



Important Information regarding school administration issues during the current public health emergency

All schools will remain closed to students until 19 April 2020. Under new public health advice all schools will be closed to staff until 12 April except in special limited circumstances. The decision has been taken following advice from the NPHET (National Public Health Emergency Team) as part of efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19.

The Department really appreciates the enormous effort under way by schools to provide for continuity of learning for students. In addition to providing for the continuity of teaching and learning during this time and in order to ensure that the disruption to the operation of schools is minimised as far as possible, it is important to continue to progress other administration work, thus ensuring that schools recover quickly and are ready to reopen in accordance with public health advice.

Planning and preparatory work for the 2020/21 school year

This part of the school year is a key period for planning and preparatory work to facilitate a smooth start to the following school year.

Such planning and preparatory work includes the operation of school enrolment processes, teacher allocation and redeployment processes, teacher appointment processes and also other matters such as engagement with the Planning and Building Unit in relation to school accommodation requirements etc.

The requirements of the COVID-19 national emergency including the current closure of schools impacts on the capacity to undertake this planning and preparatory work in the normal way.

It will require flexibility and everyone working together during this current period to ensure that planning and preparatory work for the 2020/21 school year is done in as timely a fashion as is possible within the current constraints.

The following information and guidance is issued to assist schools with queries and provide consistency across the school system. The Department will be providing further advice as issues arise.

1. School buildings

Where school management has opted to continue with school meals programme, school buildings can be used if necessary to facilitate operations relating to distribution.

We are aware that some schools have been approached regarding the use of their buildings or other facilities to contribute towards efforts to combat the spread of the virus. Any positive contributions that can be made by the sector to help in the current crisis are very welcome. However, where schools have been approached by the HSE or other state organisations requesting the use of their facilities to assist with limiting the impact of Covid-19, schools must first consider the length of the time the school will be required by the HSE or other organisations and any impact on the reopening of the school to staff and pupils should also be considered in responding to such requests.

If you have queries in regard to a request by a State body to use your school, please email schoolproperty@education.gov.ie to discuss in advance. The Department will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible.

In addition, the Planning and Building Unit will engage in the coming weeks with the relevant School Patrons and management to develop and implement contingency

arrangements in the event of an impact on the delivery of necessary school accommodation for the 2020/21 school year as a result of the COVID-19.

If your school has personal protective equipment (PPE) that is not required at present, this can be offered to the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), which is coordinating all offers of this nature so that equipment can be deployed across emergency services if required. This can be done here www.gov.ie/covidsupplies

2. Regular monitoring of school communications

It is of critical importance that schools continue to monitor and respond as appropriate to correspondence, communications and queries from the Department and from parents/students and others. Failure to do so will lead to unnecessary disruption to teaching and learning for students and to the important administrative functions to support the functioning of the school and the future reopening of the school.

Some school employees may require documentation in order to access the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection supports. This service should be facilitated.

3. Board of Management meetings

Alternative solutions will be required for Boards of Management to meet and continue to operate and make important decisions in relation to the functioning of the schools particularly in these challenging times. The Department is aware that some school management bodies have provided guidance on conducting board meetings in the context of the current crisis.

Section 13.3 (g) of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019 – 2023 provides for the use of conference calls to facilitate Board meetings

This is not necessarily restricted to the use of phones, other on-line media platforms can be considered once the Board is satisfied that appropriate security measures are

in place to protect confidentiality. Where phones and other on-line media platforms have been used to host the meeting, this should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The normal requirements for confidentiality, continue to apply.

Section 13.3 (c) of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2019 – 2023 sets out the arrangements for meetings to remain quorate for their duration.

Note re Child Protection Oversight Report

For the duration of these emergency measures, the requirement to provide a Child Protection Oversight Report (CPOR) will not apply to board meetings held remotely whether by video conference or teleconference. This is because it is not possible to meet the requirement to provide to board members the specified documentation at the board meeting. The Principal must continue to maintain the relevant data and records for the CPOR which shall be provided at the next face to face meeting of the board. The data in that report must reflect cases arising since the previous CPOR was provided to the board.

4. Section 29 appeals

Having regard to the current public health guidance, the Department is putting in place alternative arrangements for Section 29 appeals during this period.

Consultation will take place with the education partners on these arrangements and the finalised details will be published on the Department website. Schools that are involved in an appeal will be also contacted directly by the Section 29 Administration Unit with details of the arrangements.

The Section 29 Administration Unit is now accepting appeals by email to section29@education.gov.ie. The Unit will also be communicating with schools and appellants by telephone and email as far as possible.

5. Counting of school days for the purposes of suspensions and permanent exclusions

Boards should be aware that the current period during which schools are closed to pupils shall not be counted as “school days” for the purpose of section 24 (4) of the Education Welfare Act 2000 which provides that a student shall not be expelled from a school before the passing of 20 school days following the receipt of a notification by an educational welfare officer of the board’s opinion that the student should be expelled from that school.

The current period during which schools are closed to pupils shall also not be counted in calculating cumulative days of suspension for the purposes of an appeal under Section 29 (1) (b) of the Education Act 1998. Section 29(1) (b) provides for an appeal against a decision by a board to suspend a student from the school for a cumulative period of 20 school days in any one school year.

Important Note: Schools must ensure that all students, including those suspended/suspended pending a decision to expel at the time the decision was made to close schools to students, are provided with continuity of teaching and learning and other appropriate supports during this period.

6. School admissions policies and enrolments under the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018

Admission policies must be in place, in line with the requirements in the 2018 Admissions Act and the timelines previously advised.

In relation to the requirement to consult with parents, patrons and staff of the schools etc., on admission policies and on other matters, school websites, other on-line platforms, post, and texts to alert individuals to the consultation process or a combination of options, can be used. See also section 4 also in relation to board meetings.

7. Allocation and redeployment of teaching resources

We need to work together to ensure that schools have appropriate levels of staff in place for the new school year. It is important therefore that the arrangements which have been communicated directly to all schools in recent days are noted and acted upon by schools in relation to the allocation of teaching staff to schools for the 2020/21 school year. By working together, we can aim to minimise disruption where possible, and in particular any impact on the new school year.

Post Primary

Teacher Allocation staff are currently processing the curricular concession applications and will continue to do so over the next number of weeks. The Department is working to complete the process within normal timeframes. It is important that the following points are also noted and acted upon by schools in relation to the teacher allocation process for the 2020/21 school year:

- Teacher allocation circulars for the 2020/21 school year were published on the Department website in February (circular 13/14/15/2020) with a closing date of 16th March for all Curricular Concession applications/CID forms and Redeployment forms.

- All schools should have also returned their Staffing Position Form (SP1) at this stage.

In relation to redeployment forms, we are aware that some schools are finalising same this week.

As already advised outstanding curricular concession forms were due to be submitted to Allocations Section by **Monday 30th March**. Any outstanding applications should be submitted by the end of this week.

- In some instances, the late withdrawal of a career break application may lead to redeployment implications for a school. Schools that have a late withdrawal of a career break and where this subsequently affects the overall staffing of the school for the 2020/21 school year, are required to complete the necessary redeployment forms and return to Teacher Allocations section. The redeployment details and the necessary redeployment forms are

available in the relevant Teacher Allocation circulars on the Department website i.e. (circular 13/14/15 of 2020).

Please note that in instances where schools have late withdrawal of career breaks, the Principal should contact Teacher Allocations section with the relevant details to allocations@education.gov.ie (*As per Chapter Seven of circular 54/2019 - https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0054_2019.pdf#page=102 other than in exceptional circumstances, a teacher won't be allowed to withdraw their application for career break later than 14 April*)

Primary and Special Schools

The date for returning all forms has been extended until **Friday 3rd April**.

- As you know the staffing arrangements were published on the Department website on 5th March 2020 (circular 18/2020) with an original return date for all forms of Friday 27th March 2020 (now extended to 3rd April).

In relation to the return of the following forms:

1. Main redeployment panel forms
2. CID declaration forms
3. Staffing Appeals forms and the
4. Notification of vacancies to the relevant Panel Operator

Schools have the option to email a scanned signed copy of the Main Panel forms and the Staff Planning Form to the following Department address at primaryallocations@education.gov.ie. A copy of the original should be retained in the school for future reference.

- In addition all schools will receive the Staff Planning Form next week and the required return date for these forms is Wednesday 22nd April.

This closing date is to facilitate schools that may have to manage late withdrawals of career breaks by applicants

(*As per Chapter Seven of circular 54/2019 -*

https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0054_2019.pdf#page=102 other than in exceptional

circumstances, a teacher won't be allowed to withdraw their application for career break later than 14 April)

In instances where schools have late withdrawal of career breaks and this affects the redeployment process or CID entitlements within the school, the Principal should contact Primary Teacher Allocations section with the details at primaryallocations@education.gov.ie.

SNAs

Following consultation with the education partners, arrangements for allocation of SNAs to schools for the next school year are advancing and a separate notification to schools on this matter will be issued as soon as possible.

8. School Transport –

Special Educational Needs (SEN) School Transport Scheme

Applications

In order to ensure continuity during this period of restrictions for the benefit of children who require SEN Transport, the National Council for Special Education and the Department are developing plans for a temporary process to allow for SEN Transport applications to continue to be submitted at this time. Further information will issue on this in due course.

Applications which have been submitted up to close of business on Friday 27th March are currently being processed.

Primary and Post-Primary School Transport Scheme Applications

It should be noted that in regard to the Primary and Post-Primary School Transport Schemes, applications for School Transport for the 2020/2021 school year are currently open and can be accessed online at www.buseireann.ie/schooltransport . . The closing date for applications is **Friday 24th April 2020**.

9. Working together:

The Department appreciates the work of all school staff to try and minimise the impact of the current public health crisis on the students and the overall school system. As you will understand, the staff of the Department are also implementing public health advice and this has resulted in some changed work practices in the Department which mean that it may not always be possible to answer telephones or deal with post in the normal manner. Therefore, we would request schools, where possible, to use email to contact the Department. (ETB schools should contact their ETB in the first instance). We will endeavour to respond to email communication as quickly as possible in order to provide the advice, support and guidance required by school authorities at this challenging time.

The Department is happy to make greater use of email communication with all Principals/Schools at this time. It would be appreciated if Principals could respond to communications as soon as possible given the challenges we are all currently working under. If scanned documents are submitted, a copy of original documentation should be retained for future reference. The Department will continue to work to try and provide advice, support and guidance to the school system during this time and to be as responsive as possible to any queries received.

School Governance Section

Department of Education and Skills

1 April 2020