



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# **In-person supplementary programme for post-primary students 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 students in post-primary schools with complex needs. The programme is to be delivered either by special education teachers, subject teachers, class tutors, or SNAs in the student'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 students. This allocation is intended to supplement (and not replace) the remote teaching provided by the student's school.

Teaching and learning have been disrupted for all students during the closure period. While most teachers and learners have adapted to the new circumstances, the absence of school can have a particularly negative impact on the lives and wellbeing of some students with complex needs and their families. To address this, the Department is offering a supplementary home-based programme for a range of students 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 either by teachers as outlined above, or alternatively, an in-person care programme to be delivered by an SNA. Details of both of these approaches are outlined below.

Teachers engaged 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 students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- Provide students 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 students in special classes
- Students in mainstream schools who are accessing the highest level of the continuum of support (Student Support Plus/for a few). This includes students with Autism, Down syndrome, sensory impairments, and other disabilities.
- Schools have flexibility to identify students who require the highest level of support at any given time. This will ensure that students presenting with exceptional needs due to the current school closures can participate in the scheme.

## Programme content

Students have had different experiences of remote learning. This guidance is provided to help the teacher to support, learning, wellbeing and resilience while also addressing regression as students start their journey towards re-engagement with in-person learning as schools reopen. In line with the aims of the supplementary programme, this guidance recommends supporting the learning and wellbeing of students 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 and promoting the wellbeing of post-primary students, click [HERE](#)

For targeted guidance on supporting the wellbeing of students with SEN click [HERE](#)

## Delivery of a learning programme by teachers

Schools are currently using a range of online applications to enhance the remote learning of students with complex needs. In advance of engaging with the student, teachers delivering the supplementary programme should familiarise themselves with how the students school is delivering remote teaching and supporting remote learning. The teacher may be in a position to advise parents on enhancing the student's engagement with online applications used by the school.

When the home-based programme is being prepared, the teacher should:

- seek access through the school/parents to the student's most recent support plan to help with establishing learning priorities
- Consult the school, parents and student to identify the student's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they may be best supported
- Review progress on the agreed learning priorities regularly with the parents, school based teachers and the student
- Maintain a record of content and skills taught during the supplementary programme and provide a summary of this to the parents and school.

### **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
- Supporting the students' social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context
- Focusing on developing effective engagement, planning and organisational skills
- Reinforcing communication skills and approaches to ensure that students can indicate choices and give their opinions
- Developing skills needed in order to benefit from remote learning opportunities provided by the school.

### **Teaching approaches**

When devising the programme, effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting students to engage with learning and to experience success. Effective approaches include:

- Adopting a strengths-based approach – using the student's strengths, interests and abilities to build resilience and foster a sense of belonging
- Using targeted programmes to develop social and emotional competence
- Teaching relaxation techniques and calming strategies to manage anxiety and promote self-regulation
- Providing information in accessible formats to promote access and engagement
- Fostering social connections and friendships through supporting engagement in class based remote learning
- Teaching skills to support adapting to new routines about hygiene requirements using visuals, videos and repetition to reinforce key messages
- Scaffolding the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, building incrementally on prior learning.
- Providing regular and structured feedback to promote efficacy and autonomous learning.

### **Using technology**

It is important to continue supporting students to access and use any technology or communication devices on which the student 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 student's voice and agency**

It is important to remember to provide ongoing opportunities for the voice of the student to be heard, and responded to in a meaningful way. Involving the student in setting learning targets and in monitoring their progress can be empowering and motivating for them. Some students may have language and communication difficulties, therefore it is important to use appropriate means for students to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. use of visual supports, choice boards, assistive technology). When engaging with the students, 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
- 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 as part of the programme.

### **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 student. In these circumstances, parents are advised to engage with their child's school on the additional care supports which are included in their personal care 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, in consultation with the parents
- Assistance with mobility and orientation: where a student with special needs requires adult assistance
- Supporting engagement in activities drawn, as appropriate, from the plan for the student.