infection.

3. School staff as well as pupils (as appropriate to their ability), their parents, guardians and families should be aware that the must not attend school or training if they have symptoms or signs that may suggest COVID-19 until they have taken appropriate medical advice and testing if appropriate. They should be aware that they should not attend school or training if they have been told they are close contacts of a person with COVID-19. These messages should be reinforced regularly.

4. School staff as well as pupils (as appropriate to their ability), their parents, guardians and families should be aware of the general advice they should follow outside of the educational setting to lower the risk that they become infected with COVID-19.

5. Limiting the number of people entering the educational/training setting to those essential to provide the service reduces risk of introduction of the virus.

6. Staff should be alert for any signs of illness that suggest that they, a pupil or a colleague may have COVID-19 on arrival for school and throughout the day.

Reducing the risk of spread of COVID-19 in the Educational Setting

If the virus is introduced into an educational setting, the highest risk of spread is related to close contact with an infectious person or their immediate surroundings. Therefore the most important measures to reduce the risk of spread are doing all that is practical to limit the degree to which different groups of people within the education/training setting mix and interact with other groups. This is especially the case indoors.

It is recognised that there are practical considerations that must be taken into account when it is necessary for an SNA to support multiple students across different settings in the course of a working day. It is also the case that some children will need to move from their special class into a mainstream class during the day to ensure that their integration needs for educational purposes are addressed. As below, where movement is necessary the risk can be reduced by hygiene measures.

The risk of spread can also be reduced to some degree by the highest practical standard of personal and environmental hygiene. In the context of COVID-19, the risk is associated with droplets and fluids from the respiratory tract. There is very little risk of spread of COVID-19 from other body fluids (such as urine and faeces) although they may carry other infectious microorganisms.

Reducing Mixing Between Groups

1. To the greatest degree that is practical in the context of the educational and care needs of the pupils groups/classes should avoid mixing with other groups particularly indoors.

2. SNA should support the smallest number of pupils that is practical (a pod of pupils) and should move between pods as little as is practical to do so recognising that flexibility is sometime essential to manage absence due to leave or illness.

3. If movement between pods/classes is necessary SNAs should move between the least possible number of pods/classes on any given day.

4. If members of discrete pods/classes assemble in one area for meals or other activities maintain as much distance as is practical between the pods/classes and manage entry and exit to reduce interaction between members of different pods/classes as much as is practical.

Promoting Key-Behaviours that Reduces risk of Person to Person Spread

1. Promote hand hygiene for staff and pupils particularly on boarding a bus if there is shared transport, on arrival at the school/centre each day, prior to departure, before meals and after any contact with the pupil that is likely to have resulted in contact with oral or nasal fluid.

2. There should be ready access to hand sanitiser in all educational settings with due regard in relation to placement to avoid the risk of ingestion by pupils. Please note also that alcohol based hand rub is flammable and needs to be kept away from naked flame.

3. Providing SNAs with personal pocket size dispensers of alcohol hand gel may be useful, particularly if wall mounted dispensers are not a safe option in a particular context and also for use during outdoor activities.

4. Promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette to the greatest extent possible.

5. Support in performing hand hygiene should be provided to pupils who need assistance.

6. Limit sharing of items between members of the pod in so far as is practical especially with respect to items that pupils may put in their mouth.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

1. Personal protective equipment in the setting of COVID refers to items that are used to reduce the risk of infection in particular settings.

2. PPE can be of value as an addition to all the other measures outlined here to reduce the risk of infection for SNAs.

3. As with all children, pupils with additional care needs should not be required to wear a face covering if they are under 13 years of age. Those who choose to wear a face covering may do so.

4. Pupils with additional care needs who are 13 years or older should not be required to wear a face covering if the face covering causes distress or is a barrier to their education and care needs.

5. In this context and in association with other measures specified the use of a face covering should be routine for SNAs in accordance with Government guidance.

6. When SNAs are within 2m of a pupil and to whom they are delivering personal care or attention for a period of time the face covering should normally be a surgical mask. If surgical mask are not available a cloth face covering should be used. If or any reason use of a surgical mask or cloth face covering is not practical for any reason, they should use a visor

of a quality suitable for use in a healthcare setting however HPSC advice is that a visor does not provide protection equivalent to a mask.

7. Mask and visors should be donned and doffed and disposed of as demonstrated in videos available at https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/ppe/. Masks should be removed and disposed of if they are wet or damaged. Masks should be removed and disposed of if going or a break or visiting the toilet.

8. Gloves and aprons should not be used routinely in the educational setting.

9. If providing care that involves specific risk of exposure to blood or body fluids (oral fluids, faeces, urine) use of gloves and a disposable plastic apron is appropriate. These must be removed and disposed of safely and hand hygiene performed after caring for each individual. Note with respect to faeces and urine the risk of infection is related to other infectious organisms rather than COVID-19.

10. Hand hygiene should be performed before donning and after removing gloves.

11. If providing care that involves a risk of splashing of body fluids a visor is required to protect the eyes from splashing even if already wearing a surgical mask.

12. Used PPE is generally discarded directly into domestic waste.

13. PPE used when attending to a person with suspected COVID-19 while waiting for collection can be placed in a separate plastic bag, which is then placed in domestic waste.

Environment and cleaning

1. The educational environment should provide discrete rooms for each group to the greatest degree practical and be as spacious as is practical with as much natural ventilation as practical.

2. Surfaces should be easy to clean.

3. Outdoor activity is associated with lower risk and should be encouraged where appropriate and weather permits.

4. The highest practical standards of general hygiene should be maintained.

5. The floors, tables, chairs and other items should be easily cleanable and cleaned at least daily.

6. Cleaning is generally with water and detergent or detergent wipes. If disinfection is required in specific circumstances then this is always in addition to and never instead of cleaning.

Isolation for people who develop symptoms or signs in the educational setting

1. If anyone develops symptoms or signs that cause concern about COVID-19 during the day the person should move as quickly as possible to a separate room or if that is not possible to

a separate area more than 2m away from other people other than the person(s) needed to provide support until they can leave.

2. The parents/guardian should be telephoned to come and take the pupil home as soon as is reasonably practical. This needs to be done reasonably promptly but this is not an emergency. It is important that parents and guardians do not expose themselves and others to other risks (for example road traffic accident) on the understanding that this is an emergency.

3. Parents/guardian should take medical advice regarding the requirement for testing and the duration of exclusion from education.

4. There is no requirement for other pupils or school staffs to interrupt their scheduled activity immediately if one person develops symptoms.

5. Contact surfaces in the immediate vicinity of the person with symptoms should be cleaned/wiped down.

6. The person accompanying a pupil waiting to be collected should limit physical contact as much as is practical consistent with the pupil's needs and should use a surgical mask, visor and nitrile gloves. Hand hygiene must be performed after removal of gloves.

7. When the pupil is collected, the accompanying person can resume work with other pupils after removing used PPE and performing hand hygiene.

8. It is not appropriate to require certification from a doctor before the pupil returns to education. There is a certificate that parents can be asked to complete on hpsc.ie website.

Reducing the Impact of COVID-19 Infection

It is likely that COVID-19 infection will impact on some pupils and SNAs during the coming school year as a result of infection acquired in everyday life or in the educational setting. The likelihood of suffering serious harm as a result of COVID-19 infection depends on the age and general health of the person when they became infected and on access to healthcare if they need it.

1. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle (exercise, nutrition, avoiding exposure to smoke) and good care of any existing medical conditions improves the likelihood of making a good recovery from COVID-19.

2. Early access to appropriate medical care, if required, is important in recovery from COVID-19. All pupils and school staffs should be registered with a GP to provide care if required.

Appendix 1

Links to the detailed documentation including School COVID-19 Response Plans and advice from Public Health (HPSC)

Relevant section of HPSC website with guidance documents for education settings (updated on ongoing basis)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/

Guidance for Schools Regarding Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) Supporting Children and Young People with Additional Care Needs in the Context of COVID-19 (Updated 7th January 2021)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/COVID-19%20Education%20SNA.pdf

Definition of Close Contacts in an Educational Setting (30th October 2020)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/casedefinitions/covid-19educationalsettingscasesandclosecontactsdefinitions/

Interim HSE advice in relation to return to school and at risk groups (September 2020)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/HSE%20advice%20on%20return%20to%20school.pdf

Guidance on COVID-19 Respiratory Care in School for Children with Tracheostomy who require suctioning while in school (2nd September 2020)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/Children%20Tracheostomy%20Suctioning%20Schools.pdf

Guidance Document on Infection Prevention and Control Practices in Relation to Delivering Face to Face Education during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic (30.07.2020)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/IPC%20Guidance%20for%20delivering%20face%20to%20face%20education.pdf

Guidance on what constitutes Aerosol Generating Procedures (June 2020)

https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/infectionpreventionandcontrolguidance/aerosolgeneratingprocedures/

Appendix 3

Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plans required by 'Work Safely Protocol'

Sec 4.2 Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW) & Appendix 6 Checklist for School Management

A RTW form should be completed and returned to the school before returning to work. Schools should request staff (verbally or in writing) to confirm that the details in the pre-return to work form remain unchanged following subsequent periods of closure such as school holidays.

Sec 5 Infection Prevention Control Measures - To prevent Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 in Schools

- Advise staff and pupils to self-isolate or restrict their movements at home if they display any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and contact their family doctor to arrange a test
- Advise staff and pupils not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
  - if they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19
  - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
  - If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
  - Advise staff and pupils to cooperate with any public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice in the event of a case or outbreak in the school;

Sec 5.3 Hand Hygiene

- There is a requirement for access to hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands
- Alcohol-based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame

Sec 5.4 Physical Distancing

Ventilation – new section

The Department has published guidance setting out the practical steps for good ventilation in accordance with public health advice '*Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools'* The guidance sets out an overall approach

for schools that windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (assuming not in use) and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance provides that good ventilation can be achieved in classrooms without causing discomfort, particularly during cold weather.

Sec. 5.5 Use of PPE in Schools

Medical Grade Masks

Schools must provide medical grade masks in the EN16483 category to all SNAs and teachers in special schools and special classes and those staff by necessity that need to be in close and continued proximity with pupils with intimate care needs including School Bus Escorts.

Sec 8 Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19

School staff should be encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contract tracing purposes both in and out of the school setting.

Sec 9 Staff Duties

- Not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
  - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
  - If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
- Cooperate with any public health personnel and their school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in their school
- Undergo any COVID-19 testing that may be required in their school as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health

Sec 11 Employee Assistance Service

Information updated in this section.

Appendix 2 Pre-Return to Work Form COVID-19

Number of questions increased from 5 to 7. Additional questions:

- Are you awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test?
- In the past 14 days, have you been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19?
- Other 5 are slightly reworded

Appendix 6 Checklist for School Management

Staff

- Have you requested confirmation that the details in the pre-return to work form remain unchanged following periods of closure such as school holidays.
- Have you advised staff and pupils not to return to or attend school if they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 or if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus.
- Have you advised staff and pupils not to return or attend school if they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel
- Have you advised staff and pupils to cooperate with any public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice in the event of a case or outbreak in the school;

Hand / Respiratory Hygiene

Have you told staff and pupils when they need to wash their hands or use hand sanitiser? This includes:

- When entering and exiting vehicles
- When entering and exiting school buildings

Physical Distancing

- Have you advised staff of the Department's guidance to achieve good ventilation
- Have you checked any mechanical ventilation systems to ensure an adequate supply of fresh air is used

Appendix 7 Checklist for dealing with a suspected case of COVID-19

A nominated member of the school management team will be will be responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the protocol to deal with suspected cases have been adhered to.

Appendix 9 Checklist for cleaning

Have you put in place a written cleaning schedule to be made available to cleaning staff including:

- Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces such as vending machines, coffee machines and door handles