



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

In-person supplementary programme for pupils with complex needs during school closures

**Guidance for Teachers / Special Needs
Assistants**

February 2021

Introduction

This guidance from the Department of Education provides a framework for teachers/Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) delivering the in-person, supplementary programme to support the education or care needs of pupils with complex needs. The programme is to be delivered either by teachers or SNAs in the child's home. This guidance document should be read in conjunction with the accompanying *Overview of the In-Person Supplementary Programme* document which provides further detail on the operation of the programme.

The supplementary programme is provided in the context of school closures associated with COVID-19. An allocation of five hours per week home-based support will be made available to eligible pupils. This allocation is intended to supplement (and not replace) the remote teaching provided by the pupil's school.

Teaching and learning have been disrupted for all pupils during the closure period. While most teachers and learners have adapted to the new circumstances, the absence of school can have a particularly a negative impact on the lives and wellbeing of some pupils with complex needs and their families. To address this, the Department is offering a supplementary home-based programme for a range of pupils as identified below.

The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance note are intended to assist teachers/SNAs in delivering the home-based programme to address wellbeing, continuity of learning, aspects of educational regression, reconnecting and transitioning back to school. The supplementary programme comprises either a learning programme to be delivered by a teacher, or an in-person care programme to be delivered by an SNA. Details of both of these approaches are outlined below.

Teachers chosen by parents to participate in the home-based scheme are required to give parents confirmation of their Teaching Council registration and to sign the Statutory Declaration.

Aims of the in-person supplementary programme

The aims of the in-person supplementary programme are to:

- Provide a foundation for addressing and limiting regression
- Support families and provide respite, where appropriate
- Support pupils' physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- Provide pupils and families with the practical and technological skills they may need to communicate with schools and engage with remote learning.

Who can participate in the programme?

- All pupils in special schools and special classes

- Pupils in mainstream schools who are accessing the highest levels of support in school at the School Support Plus/Support for a Few stage of the Continuum of Support (including pupils with Autism, Down syndrome, sensory impairments, and other disabilities.) This will include the pupils who were identified for the summer provision programme of 2020.
- Schools have flexibility to identify pupils who require the highest level of support at any given time. This will ensure that pupils presenting with exceptional needs due to the current school closures can participate in the scheme.

Programme Content

Pupils have had different experiences of remote learning. This guidance is provided to help the teacher to support wellbeing and promote resilience while also addressing regression as pupils start their journey towards re-engagement with in-person learning. In line with the aims of the supplementary programme, this guidance recommends addressing pupils' wellbeing by using the following five key principles, which are based on the framework developed by Hobfoll et al. (2007):

- Promoting a sense of safety
- Promoting a sense of calm
- Promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness
- Promoting a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy
- Promoting a sense of hope.

For more information on the five key principles, see

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/af24b-wellbeing-guidance-documents-for-parents-students-and-schools/#school-staff-primary-schools>

Delivery of a learning programme by teachers

Schools are currently using a range of online applications to enhance the remote learning of pupils with complex needs. In advance of engaging with the pupil, teachers delivering the supplementary programme should familiarise themselves with the manner in which the school is delivering remote learning. The teacher may be in a position to advise parents on maximising the pupil's engagement with online applications used by the school.

Parents should provide the pupil's most recent educational support plan to enable the teacher to start planning suitable content and approaches for the programme.

Further, parents should engage with teachers regarding:

- The identification of their child's unique strengths, interests and needs, and in setting learning objectives
- The planning for transitions and routines
- The selection of activities and teaching approaches.

Suggested Areas of focus

It is important for teachers delivering the programme to focus on skills associated with learning to learn, including:

- Practising hygiene routines that exist in schools as a result of COVID-19
- Re-establishing pupils' social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context
- Focusing on developing effective task and organisational skills
- Reinforcing communication skills and approaches to ensure that pupils can indicate choices and give their opinions.

Teaching approaches

When devising the programme, effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting learners to achieve and to experience success. Effective teaching approaches include:

- Using visual structured teaching approaches
- Focusing on play and activity-based learning
- Scaffolding incremental knowledge and skills
- Using graphic organisers and mind-maps
- Using technology wherever possible and appropriate
- Promoting autonomous learning
- Providing regular feedback to encourage the pupil to the next steps
- Using quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and to make learning fun

Using technology

It is important to continue supporting pupils to access and use any technology or communication devices on which the pupil relies. Assistive technologies and devices may be used to:

- Support learning (e.g. using a laptop to provide practice and consolidation opportunities)
- Encourage communication (e.g. various software, messaging apps)
- Increase social opportunities (e.g. social media apps)
- Reduce stress (e.g. music players, calming apps)
- Promote recreational interests (e.g. researching and pursuing areas of individual interest)

The pupil's voice

Involving pupils in setting learning targets and in monitoring their progress can be empowering and motivating for them. Some pupils may have language and communication difficulties, therefore it is important to use appropriate means for pupils to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. use of visual supports, choice boards, assistive technology). When engaging with the pupils, teachers/SNAs should listen to their input regarding the:

- Activities in which they engage
- Nature and level of adult support
- Use of technology to support learning and communication and care
- Social aspects of the home-based programme
- Nature and level of adult support in relation to care needs
- Recreational activities, walks, or community-based outings in which they engage.

Delivery of a care programme by SNAs

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

SNA Supports

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

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