



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Guidance on Continuity of Schooling

## For primary schools

28 May 2020

## Introduction

This document supplements the guidance documents provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to support schools as they deliver distance learning opportunities for their pupils<sup>1</sup>. It serves to further support schools as they continue to provide for their pupils for the remainder of the school year while pupils learn from home.

The document takes account of the provision for school staff to access school buildings under limited circumstances from the 18 May 2020. This access is to allow for carrying out of essential work that cannot be done remotely, facilitate the organisation, preparation and dissemination of books and other learning materials, and give access to the school's ICT infrastructure to support remote learning<sup>2</sup>.

The Department acknowledges the collective effort across the system and in schools in adjusting to a new way of working. In particular, it acknowledges the leadership shown by principals and management of schools, the degree to which technology has been used by teachers and the innovative approaches adopted by teachers, where technology is not available, to provide instruction and prepare resources. The examples of practice in this guidance and in previous guidance documents issued by the Department exemplify the extraordinary commitment and creativity demonstrated by individual schools as they help pupils to stay connected with others, keep up their interest in their school work and progress their learning at this time.

It is intended that further guidance will issue to schools on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the re-opening of schools for the next academic year, in line with the most up-to-date advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE). Schools are advised to stay informed of public health requirements as they plan for access to school buildings in the short term, year-end procedures in the interim and reopening of schools in the longer term.

---

<sup>1</sup> The guidance is informed by a telephone survey with school principals or deputy principals conducted by the Department's Inspectorate between the 3 April and 4 May 2020, a primary survey conducted by Maynooth University on behalf of the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) in March 2020, and a survey of parents carried out by the Department in collaboration with the National Parents Council (Primary) between 3 and 7 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See the Department's information note on access to schools from the 18 May 2020 at [education.ie/covid19#guidance](https://www.education.ie/covid19#guidance).

### Key themes of this guidance

- Managing the school
- Supporting the wellbeing of pupils, teachers and families
- Advancing teaching, learning and assessment
- Preparing for the end of the school year
- Using technology
- Keeping up to date

### Managing the school

As the final term of the school year continues, it is important that school management maintains a leadership and oversight role of the work of the school. Feedback from principals<sup>3</sup> indicates that a distributed leadership model, where available, is particularly useful for managing schools during the current crisis.

### Boards of management

Boards of management continue to play a pivotal role in supporting the management of the school and the work of the principal. As part of their oversight role and in response to the current crisis, many boards have included continuity of teaching and learning as an agenda item at board meetings. Arrangements should be made to facilitate board meetings prior to the end of the school year and as necessary to address issues in the context of current closures. Videoconferencing software that allows meetings to proceed in a secure fashion can be used to facilitate these meetings. For further guidance, please refer to the [Important information regarding school administration issues during the current public health emergency](#) document issued by the Department on 1 April 2020.

*Example 1: A rural school in the South-East holds board of management meetings online using a virtual platform. Following discussions at board level, a whole-school approach to supporting the wellbeing of the pupils and their families has been implemented across the school.*

**In-school management:** Ongoing collaboration between members of the in-school management team (i.e. principal, deputy principal and where available, assistant principals) should seek to:

- Plan for any access to the school by teachers or other staff members and ensure that all are fully aware of arrangements in place to ensure compliance with public health guidelines

---

<sup>3</sup> Based on data gathered through telephone conversations between Department inspectors and principals between 3<sup>rd</sup> April and 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020

- Establish a whole-school approach to the facilitation of remote learning activity so that all teachers are actively engaging with their pupils and supporting pupils' ongoing engagement with learning
- Encourage all teachers to engage with available CPD resources (see [pdst.ie/distancelearning](https://pdst.ie/distancelearning)) to guide their approaches to teaching and learning in a remote environment
- Establish a clear picture<sup>4</sup> of the level of pupil engagement in learning activities across all classes, including special classes, and the steps that can be taken to address any gaps or issues
- Analyse feedback from parents or guardians and identify solutions to relevant issues
- Determine strategies for prioritising relevant aspects of school life usually addressed in the final months of the school year, including curricular and extra-curricular activities and reporting to parents
- Evaluate the level of preparedness for the new school year and prioritise actions that can be completed before guidance on re-opening schools is issued, for example class allocations, support for transitions of 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils to post-primary school and the induction of new junior infant pupils.

*Example 2: In a large school in Dublin, the principal has a phone call with the deputy principal each morning. In addition, members of the leadership and management team are assigned to particular class levels to ensure clear lines of communication between teachers and management.*

**Staff Meetings:** Effective management of the school and progressing whole-school approaches for teaching and learning during the crisis requires regular staff meetings. Meetings can be facilitated using videoconferencing software which allows teachers to attend online or to phone in, and should serve to:

- Create a sense of community and reduce the sense of isolation that teachers may feel at this time
- Allow the teachers to share their experiences of facilitating distance learning, including non-technology, low-technology and high-technology based solutions relevant to the resources available to teachers and pupils
- Identify and agree whole-school approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that are proving most effective for the school's context
- Plan for the end of the school year and identify issues that need to be addressed in preparing for the new school year.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ways of establishing a clear picture of pupil engagement include surveying teachers, parents or pupils, engagement with the Parents' Council in the school, or engagement with class representatives.

*Example 3: A large DEIS school in Munster holds frequent staff meetings online. Following staff discussions, it was decided that teaching and learning in term three would move beyond revision and teachers would prioritise trying to teach new concepts insofar as possible. They decided on the most suitable methods for their context as a staff.*

## Supporting the wellbeing of pupils, teachers and families

The unprecedented situation presented by the closure of school buildings to pupils and teachers has had a very significant impact on the entire school community. The Department has provided guidance for parents, which can be accessed on the [Covid-19 page](#) of the Department's website. Schools have been creative in meeting the wellbeing needs of their whole school community, by

- ensuring regular contact with pupils and their families to maintain relationships and a sense of connection with school
- providing opportunities for staff members to communicate with one another to provide support and advice and to share expertise and resources
- maintaining a sense of community through the use of online assemblies and staff meetings, where possible
- providing opportunities for accurate and supportive feedback to pupils on their work
- providing fun and exciting learning opportunities that promote independent learning
- monitoring pupil engagement levels and implementing strategies to support pupils who find engagement difficult
- ensuring that any assigned work is suitably adapted to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs or additional needs
- ensuring a balance of provision, where possible, to include opportunities for the pupils to see and hear their teacher through pre-recorded video or audio clips and opportunities for pupils to interact online using video conferencing facilities
- encouraging parents to make use of the [Home School Hub](#) on RTÉ and [Cúla4 ar scoil](#) on TG4 to support distance learning at home
- encouraging parents of children in Irish-medium schools to provide opportunities for their children to hear and engage with the Irish language, using Irish language television programmes and resources available on websites such as [cogg.ie](#) or [gaeloideachas.ie](#)
- supporting teachers and families who are experiencing particularly challenging times by directing them to the support services available at [gov.ie/en/campaigns/together/](#) or to the resources and supports provided by agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) or the Employee Assistance and

Wellbeing Programme. Schools may also consult with NEPS in relation to the academic, social and emotional needs of their pupils.

*Example 4: A small school in Ulster has found the guidance from NEPS to be particularly useful for supporting pupils, teachers and families' wellbeing. They have distributed the relevant guidance documents from NEPS to parents as a support.*

It is advisable to review the school's critical incident policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the existing circumstances. Further information is available [here](#). Additionally, internet usage policies may need to be amended. Further information is available [here](#). All relevant policies, including Data Protection and Child Protection policies, should be reviewed and updated to cater for teaching and learning in a remote learning environment. Teachers, parents and the whole school community should be made aware of these updates as relevant.

### **Advancing teaching, learning and assessment**

Schools have already made considerable progress in how they have engaged with pupils in relation to teaching, learning and assessment during the Covid-19 crisis. In most cases, teachers and families have access to technological resources that facilitate various forms of remote engagement<sup>5</sup> for teaching and learning activities. Schools, education centres and support services have been very proactive in ensuring teachers have access to relevant professional development to enhance the skill set necessary for this type of educational provision.

In some instances, the circumstances of teachers and families have posed problems for delivering distance learning through technology. Digital solutions are not always possible because of broadband services in areas or may not always be the most appropriate solutions for some pupils. In these cases, schools have been innovative in the way they cater for these specific needs and are ensuring that their pupils are still connected with learning. For example, some schools involved in the School Meals Programme have made local arrangements for packs of work to be delivered by the meal providers, while other schools have made similar arrangements with local businesses. With access to school buildings possible from 18 May 2020, schools are now in a position to make arrangements for the preparation of hard copies of material and their distribution to families who cannot access teaching and learning using technology.

---

<sup>5</sup> From telephone conversations with principals between 3 April and 4 May 2020, Department inspectors found that >99% of schools were using IT to support teaching and learning, including email (70%) and other technology-based platforms, such as Seesaw (35%) and Google Classroom (21%).

Given the evolving nature of the variety of provision in place, it is essential that schools regularly monitor provision to ensure that teacher planning and preparedness for teaching, records of learning, specific teacher input, learning activities, engagement with pupils and feedback to pupils, adapted as necessary in the changed circumstances, are effective and supportive for all pupils. Where challenges arise in engaging with pupils or their parents, schools should engage with relevant support agencies to help address these challenges.

### **Teacher planning and records of learning**

Schools should consider existing methods of short-term planning and preparedness for teaching and learning along with monthly progress records (cuntais mhíosúla) in the context of the current circumstances and agree adaptations to these documents at whole-school level, to ensure that:

- Teachers' planning documents and preparedness are reflective of the context and requirements of distance learning
- Specific, relevant units of learning from long-term plans that are considered priority learning and are most suitable for distance learning are selected for teaching and learning
- Cúntais mhíosúla / monthly progress records, which will be modified as necessary, concisely capture the learning activities from the period of school closure, in order to allow the children's learning to progress as seamlessly as possible in the new school year.
- Support plans for pupils with additional needs are updated, progress in achieving targets are monitored as is possible and records are maintained in the student support file.

### **Teaching and learning**

Throughout the period of school closures, teachers have sought to provide instruction to their pupils which enables progression in learning. As distance learning will continue until the end of the school year, it is important that all teachers provide specific teaching input to their pupils to support them as they continue their learning between now and the end of the school year. In this regard, the weekly or fortnightly assignment of work without specific teaching input can add to the burden on families at this time. Instead, more frequent engagement with pupils should be provided. Where possible, teachers should engage with their pupils on a daily basis or at least a number of times each week. This engagement will vary between the work that the teacher will ask pupils to do independently and direct teaching by the teacher and include a balance of:

- assigned tasks such as written, practical activities and project work and
- where suitable facilities are available and appropriate, online learning such as virtual classes, videos of lessons, presentations or use of online learning resources by the pupils as advised by the teacher.

Where there is less frequent engagement throughout the week, a clear daily and manageable allocation of work should be provided for pupils.

In all cases, engagement with pupils should take account of the following:

- **Teacher input:** Teachers should ensure, to the extent that this is practicable in the new environment, that direct instruction is provided for all pupils, including pupils with SEN, frequently throughout the week for aspects of learning that require it, using a variety of approaches including video, audio, presentation software and written instructions.
  - **Learning opportunities:** Teachers should ensure that the learning tasks chosen give pupils an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a clear and concise manner. It may be necessary to adjust the number of tasks usually given in the school setting to take account of the fact that pupils are doing this work from home. Workbook and textbook tasks may be reduced, supplemented or replaced with other alternative learning tasks. There should be a balance of guided and independent learning tasks assigned across the curriculum. The tasks chosen should be specifically aligned to the needs of the pupil(s), including pupils with SEN, and should enable the teacher to monitor pupils' learning and give feedback to support the next stages in their learning.
- Continuity and Progression:** Teaching and learning to the end of the school year should ensure that pupils are given opportunities to make real progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum. Once-off lessons and tasks are less effective in achieving this progress.

*Example 5: In a mid-sized school in Leinster, all teachers are using an educational app to support distance learning. The teachers record short videos of specific teaching input each day, along with explanations of tasks for pupils to complete. The children view the videos and use this to inform their work, which is then sent back to the teachers for feedback.*

### **Feedback to and from parents and pupils**

Schools should continue to review the modes of communication used, in consultation with teachers, parents and pupils, to ensure two-way feedback is encouraged and supported. When doing so, schools should seek to provide manageable and accessible opportunities for all pupils to send samples of their work to the teacher throughout each week, in line with the tasks assigned. Teachers should ensure that work received is corrected and relevant feedback is provided to parents and pupils. The benefits for pupils of this are:

- **Motivation:** Doing work for their teacher and receiving feedback on this work motivates pupils to stay engaged and make progress in their learning. Without this, pupils are likely to become demotivated and disengaged in learning.



- **Monitoring of progress:** Monitoring progress will guide teachers to maintain or adapt future teaching and learning as appropriate. Providing feedback will help to address misunderstandings in learning and support optimum progress for pupils.
- **Wellbeing:** Frequent engagement between pupils and teachers can provide a sense of normality and connection for pupils and teachers. Sending work for feedback, and receiving feedback from a teacher can contribute to pupils' sense of wellbeing, and the role of teachers in this regard is very significant and should not be underestimated.

*Example 6: A small rural school in Connacht is using the Seesaw app to provide learning opportunities to pupils on a daily basis. When samples of work are received by the teachers from pupils, they provide positive feedback as well as audio / video recordings highlighting how to progress learning and additional explanations of content and procedures as necessary for individual pupils.*

*Example 7: In one school, the teachers use the school website to post "wow" work on a regular basis in order to celebrate achievement and motivate their pupils to continue to engage with teaching and learning.*

In addition, the various modes of communication should allow for feedback from parents as they are, in many cases, managing distance learning and remote working from their homes. It is important to engage with parents to ensure that the number and nature of the tasks assigned to their child are manageable for them and their child and that the pupils sufficiently understand the work being assigned. This feedback should be used to inform teaching and learning between now and the end of the school year.

### **End-of-year reporting**

In order to ensure that records of children's progress are maintained and the end-of-year reports that are provided to pupils and their parents are sufficiently reflective of each pupil's progress and development throughout the year, teachers should consider relevant data from a variety of methods of assessment. [Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum - Guidelines for Schools](#) (NCCA, 2007) should be used to inform decision-making, and assessment strategies used in continuing to monitor pupils' ongoing progress should be compatible with the distance learning environment. The following information about standardised assessments and end-of-year report cards should also be considered:

- **Standardised assessments:** The Department has made the decision to cancel standardised tests in primary schools for the 2019/2020 academic year. There will be no requirement to include standardised test results in end-of-year reports, with the exception of where a child is transitioning to post-primary level. Standardised tests are only one of a number of assessment tools that can be

used to inform teaching and learning in primary schools. Further information is available on the [Covid-19 page](#) of the Department’s website.

- **Report cards:** Report cards developed through the online Report Card Creator on the [NCCA website](#) provide teachers with an opportunity to share information in writing about children’s progress and development. At a whole-school level, teachers should agree on the format of the report card(s) to be used and the principal will maintain oversight of all reports issued. While the 2019/2020 school year has been very different, parents should be provided with a summary of their children’s learning progress and achievement as normal. Reports provided should also consider the child’s remote learning experiences. Schools should consider adding a short narrative to their preferred report template to comment on the pupils’ engagement with learning since the start of the school closures, keeping the pupils’ wellbeing at the heart of the communication. For example, some of the project work and active tasks undertaken by the children in their homes may be referenced in the report, as in the sample text below:

*Sample text: From March to June of this year, pupil A engaged very well with learning activities that were assigned by the school during the school closures. In particular, pupil A wrote imaginative poems and stories in English, and in History, she / he completed very good project work based on The Famine. She / he has remained positive towards his/her work throughout the school closures and developed lots of skills at home, such as cooking and gardening, as shown in the photographs sent in.*

Due to a range of circumstances, the engagement of some pupils with the teacher may have been limited since the schools closed in March. This should not be reflected negatively in the report. Schools should forward reports to parents in a timely manner and at least two weeks before the end of June in order to facilitate further discussion about the child’s progress and provide an opportunity to address parents’ queries. It may not be possible to send hard copies of the report card to parents this school year. In this case, alternative methods of delivering reports should be agreed with parents, using email or communication apps as appropriate. The Department has published a Frequently Asked Questions document about end-of-year reporting and this is available on the [Covid-19 page](#) of the Department’s website.

### **Preparing for the end of the school year**

The final months of the academic year are a time of excitement and occasion, as schools try to celebrate the end of the school year and begin to prepare for the new one. These months are often associated with extra-curricular and co-curricular activities as well as ceremonies to mark the end of the school year. This year, the format of these events will be different, but schools should agree which events they can continue to provide for in the distance learning environment, given that they hold such an important place in the school calendar for teachers and for pupils. These events might include:

- **Graduation ceremonies:** Schools hold graduation ceremonies for pupils leaving sixth class each year. While it will not be possible for schools to carry these out in the traditional format, some schools are exploring ways of marking the occasion remotely, by hosting virtual meetings for the pupils or prerecording videos that can be sent to them to celebrate their time in school. Certificates of achievement, photo stories, scrapbooks and other memorabilia can also form part of the celebration.
- **School tours:** While schools will not be in a position to provide school tours this year, some schools have begun looking at ways of providing alternatives to their pupils. Some schools are planning to use fun activities such as treasure hunts and outdoor games to provide an alternative ‘tour from home’, with the main aim of providing a fun-filled, interactive experience for children in place of their traditional school tour.
- **Sports Days:** In place of traditional sports days, schools can look to assigning a day where each child participates in fun outdoor activities from home. The [Active School Flag website](#) has many ideas for facilitating this. Technology can be used to bring an interactive element to this, by including videos or photos of the children enjoying these activities, or by hosting a virtual awards ceremony at the end of the day. Alternatively, photographs can be stored and printed in school in the new academic year to celebrate the work done.
- **Cruinniú na nÓg:** Schools may wish to encourage pupils and their parents to participate in Cruinniú na nÓg, a day of free creativity activities and workshops for children and young people that takes place as part of the Creative Ireland Programme on the 13 June 2020. Information is available at [cruinniu.creativeireland.gov.ie/about/](http://cruinniu.creativeireland.gov.ie/about/).

*Example 8: In a rural school in Connacht, the principal and teachers are currently researching ways of providing a virtual school tour for each class in place of the traditional school tour. One idea they have is to allocate a particular day where all the class will engage in a treasure hunt based around a virtual tour of a museum or landmark, followed by other fun activities to be carried out at home.*

In addition to these events, schools prioritise particular aspects of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum for the final months of the school year. As with all curricular areas, schools now need to identify what can and cannot be delivered effectively through distance learning. Schools should note the following when making decisions around the provision of SPHE to the end of the school year.

- **Stay Safe:** It is recommended that the Stay Safe programme would not be taught remotely at this time, but that it would be prioritised instead in term one of 2020/2021. For pupils transferring to post-primary school who have not accessed Stay Safe for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class, the relevant post-primary schools should be

informed of the remaining areas of learning that have yet to be completed so that these can be prioritised as part of the SPHE programme for first-year students.

- **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE):** Schools should decide what aspects of the RSE programme are appropriate for distance learning and prioritise those being omitted for the new school year. In order to address teaching and learning about puberty for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils, schools can refer parents to the [RSE tip sheet for parents](#) on the PDST website and to the [HSE website](#) where copies of Busy Bodies can be ordered for use at home. While schools may not feel it is possible to deliver this aspect of the curriculum remotely, equipping parents with these resources could be valuable for their children as it can facilitate and support conversations about puberty at home.
- **Personal safety:** Now that the summer holidays are approaching, it is important that personal safety and safety issues including those relating to water, being in the park or playground or on the farm are explored as part of the SPHE programme.

*Example 9: A school in Connacht has decided that teaching and learning for each week in June will be based on a theme relating to safety from the SPHE curriculum, including farm safety, road safety and cycling safety. These themes will inform learning activities across the curriculum.*

### Managing transitions

At this stage of the school year, teachers usually begin to focus in particular on supporting the junior infant children who will be joining the school in the next academic year, as well as the children who will be leaving the school to start the next stage of their education.

- **Transitions into primary school:** While the usual process for transitions into primary school may not be possible at present, schools have started to look at alternatives:
  - **Record a video<sup>6</sup>:** Include a virtual tour of the school so that the children can familiarise themselves with the building, introductions to key people in the school, or share a social story with photographs about a child who started school in September 2019 telling their key experiences in the first few weeks.
  - **Learn about the children:** Communicate with the Early Years (EY) practitioners in feeder pre-schools to learn about the children and to establish if they can share key information on the children's learning and development with the school. Use the information provided in the

---

<sup>6</sup> It is important that due consideration is given to data protection matters when using or circulating recorded material.

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 'Mo Scéal' documents if available from the EY setting. Ask parents to send short videos / audio clips of the children telling the class teacher about themselves. For children with SEN or additional needs, engage with parents and seek available information related to the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) of support for children with disabilities attending preschool and/or professional reports relating to children's support needs.
- **Review the pupil enrolment forms** to ensure that the school is informed about the specific needs or requirements of individual pupils and that the necessary resources or accommodations are in place to cater for any identified needs in September, insofar as possible.
  - **Prepare a virtual information session for parents** similar to what would normally be done face to face in the school.

*Example 10: A primary school in Ulster has explored new ways of supporting the incoming junior infants. A dedicated email group for all families with children due to enrol in September was established and the junior infant teacher and the principal have been communicating with the parents through this email. The teacher of junior infants produced a video for the families, introducing herself to the new pupils and a PowerPoint presentation with voice over, including photographs of the teachers, the school building and the junior infant classroom in particular, was also provided.*

- **Within-school transitions:** Teachers within each school should ensure that relevant aspects of monthly progress records and assessment data are shared with colleagues as relevant<sup>7</sup> to ensure that when children begin working in a new class, the new teacher has the relevant information to provide effective teaching and learning in as seamless a manner as possible. In the interest of continuity, consideration might be given to the current class teacher continuing with their class where possible as they proceed to the next class level. Consideration might also be given to leaving the composition of class groups as they were where resources allow and subject to school policy. Student Support plans, where in place, should also be formally reviewed and information shared as appropriate with new teachers.
- **July provision:** The Department intends to run a summer programme along the lines of the traditional Extended School Year Programme (July Provision) for children with complex needs. The programme would have to take account of the public health restrictions in place and the Roadmap for reopening Society and Business published by Government on 1 May. A number of options are being

---

<sup>7</sup> Schools should be cognisant of data protection requirements if monthly progress records and assessment data are shared in digital format with colleagues.

considered and there will be consultation with stakeholders. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

- **Retention of pupils in the same grade:** Circular 32/2003 outlines exceptional circumstances in which a pupil might be considered for retention in the same grade for two school years. The arrangements outlined in this circular remain in place. In general, gaps in pupils' learning arising solely due to the emergency closure of schools should not result in a pupil repeating a year. When pupils have started back in school, the principal and teachers can assess their needs and adapt their teaching programme so that any gaps in their learning resulting from the emergency closure of schools can be addressed. For the vast majority of pupils, this will ensure progression is as seamless a manner as possible. Outside of this, schools should process requests from parents for pupils to repeat a year in the usual manner in accordance with [Circular 32/2003](#).
- **Transition from primary to post-primary school:** Liaising with the new post-primary schools of children who are leaving the school for the next stage of their education is important. This transition can be managed as follows:
  - **Education passport:** Schools should use the Education Passport materials developed by the [NCCA](#), including the child and parent forms, as usual this year. The passports should be retained in the primary school until the post-primary school principal or designated person who has responsibility for initiating the pupil information transfer sends a written request for the children's report cards. Standardised test scores from 2nd class, 4th class and 6th class are usually contained in the report. However, for the 2019/20 school year, standardised test scores for 2nd, 4th and for 5th class, where tests were administered, should be provided. This will provide the post-primary school with useful information about the trend in test performance over a period of time.
  - **Continuum of Support:** In line with the NEPS Continuum of Support and the individual pupil's support plan, sixth class pupils, including pupils with identified special educational needs (SEN), may require additional support in preparing for their transition to post-primary school or to special school/special class placements in September 2020. To ensure that the needs of these pupils are identified and supported, primary school principals should assign special education teachers to these individual pupils to implement a transition plan that takes into account the particular concerns identified by the pupils, parents and teachers. Good communication with the post-primary school and external professional agencies such as NEPS, Network Disability Teams, Primary Care Services and CAHMS would be helpful in this regard. NEPS have a range of resources to support transitions, available [here](#).
  - **Supporting parents in communicating with post-primary schools:** Parents should be encouraged to communicate with the relevant post-

primary schools, to familiarise themselves with the school websites and ensure they are up to date with any communications that have been sent by the post-primary schools. Where a pupil does not have a confirmed place in a post-primary school for September 2020, schools should assist parents and where possible, make contact with or provide contact details for the relevant Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) or the local SENO in relation to specialist placements.

**Using the additional supports available in DEIS schools:** In DEIS schools, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinators play an important role in supporting transitions at all stages, providing parents with information, resources, advice, confirming school places, etc. School Completion Programme (SCP) co-ordinators also play a key role in supporting primary to post primary transition of pupils in DEIS schools, through universal transition programmes to more targeted individual support.

- **Transitions for pupils with SEN:** Transitions between educational settings can be a difficult time for pupils with SEN and their families. The Department acknowledges that school level transition planning for these pupils will have been well advanced prior to the school closures. Schools are requested to contact pupils, parents and other relevant agencies to prioritise finalising this transition planning for pupils with SEN, including

- Pupils with SEN starting in the school next year
- Pupils with SEN moving between mainstream and special class settings

A number of useful resources are available from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), NEPS and the NCCA. Guidelines on Moving from Primary to Post-Primary School from the NCSE are available [here](#). NCSE Guidelines on Moving between Mainstream and Special Settings are available [here](#). NCCA Guidance on Education Passports is available [here](#).

## Using Technology

Digital technologies have become the primary medium by which schools communicate with their pupils and staff, as most teachers and families have good access to devices and internet coverage. Teachers have invested significant time and energy in upskilling in this area, and the impact of such approaches to educational provision have proven to be very effective in progressing children's learning. However, due to a range of factors, the use of technology has not always been possible for individual teachers and pupils. In these situations, schools should critically reflect on how distance learning can be provided in the absence of technology, with a view to providing equitable access to teaching, learning and assessment opportunities for all pupils. Schools should look at the most effective ways of communicating with all pupils relevant to their context.

*Example 11: In one school in Munster, most of the work is being done using technology. However, for the small number of pupils who have limited access to technology, the school has been supported by a local newsagent, who print off the materials that are sent to them from the teacher and specific parents collect the work from there.*

*Example 12: A junior and senior school in Munster have collaborated to create a TV channel on YouTube. Each week, a one hour programme is uploaded to the channel with a selection of mini-lessons produced by the teachers for their classes. These videos form the basis of some of the tasks that are provided to the pupils to progress their learning.*

The recent allocation of additional funding for ICT can be considered in supporting this equality of access. The relevant circulars are available at [Circular 0031 2020 \(ICT Grant\)](#) and [Circular 0032 2020 \(ICT Top-Up Grant\)](#). To support the continued use of technology, the PDST have produced an [overview video](#) of the range of resources available on their website. Schools are advised to ensure that online accounts and virtual learning platforms are suspended for the summer holidays in order to maintain online security.

## Keeping up to date

### Primary Curriculum Framework

The NCCA published the draft Primary Curriculum Framework for consultation in February 2020. It is very important that teachers take the opportunity to contribute to the consultation to ensure that the final version reflects the views of those who will be tasked with enacting the framework in classrooms. Teachers can contribute to the consultation in a number of ways, and details of the consultation process are available on the [NCCA website](#).

### Primary Language Curriculum

Teachers are reminded of the range of supports available on the PDST, NCSE and NCCA websites to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB). While it is likely that the next phase of sustained support for the PLC/CTB will not recommence until January 2021, the PDST/NCSE will continue to provide webinars to support teachers' practice. It is anticipated that there will be no school closures for engaging with these webinars in the period September-December 2020. Further communication regarding PDST/NCSE support for the PLC/CTB will issue in due course.

### CPD for teachers

School management should support all teachers to engage with available resources to build the skills needed for delivery of teaching in a virtual or remote learning



environment. The Teacher Education Support Services continue to be available to support schools, principals and teachers at this time. Information on each service is set out below.

- **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST):** The PDST continues to be available to primary and post-primary teachers and school leaders for advice and support at this time. Schools also have continuing access to PDST Advisors for customised and sustained school support by phone, on line meetings and e-mail. The dedicated primary section of the website is updated on an ongoing basis. In addition, there is a new dedicated webpage of curated content to support schools and teachers engaged in distance learning in order to provide continuity to pupils. This page can be accessed at: [pdst.ie/distancelearning](https://pdst.ie/distancelearning). It contains links to:
  - A special on-line course created specifically to support teachers during the Covid-19 closures, as well as signposts to various platforms and resources that can be used to support teaching and learning remotely
  - Specific portals designed to support Health and Wellbeing, School Leadership, Literacy and Mathematics
  - Newly produced PDST webinars to support teachers' familiarity with the PLC/CTB
  - PDST/Teaching Council Webinars
- **Education Support Centres:** Education Support Centres are continuing to engage with the schools in their areas and in particular with school principals, to enable schools to access supports to aid their teachers and pupils during this crisis. Contact details for each of the Centres and the supports they are providing can be located at [esci.ie](https://esci.ie)
- **The Centre for School Leadership (CSL):** The CSL continues to support primary school principals at this time. Mentoring support and coaching for school leaders is provided by phone and email. The eight universities and colleges facilitating the CSL Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership have moved all learning online. The [CSL website](#) is updated on a regular basis with links to publications and research to assist school leaders.
- **Other useful websites:** Other useful websites containing up to date information for teachers and schools include the [Teaching Council website](#) and the [National Induction Programme for Teachers \(NIPT\) website](#).

## Arrangements for the re-opening of schools

To assist with the development of contingency plans for the re-opening and operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing and other public health requirements, the Department is engaging with relevant stakeholders and experts from within the education sector and the health sector. This work will be based on the [National Return to Work Safely Protocol](#) that was published by Government and will also

be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions. A core objective of the contingency plans will be to ensure that schools and other education settings can re-open and operate in a safe manner that is consistent with public health advice.

Following consultation, currently underway with the education partners, guidance will issue to schools as soon as possible on the logistical and curricular arrangements to be put in place to facilitate the phased re-opening of schools. This guidance will provide a framework for individual schools to develop plans for the re-opening of school in accordance with their own circumstances, the context and needs of their staff and students and in compliance with public health guidelines.