An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Information Note **TC 0011/2021**

To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary Schools
And the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards of Community National Schools

COVID-19: Full Re-Opening of Primary Schools
Arrangements for Special Needs Assistants employed in recognised Primary Schools

1. Introduction

1.1 The full re-opening of primary schools will take place on 15th March, 2021.

1.2 During the partial re-opening period, temporary leave arrangements were made available to Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), so as to provide flexibility in relation to childcare, specifically. These arrangements related to temporary changes to specific terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and the Unpaid Leave Scheme.

1.3 From 15th March, these temporary leave arrangements will no longer be available to SNAs. Therefore, the terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and Unpaid Leave Scheme will apply, as normal.

1.4 This Information Note supersedes Information Note TC 0006/2021 with effect from 15th March, 2021.

2. SNAs at 'High Risk' and 'Very High Risk' of COVID-19

2.1 During the partial re-opening period, an SNA categorised as High Risk (including an SNA over 60 years of age) by the Occupational Health Service (Medmark) was facilitated on a temporary basis, with more flexible working arrangements. This included re-assignment of an SNA to other duties within the school or at home or the re-assignment of SNA roles within the complement of SNAs available to the school.

2.2 From 15th March, these temporary arrangements will no longer be available and therefore an SNA in the High Risk group who is medically fit for work must return to the workplace.

2.3 The latest HSE guidance on the 'very high risk' group is at: https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html.

2.4 The 'very high risk' group is currently advised to cocoon.

2.5 In accordance with DPER guidance, where an SNA has been categorised as Very High Risk by Medmark and is medically fit for work, the employer should prioritise alternative working arrangements to the maximum extent possible e.g. working from home.

2.6 Such SNAs may carry out on a temporary basis, tasks appropriate to the list of duties incorporated at paragraph 12 of Circular 0049/2020 in this respect. This may include supporting pupils who have not returned to school because of medical vulnerability as well as supporting other school staff, including other SNAs, teachers or administrative staff. These duties include:

- Advice on what typically works for a child in school.
- Demonstration/advice/training on strategies to support the child's needs.
- Support to develop a schedule to structure the child's day.
- Help with provision of social stories to support their understanding of the ongoing health emergency.
- Support, advice and reinforcement to address behaviours that challenge.
- Work on providing educational or therapeutic resources / materials in collaboration with the teacher and substitute SNA.
- Supporting, engaging with and monitoring very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend school, using online technology or telephone support, if online systems are not available.
- Participating in staff meetings and all other normal meetings using online technology or by telephone, if online systems are not available.

2.7 Where an SNA has been categorised by Medmark as Very High Risk and is not attending the workplace, the employer may appoint a substitute, paid by the Department/ETB. A contract awarded to a substitute to cover for a Very High Risk SNA, should make clear reference to the fact that the appointment may have to be terminated in the event of the SNA returning to the workplace earlier than expected.

2.8 An SNA categorised by Medmark as being in the 'Very High Risk' group and who is medically fit to work from home, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system.

2.9 Please refer to paragraph 10 of Circular 0049/2020 in relation to the full working arrangements for the Very High Risk group.

3. Pregnant SNAs at higher risk of COVID-19

3.1 The HSE has recently published guidance for the education sector in respect of pregnant employees.

3.2 A pregnant SNA is categorised in the High Risk category in the HSE guidance. The Department is currently seeking clarifications from the HSE on this guidance.

3.3 In the interim and pending such clarification, a pregnant SNA should continue to work remotely on a temporary basis.

3.4 In this regard, a pregnant SNA who is facilitated to work remotely, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system. The employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace the pregnant SNA in the classroom.

4. Employee Assistance Service

4.1 The Employee Assistance Service is available as a supportive resource for employees. The free phone confidential helpline is 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

5. Circulation of Information Note

5.1 Please ensure that copies of this Information Note are provided to all members of the Board of Management/Education and Training Boards and its contents are brought to the attention of all SNAs in your employment including those on leave of absence.

5.2 All queries should initially be brought to the attention of the employer who may wish to consult with their representative organisation. Any further queries may be directed to the Department at the following e-mail address: teachersna@education.gov.ie

Clare Butler
Principal Officer
Teacher/SNA Terms & Conditions

Padraig Maloney
Principal Officer
Payroll Division

08 March, 2021