



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Guidance on Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning in a COVID-19 Context

For post-primary schools and centres
for education

1. Introduction

This document is designed to provide guidance for schools in situations where a partial or full school closure is advised by Public Health HSE because of a case or cases of COVID-19. It is also intended to advise schools on how individual students who may have to self-isolate or restrict their movements can be supported in continuing their learning remotely. It is intended to review the operation of these arrangements at the end of each term while we continue to live with COVID-19.

The Department acknowledges the collective efforts across the system that enabled schools to re-open at the start of the school year. In particular, it acknowledges the leadership shown by principals, deputy principals and management of schools and the degree to which teachers have prepared for and adapted their practice in order to minimise the risk of infection due to COVID-19 in schools. In addition, the efforts of the wider school community in supporting the reopening of schools, including Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), secretaries, caretakers, parents/guardians and others are acknowledged.

It should be noted that decisions around advising students, teachers or other school staff to restrict their movements for COVID-19 related reasons are made solely by Public Health HSE. Schools should refer to the *Public Health Guidance Letter to schools* dated 27 August 2020 and to *Schools Pathway for COVID-19: The Public Health approach* prepared by the HSE, both of which are available [here](#).

In addition, schools should refer to [Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19](#), the Government's risk management strategy for the next six to nine months, designed to allow individuals, families, businesses and services better understand, anticipate and prepare for the measures government might introduce to stop escalation of the transmission of the disease. A set of frequently raised topics entitled *COVID-19: Your questions answered about returning to school* is available [here](#).

This Department guidance sets out how schools should plan for and support students' learning in a number of possible scenarios which could occur during the 2020/21 school year. As the extent to which these scenarios may be required cannot be predicted, it is possible that individual or groups of students and teachers may find that they are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements on a number of occasions during the 2020-21 school year. This may lead to an accumulation of a significant number of days where students learn and teachers work from home. Therefore, it is crucial that all schools make every effort to enable teachers to support the continuation of students' learning effectively during each possible scenario. This is particularly important in the context of students at risk of early school leaving, students with special educational

needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage. The examples in Section 4 provide some illustrations of how schools can sustain students' learning where they are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements.

Where students are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements, schools should continue to focus on supporting their wellbeing. Staff and families who are experiencing particularly challenging times can be directed to the support services available at [gov.ie/en/campaigns/together/](https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/together/). Families can be referred to the resources and supports provided by agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS). Staff can refer to the Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme. Schools may also consult with NEPS in relation to the academic, social and emotional needs of their students.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Department's previous guidance to schools in relation to supporting continuity of students' learning during the March to June 2020 school closure period, available at: www.gov.ie

2. Planning and organisation considerations

2.1 Practical consideration for supporting continuity of schooling

The public health restrictions which led to the closure of schools in March 2020 highlighted the absolute necessity for schools to be agile in providing for continuity of schooling in the future. As a contingency for when students and/or teachers are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements, all schools are advised to create a brief, concise action plan¹ that includes provision, where appropriate, for the provision of emergency remote teaching² and learning to support the continuity of schooling, using digital technology where possible. This should outline the necessary actions and relevant personnel to:

- **Research and identify appropriate digital communication platform(s)**³: All schools are required to put in place arrangements to facilitate:
 - Digital communication with and between staff
 - Digital communication between staff and students
 - Digital communication between schools and parents/guardians, including a designated email address or attended school phone number for contact during school closure
 - Emergency remote Teaching and learning.

Schools should then select the most appropriate approach(es) for their context following consultation with, and agreement by, staff. In some schools, the use of digital communication platforms may not be appropriate or possible for some students. In these cases, alternative arrangements should be identified, including using the postal service, emails and phone calls.

- **Identify and develop the skills set of the teachers and support staff, as needed**: On selecting a digital platform(s) for the school, the school should ascertain the level of digital competency required to use the platform and any gaps in the digital skills set of the teachers should be identified. Arrangements should be put in place, to ensure that any necessary professional development is provided to enable teachers to use the platform(s) as outlined above. Such CPD will be availed of at a time identified and agreed by staff as part of the agreed framework for the provision of CPD.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a suggested checklist

² Remote Teaching and Learning refers to all forms of facilitating teaching and learning with students who are engaged in learning outside of the physical school setting

³ A digital communication platform refers to any technology that facilitates communication and remote teaching and learning.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Digital Technologies Team has developed a comprehensive range of professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders in the context of COVID-19. These are available at pdst.ie/blendedlearning. Schools can also apply to pdst.ie/schoolsupport for the assistance of a PDST advisor with specific queries regarding emergency remote teaching, learning and assessment practices. Other relevant staff, such as Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) should be supported in the development of their digital skills, using time from their Croke Park hours, for example.

- **Enable students to develop the necessary skills set: to use the selected digital platform(s).** This will enable students to both improve their use of digital technologies in their daily school experiences and ~~enable them~~ to be ready to use such technology effectively to support their learning should they need to restrict their movements or self-isolate for a period. In this regard, it is essential that students have opportunities to practise:
 - Accessing and navigating the platform(s)
 - Engaging with teaching and learning materials
 - Uploading their own work independently.
- **Support equity of access to digital resources:** Availability of appropriate digital devices and/or internet connection with sufficient bandwidth will be a challenge for some families, including those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, or those who live in geographical areas with poor internet infrastructure. Schools should establish a clear picture of the relevant supports needed by their students to engage in remote learning and the steps that can be taken to address any gaps or issues. For example, the school could re-allocate digital devices, if available, from the school's supply to families⁴ for the duration of the students' absence from school for COVID-19 reasons. If necessary, other strategies for communicating with students should be considered, such as using the postal service, phone calls or emails. This recognises that, in some instances, schools will not be in a position - even with optimal deployment of their existing resources - to ensure equity of access to digital resources.
- **Schools have been provided with funding for ICT resources** and should use this funding to address any shortfalls. In this regard, schools should consider the loan of digital devices to staff (as well as students) in order to ensure that teachers have access to the necessary digital technology to support students' remote learning when required.

⁴ Where schools provide devices to families, all parties should agree the parameters and relevant policies for use of the device, and that the device remains the property of the school to be returned to the school when the student returns or the full/partial school closure period ends.

- **Sharing subject plans:** In order for teaching and learning to progress as seamlessly as possible during emergency remote teaching and learning, schools should ensure that there is a system that enables the substitute teacher and other relevant teacher to access relevant collaborative subject plans as required, including planned learning targets for students with SEN.
- **Collaborate and communicate with parents/guardians:** Schools should inform parents/guardians of the approach to be taken for emergency remote teaching and learning should it be required. Good two-way communication with parents/guardians is essential to ensure that the school is ready to engage in emergency remote teaching and learning in an effective way.
- **Communication with external agencies:** During partial or full school closures, it is important that the appropriate personnel in schools, for example principals, year heads or SETs, maintain contact, relevant to the needs of the students affected by the closure, with any necessary external agencies, including the HSE, NEPS and the NCSE.
- **Ensure relevant policies are up to date:** Schools should review all policies relevant to emergency remote teaching and learning. In some instances, policies may need to be updated. For example, the school's acceptable usage policy (AUP) may need to be updated to reflect the digital environment. Data Protection policies and the school's Child Safeguarding Statement may also need to be reviewed and, if necessary, updated in line with the appropriate review procedures to take account of teaching and learning in a remote environment.

2.2 Personnel to support continuity of schooling

Where students and/or teachers are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements, local contextual factors mean that no one-size solution will fit all schools. The subject teacher/s should provide for continuity of schooling to the greatest extent possible for those students who are advised to restrict their movements. However, this may not always be a practical option. The non-exhaustive list below outlines alternative personnel who could be considered instead of, or as well as, the subject teacher when arranging for continuity of schooling. Consequently, flexibility will be required, in supporting students who are asked to restrict their movements.

- **Special education teacher (SET) from the school/ETB:** The principle of allocating the greatest level of support to those students with the greatest need remains, in line with the Continuum of Support. The SET(s) assigned to a student/class affected can reassign this time to supporting emergency remote teaching and learning for these students when required. Alternatively, it may be possible for the SET(s) to reassign time normally allocated for *whole-school and classroom support (for all)* on the

Continuum of Support from his/her normal timetable, for example, by pausing some team-teaching initiatives for the duration of the closure to release time for remote teaching and learning.

- **Designated teacher from the staff of the school / ETB:** A teacher on the staff who has been medically certified as being at very high risk to COVID-19 and is available to work from home can support emergency remote teaching for individual students or classes in line with circular 0049/2020
- **A teacher from the staff of the school/ETB who has been advised to restrict his/her movements:** A teacher on the staff who has been advised to restrict his/her movements but is medically fit for work can support emergency remote teaching and learning for individual students or classes in line with Circular 0049/2020
- **Designated teacher from a local Education Centre:** A teacher from another school who has been medically certified as being at very high risk to COVID-19 and is on the assigned list in the local Education Centre can assist in this work in line with circular 0049/2020.

3. Required features of provision

Where it is necessary for a teacher to support students in their learning from home for reasons related to COVID-19 (i.e. based upon medical certification of a COVID-19 diagnosis or because they are restricting their movements), emergency remote teaching and learning will be encompassed within a teacher's normal, contracted hours. There is no expectation or requirement that teachers will be on call/available outside of those hours or at weekends.

In this context, schools should ensure that emergency remote teaching and learning is characterised by:

- **Regular engagement with students:** Teachers should, as far as possible, engage with students as per the normal school timetable. Special education teachers (SETs) should also, as far as possible, continue to engage with students on their caseload as frequently as they would under normal circumstances. The assignment of tasks to be completed is not, of itself, sufficient because students need direct teaching inputs from their teachers in order to feel connected to the school, to stay motivated, and to make progress in their learning.
- **A blend of guided and independent learning tasks/experiences:** Teacher-student engagement should involve both direct teaching by the teacher and the assignment of independent learning tasks for completion by the students. Teachers should ensure, as far as practicable, that direct instruction is provided for aspects of learning that require it, using a variety of approaches, for example video, audio, presentation software and written instructions. Regular engagement with students when they are out of school will also help them to reintegrate when they return to school.
- **Appropriate and engaging learning opportunities:** Teachers should ensure that the chosen learning tasks give students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a clear and concise way. It may be necessary to adjust the number of tasks usually given in the school setting to take account of the fact that students are doing this work from home.
 - **Learning tasks:** The tasks chosen should be specifically aligned to the needs of the student, including students with SEN, and should enable the teacher to monitor progress and give constructive, developmental feedback to support the next stages in their learning.
 - **Skills development:** Schools should make local arrangements that seek to ensure that students are given opportunities to develop self-management and organisational skills so they are equipped to engage in remote learning. For students with additional and/or special educational needs who are being

supported on their transition back to school, the work being carried out should be continued remotely to ensure progress is not lost and to enable successful reintegration into school after the period of the partial or full closure.

- **Two-way feedback between home and school:** Schools should ensure that two-way feedback between teachers and parents/guardians and between teachers and their students is encouraged and supported. Schools should provide manageable and accessible opportunities for all students to share samples of their work with the subject teachers as frequently as they would if the students were in school. Teachers should ensure that work received is corrected and relevant feedback is provided, as would be the expectation if the school was open. The benefits for students include maintaining their motivation and their engagement with learning as well as providing a connection with the school and their peers.

4. Sample situations of support for continuity in schooling

Situation 1: Student absent for a few days for medically certified COVID-19 related reasons

The school might consider supporting the student in this context through one or more of the following approaches:

- **Peer support:** it may be feasible to nominate a peer within the class group to provide the student with updates on the classwork and homework for the relevant subject areas. If the student is well enough then he/she may return completed assignments to the subject teacher via the schools learning management platform or via post to the school.
- **School’s digital platform(s) or other agreed method⁵:** These provide ways for teachers to share the lesson content and provide the student who has restricted his/her movements with access to the materials engaged with during the lesson. Teachers who normally engage in the practice of uploading their lesson content or lesson materials to a digital platform are encouraged to continue to do so. However, it is accepted that not all teachers may be in a position to do this.

Situation 2: One student or a number of students in a single class group are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements

In such a case, some of the remaining students in the class are not deemed to be close contacts and can continue to attend school.

In this situation, lessons should continue as normal with the subject teacher for those students in attendance. It may also be possible to provide opportunities for all students – including, insofar as practicable, students who are self-isolating at home - to work together collaboratively using digital technologies (for example, on project work and other areas of learning).

- **Sharing lesson content via live streaming:** In addition, consideration should be given, where possible, to live streaming of the lesson (or part thereof) so that the subject teacher can share his/her class teaching with those who are self-isolating or restricting their movements. The live streaming of a lesson may already be in place in an “overspill room” within the school and this facility to

⁵ Agreed by teachers and management. It is recognised that the methods must and will be cognisant of the needs of the students and the ICT skills of the teachers.

share the lesson could be extended beyond the school. Other agreed methods of maintaining the continuity of learning should continue in order to facilitate students' progress.

- **Support from other teachers:** Depending on the individual student needs and, for those students are deemed to be at very high risk from COVID-19, other teachers may also be involved in the continuity of schooling for an individual student or groups of students. For example, this may include but is not confined to, the SET teacher, a designated teacher from the staff of the school/ETB or a designated teacher from a local Education Centre. A teacher from the list maintained by the Local Education Centre may be assigned the responsibility of providing emergency remote teaching for the students at home in line with local school arrangements.

Situation 3: All students in a class/year group are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements

In this situation, the subject teachers should provide emergency remote teaching to all students in the class/year group, using the school's digital platform(s) or other agreed method as needed. The teaching should take place from the school if the teacher is not required to self-isolate or restrict his/her movements.

Some students who are self-isolating or are restricting their movement might not be able to engage with the teaching and learning due to being unwell for a short or extended period of time. Where this occurs, the guidance provided in one of the other situations as outlined in this document could be adapted and followed

Situation 4: A teacher / number of teachers in the school are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements

Where subject teachers are required to restrict their movements, they will avail of special leave with pay, in line with Circular 0049/2020. These teachers should follow the advice outlined in the Circular in this instance. Any teacher who is medically fit for work but has been advised to restrict his/her movements is available to work remotely.

A substitute teacher should be arranged to cover this teacher's teaching responsibilities in the school for this period. The work assigned to the teacher restricting his/her movements should support the work of the school in developing and delivering its programmes of teaching and learning for students as per Section 12 of Circular 0049/2020.

Situation 5: The school is required to close on foot of public health advice

In this situation, all teachers who are medically fit to work, including SETs, are available to work remotely and should provide remote teaching to all students in their subject class or on their caseload.

Substitute teachers should be arranged to provide remote teaching for students in classes where the teacher has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is medically unfit to work or is absent owing to another illness and is on sick leave.

The school's digital platform(s) should be utilised, where possible, by teachers and students to provide continuity of schooling and could include the use of live (synchronous) lessons and lesson materials. Students should use the school's digital platform(s) to access lessons and engage with the assigned classwork/homework.

In order to progress student learning, the school's digital platform(s) should also, where possible, be used by teachers to assign work and provide regular feedback and by students to return completed work by the end of the specified time and to communicate with their subject teacher about the subject area.

5. Resources

Organisation	Website	Purpose of support
<p>The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)</p>	<p>www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie https://www.pdst.ie/blendedlearning https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning/DigTech https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning https://teachercpd.ie/ www.scoilnet.ie www.webwise.ie</p>	<p>Teachers can access short online courses and a suite of sector-specific (primary or post-primary) supports when embarking on emergency remote teaching and learning in their contexts. These supports contain guidance as well as practical applications and case studies.</p> <p>Links are available to short instructional videos that contain activities which can be adapted for online teaching and digital learning preparation resources.</p> <p>Teachers can access a variety of online short courses to upskill in many digital areas, including online teaching and assessment</p> <p>PDST School infrastructure: Schools can contact ictadvice@pdst.ie regarding queries about their infrastructure or can email broadbandservicedesk@pdst.ie regarding broadband queries.</p> <p>Scoilnet contains a database of over 20,000+ online resources including websites, quizzes, lesson plans, notes, video/audio, games and other multimedia. To further support distance learning, Learning Paths may be used to create and organise collections of resources found on Scoilnet.</p> <p>Access to advice, information and resources exploring a range of internet safety issues and concerns.</p>
<p>Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT)</p>	<p>http://jct.ie/home/home.php</p>	<p>The Junior Cycle for Teachers Support Service (JCT) is available for post primary leaders and teachers for ongoing support and advice. The JCT website is updated regularly as additional resources continue to be added.</p>
<p>An Chomhaire um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)</p>	<p>https://www.cogg.ie/en/resources/</p>	<p>An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta caters for the educational needs of Gaeltacht schools and of Gaelscoileanna. There is a wide range of online resources available such as, access to digital books, videos and teaching aids.</p>

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)	www.ncse.ie/online-resources	The NCSE website outlines a wide range of resource to support emergency remote teaching and learning suitable for students with special educational needs.
Education Centres	www.esci.ie	Centres provide a range of online courses/webinars in response to demand from local schools and teachers.

Appendix 1: Suggested checklist to support action planning for schools when students and/or teachers are advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements

<p>Has an appropriate digital communication platform(s) been selected and agreed at whole-school level by the teaching staff and management?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does it support communication with and between staff? • Does it support communication between staff and students? • Does it support communication between schools and parents/guardians? • Does the platform effectively support remote teaching and learning? • Is the platform, and the use to be made of it, GDPR compliant? 	
<p>Have parents/guardians been notified of contact details during school closures?</p>	
<p>Have the relevant skill sets of the staff been identified?</p>	
<p>Has a plan for appropriate professional development and support been agreed with all staff where necessary?</p>	
<p>Have other relevant staff, for example SNAs, been supported in relevant digital skills development, to enable them to carry out their role during emergency remote teaching and learning?</p>	
<p>Has a plan for developing students skills for remote teaching and learning been agreed, to enable them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and navigate the platform in use? • Engage with teaching and learning materials? • Upload their own work independently? 	
<p>Has a plan been put in place to address gaps in the availability of digital devices or access to broadband?</p>	
<p>Has a system been established for sharing subject plans and learning targets for students with special educational needs, with relevant substitute and other teachers?</p>	
<p>Have parents/guardians been informed about the platform(s) to be used during any remote teaching and learning scenarios?</p>	
<p>Have procedures for supporting two-way communication and feedback during remote teaching and learning been established and agreed with staff?</p>	
<p>Have procedures for communicating with relevant external agencies, including the HSE, NEPS and NCSE where necessary been established?</p>	
<p>Have the following policies been reviewed and updated where necessary?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable usage policies • Data Protection • Child Safeguarding Statement 	