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MEMORANDUM E (20) 189 (C)

FROM: PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

DATE: 6 AUGUST 2020

TO: EXECUTIVE COLLEAGUES

FINAL EXECUTIVE PAPER - EDUCATION RESTART UPDATE AND REVISED ASSUMPTIONS

Purpose of Paper

1. The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide Executive colleagues with an update on Education Restart planning (following my **18 June 2020** paper);
- Seek the Executive's agreement to a more ambitious approach to Education Restart planning; and
- Explain the rationale for an updated position, the approach to be adopted and the key actions to be delivered.

Executive Summary

2. Colleagues will be aware of the low level of Covid-19 community transmission and the gradual relaxation of restrictions in many other areas of society. Colleagues will also appreciate that the global position in terms of re-opening schools is regularly changing. In recent days, governments in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have all signalled their intention to re-open schools with normal patterns of attendance for all pupils in the coming weeks, in time for the new school term.

3. The New School Day Guidance¹ published by my Department on 19 June 2020 was based on planning assumptions for an August 2020 restart. Some of the key elements within that guidance included:

- The start of term would be 24 August 2020 for Primary 7 (for transition), Year 12 and Year 14 (for preparation for examinations) and for vulnerable children across all year groups. Schools will be opening from 17 August 2020 for preparation purposes.
- Staggered arrival and pick up times to limit interactions.

¹ DE New School Day Guidance

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- Social distancing and frequent hygiene measures will be introduced throughout the school.
 - Allowance for new Attendance Patterns where required in order to adhere social distancing requirements:
 - Minimum 40% face to face teaching time within Primary schools.
 - Minimum 50% face to face teaching time within Post-Primary schools.
 - Where pupils cannot resume normal patterns of attendance a 'blended learning' model will be implemented.
 - Schools are encouraged to maximise the school building and re-purpose, where feasible, non-teaching areas as teaching space
4. School leaders have been asked to consider this strategic guidance and put this into practice in their own schools to the best of their ability.
5. It was always envisaged that this guidance would be 'agile' and subject to review and revision to reflect the prevailing public health position and up to date scientific advice. I have consistently stated that the re-opening of schools will be led by evidence, this remains the case. I met with the Minister of Health, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and the Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) last week and briefly provided an overview of current thinking on the resumption of normal patterns of operation and attendance and the approach I intend to pursue. I now seek the Executive's agreement that the New School Day Guidance is updated to reflect a more ambitious approach to Education Restart planning. All linked guidance will also be reviewed and updated as necessary.
6. This paper explains that a resumption of normal patterns of operation and attendance of schools by early September is justified by;
- The low levels of Covid-19 community transmission;
 - The negative impact of continued disruption on educational standards, attainment and delivery of qualifications;
 - The potential for inequity of provision across pupils in Northern Ireland and in comparison to counterparts in England, Scotland, Wales and Republic of Ireland;
 - The ongoing impact on the well-being of our children and young people, including our most vulnerable learners;
 - The practical benefits that re-opening schools will have on wider society, allowing parents to return to work; and
 - The experience and approach in other jurisdictions.

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7. My strategic objective has always been to achieve maximum face-to-face in class teaching time for all pupils, where safe to do so, at the earliest opportunity – I now believe this is possible sooner than previously expected.
8. **I am therefore minded to revisit existing guidance with the view that all schools and settings should return to more normal patterns of operation and attendance, in line with standard legislative requirements, for all pupils during week commencing 31 August 2020.** The existing guidance relating to priority cohorts returning on 24 August would remain with schools resuming normal patterns of operation and attendance during the following week.
9. I should make clear, however, this does not represent return to business as usual. We are still operating in a pandemic and therefore the return to normal patterns of operation and attendance will be accompanied by a range of hygiene and public health protocols in order to lower the risks associated with the infection and spread of Covid-19 therefore, the 'new normal' for schools will be different to what schools, parents and pupils are used to. These hygiene and public health protocols will endeavour to lower the risk of pupils attending schools with symptoms of the virus and of onward transmission. In cases where there are confirmed positive case(s) within a school, pupil records should allow for a rapid response and comprehensive track and trace of contacts to identify further potential cases and effective management of any potential outbreak. The whole school community should be vigilant for the symptoms of COVID-19, and understand what actions they should take if someone develops them, either onsite or offsite.
10. Even by adopting the measures outlined in this paper there will be a continuing impact on the design and delivery of the school day. This may include the way the school day is structured, the delivery of extra-curricular activities and the management of Area Learning Communities or Shared Education programmes. These issues will need to be considered in due course, however the overarching principle in delivering the new school day is ensuring the safety of the pupil and maintaining effective curriculum delivery. Pupils and staff must be safe and confident to return, their well-being protected and educational outcomes maintained.
11. For a resumption of more normal patterns of operation and attendance for all pupils, the following is required:
 - Removal-Relaxing of the strict requirement for social distancing amongst pupils in school and on dedicated home to school transport where it is not possible. Social distancing between adults will remain. It will also remain between adults and children insofar as it is practical. Schools will be encouraged to continue to implement as much social distancing as is practical, particularly in regard to older children and where physical capacity

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and curriculum delivery permit. However, on the return to school, the overriding provision will be a full class return with all appropriate and practical protections put in place. This return will be on a full time basis of 5 days a week for every pupil. ~~(As a precautionary approach, post-primary schools should encourage distancing between pupils where and when possible within capacity and delivery restraints.)~~

- The use of appropriate public health protocols and mitigations such as hygiene, cleaning and protective bubbles (where possible).
- The adherence to PHA guidelines on use of face masks [or face coverings](#).
- Appropriate guidance on managing staff and pupils with underlying health concerns.
- Agreed and effective processes on managing localised outbreaks, including PHA led track, trace and test programmes.

12. It is understandable that there may still be some concerns regarding the resumption of [more](#) normal patterns of operation and attendance. There may also be the need for specific action to manage and protect staff and pupils with underlying health conditions – this will be especially necessary for pupils given the proposed [removal-relaxing of strict](#) social distancing [requirements](#). There will also be the need to agree processes with PHA on a suitable response to localised outbreaks in regards to track, trace and testing.

13. It is, therefore, essential that my Department continues to engage with school leaders and trade unions on guidance to schools which must be compatible with the position of the Public Health Agency.

Education Restart Programme – update position

14. In recent weeks, my Department has continued to work with stakeholders to develop and publish a range of guidance documents to support the safe and effective re-opening of schools. In addition, there have been significant developments since my 18 June paper on issues such as summer schools, childcare support, free school meal support and pupil support services. This work is focussed on mitigating the impact of the disruption and ensuring the education system is well positioned to restart. An overview of some of the key departmental outputs is provided at **Annex A**.

Rationale for revised approach

15. As described previously, I now recommend that my Department's guidance to schools is revisited to ensure all schools and settings return to more normal patterns of operation and attendance in line with legislative requirements, for all

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pupils. This return will be expected during week commencing 31 August 2020, with priority cohorts in school from 24 August as previously stated.

16. Should the Executive be content with this direction of travel, my Department's New School Day guidance would be revised by officials through engagement with school leaders, trade unions and cleared through CMO and PHA. It will, however, remain essential that the position is kept under review and that my Department proactively plan for further disruption or localised outbreaks.

17. The rationale for this approach is outlined below.

Public Health position

18. The return of more normal operations in schools will be guided by the prevailing public health position and informed by scientific evidence on the transmission and prevalence of the virus. Ultimately, it is for the Minister of Health and CMO to advise on the wider public health position. I would also like to put on record my thanks and appreciation to the Minister, the CMO, the CSA and their staff as we have considered issues relating to education restart.

19. I would, however, draw attention to the recent paper prepared by the Children's Task and Finish Group (TFC) and Government Office for Science (GOS), published by SAGE on 24 July.²

20. The paper details the risks associated with reopening settings in England in September. Some of the key messages from the paper include;

- There is relatively low immediate risk to children's health from SARS-CoV-2 (high degree of confidence), with evidence indicating that children/adolescents have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection (low confidence) and clinical disease (high confidence) than adults.
- There is some (but limited) evidence that children play a lesser role in transmission than adults.
- In countries where schools have been open for some time, data suggests that school opening has made little difference to community transmission.

21. The SAGE paper highlights the need to balance the public health risks relating to the re-opening of schools with the risks associated with continuing to keep schools closed (mental health and well-being risks and impact on attainment). The paper provides useful information on key risk mitigation strategies, many of which my Department has already considered within its guidance, such as regular cleaning, adjusting physical layouts in classrooms, use of segmentation (or bubbles) where

² TFC: Risks associated with the reopening of education settings in September, 8 July 2020

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possible and ensuring maximum distancing between older pupils (within the age group and with others) and adults (with other adults and with pupils).

Educational impact

22. One of my primary concerns is the long term educational impact on children and young people as a result of a prolonged disruption to face to face teaching. Schools in Northern Ireland adapted quickly to the implications of lockdown making provision for remote learning by providing pupils with a range of hardcopy and online learning materials; finding new ways of keeping in contact with pupils and their families and supporting parents to assist their children with their learning. My Department has produced and disseminated a wide range of high quality support and guidance materials for teachers, parents and learners.

23. However, it is clear from a wide range of local and international research that pupils learn less when they are not in school or when school attendance is reduced. Regular and ongoing access to high quality teaching is key to improving pupil outcomes.

24. In light of current restrictions, many schools have put in place contingency plans to commence blended learning programmes in September 2020. Whilst a blended approach is a useful and vital contingency arrangement, it is not optimal, as it means reduced face-to-face teaching time. Furthermore, whilst many parents and carers were able to provide significant support during the period of school closures, the level of support for blended learning, whilst many are increasingly returning to work, is less certain. It will also be challenging for teachers to continue to deliver high quality remote education provision whilst providing face to face lessons on a full-time (or near full-time) basis. Nonetheless schools should continue to plan for blended or remote learning as a contingency arrangement [or in the exceptional cases where an individual cannot attend school for medical reasons](#).

25. Returning to school on what may be described as a full-time basis has clear educational benefits and is essential for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of learning and children's future ability to learn, and therefore we need to ensure all pupils can return to school sooner rather than later. I would argue that for the vast majority of children, the educational benefits of being back in school full-time far outweigh the low risk from Covid-19.

26. A range of studies and feedback from schools in Northern Ireland has indicated that there have been disparities in engagement throughout the period of remote learning. Many pupils will have coped well with engaging with remote learning activities. There are many accounts of pupils looking out for and helping others or

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developing new skills and interests during lockdown. However, others have struggled. Pupils face many challenges when learning remotely or in a blended manner, such as distractions when studying online and less regular interaction with teachers and other pupils. Eight per cent of respondents to the Ulster University's Northern Ireland Parent Surveys indicated their child(ren) were completing no schoolwork on a daily basis. Significant disparities in engagement are likely to continue should children return on a part-time basis only. Opportunities to provide enhanced support to vulnerable children and young people will also be more limited.

27. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and more locally, the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement (CREU), have both highlighted the risk that the gains made in closing our attainment gap could be significantly impacted by the lockdown period. This is likely to be further exacerbated if some children continue to access school on a part-time basis only. We know from existing research that regular attendance at school helps children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve and get the best possible start in life.

28. In preparing for the reopening of schools, it has been accepted that the play-based nature of the curriculum at Pre-School and Foundation Stage (Years 1 and 2) and the young age of the pupils makes strict adherence to social distancing requirements difficult. In light of the nature of the curriculum, in particular the need for practical, self-initiated and collaborative play opportunities to be provided within the classroom, it has been recognised that it may not always be possible for schools to maintain 1 metre social distancing requirements between pupils of this age. For older children too, there is a balance to strike between safety and wellbeing. In order to support effective learning, it is important our schools continue to feel natural and normal for pupils when they return.

29. Schools and teachers are to be commended for the significant support and high quality teaching and learning that was delivered across Northern Ireland throughout the period of school closures. Overall, however, it is clear a return to normal patterns of school operation and attendance as quickly as possible would enhance educational opportunities; ensure equal and consistent access to classroom learning for all children and young people; and begin the process of reengaging and supporting many vulnerable children and young people.

Qualifications

30. In addition, pupils in years 11-14 will be returning to school to prepare for GCSE and AS/A level examinations in November 2020 and January and Summer 2021. Schools and teachers have worked tremendously hard to provide these young people with support and high quality learning experiences throughout the period of

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lockdown. However, schools have lost significant teaching and learning time during 2020. Many young people feel worried about their GCSE and A Level courses and how they will cover their programmes of study to achieve their full potential in summer 2021, particularly if they only return to school on a part-time basis. Understandably, school leaders and teachers share these concerns.

31. A return to normal patterns of attendance will minimise any further lost teaching time and help ensure these children and young people are provided with sufficient face-to-face teaching to prepare for GCSE and AS/A-Level examinations.

Equity

32. Linked to the issues detailed above (educational impact and qualifications), I have a concern regarding equity of provision and opportunity.

33. The approach taken by my Department in existing guidance is to require a minimum 40% face to face teaching time in primary schools and 50% in post-primary schools. In practice, this will mean there will be variances in how schools approach the return to schools. The pattern of attendance provided by schools will be dependent on school size and accommodation. This raises issues in regard to equality of access to classroom learning, as some children and young people may have normal patterns of attendance whilst others may have significantly reduced attendance.

34. In addition, if many young people in Northern Ireland return to school on a part-time basis only, they will be at a disadvantage in preparing for public examinations, particularly for English examination boards, when compared to their counterparts in other jurisdictions who are returning on a full-time basis.

35. Therefore, under current planning assumptions, there is potential for significant inequity of education access both within Northern Ireland and in comparison to other jurisdictions. This, in turn, could potentially lead to legal challenge.

Well-being

36. I am also mindful of the potential risks to pupil mental health, welfare and well-being should schools remain closed and routines disrupted. The wellbeing of children and young people is enhanced and their learning outcomes optimised when they feel connected to others and experience safe and trusting relationships. Within the school environment children and young people are taught to learn and have fun, make new friends and experience new things in life, develop awareness of other cultures, achieve and gain qualifications, develop new skills, build confidence and self-esteem and to have the best possible start in life.

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37. As stated previously, there is a balance to strike between wellbeing and safety. I accept that for many children and young people, not being able to attend school since March is likely to have had a detrimental impact for their cognitive and academic development which can affect both current levels of learning and their future ability to learn. The impact is likely to have been particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society.
38. In order to overcome the most detrimental impacts of the lockdown on our children and young people it is imperative that they return to their schools, re-establishing those connections and relationships and re-engaging their cognitive and academic development as quickly as possible.
39. This will be achieved more quickly if schools are as close to the 'normal' routine as possible, in other words as close to a full-time basis as possible. I am concerned that returning pupils to school on a part time basis may, for some pupils, perpetuate the negative impact on their emotional health and wellbeing, as they have had a significant time out of school and a portion of the week spent at home acts as a reminder of the lockdown and makes the connections more difficult to re-establish. This will be especially so for those who find it difficult to adjust to school, as they will find it even harder to acclimatise to a divided week between home and school.
40. As the 2020/21 academic year begins, schools will take forward vitally important work to ensure that after many months away from the school environment children have good emotional health and wellbeing, are engaged and motivated to learn and have the tools and skills they require for learning. A return to normal patterns of attendance will facilitate greater time and opportunity to take forward this work and minimise further disruption to pupils' learning.

Education as an enabler

41. As stated in previous papers in May and June, all pupils returning to face to face learning is key for educational development but also it is essential to enable the recovery of our economy and our society. The return of schools, the provision of adequate childcare provision and a level of employer flexibility is essential to enable a return to work. A partial re-opening of schools and reduced face to face teaching would mean most pupils being at home for 50-60% of the week, with enormous implications for working parents, vast repercussions for both the capacity and cost of the childcare, detrimental limitations on the economy and major impacts on Executive budgets and public finance.

Benchmarking and international experience

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42. Whilst we must consider what is best for our pupils based on the local circumstances and the local health position, it is worth considering how other jurisdictions are approaching the return of education and their experiences of re-opening schools. As stated previously, this is especially the case where young people are taking examinations with English Awarding Organisations.

43. The Executive will wish to note [Annex B](#) which provides a brief summary of the [current position in England, Scotland, Wales, Republic of Ireland and other international experience in terms of education restart \(accurate at 5 August 2020\)](#).

44. The Executive will note that governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Republic of Ireland all intend to fully re-open schools and return to normal patterns of attendance. Whilst approaches in these jurisdictions will vary somewhat there are some consistent themes in relation to mitigating actions to make schools safer such as use of consistent groups / segments or bubbles; social distancing between staff; enhanced cleaning and hygiene practices; utilising space effectively; and managing the flow of staff and pupils within schools. My revised guidance will learn from approaches elsewhere as appropriate and apply in the Northern Ireland context.

45. There is some limited international experience of how schools have re-opened in other nations and the impact on transmission of Covid-19. In recent international surveys, 15 countries responding to questions relating to evidence linking re-opening of schools to transmission rates. Of these 15 countries, 11 stated that there was no evidence linking the re-opening of schools to an increase in the national transmission rate. 7 of the 11 countries reported that schools had shut due to clusters or localised outbreaks although there has been no evidence to suggest that the outbreaks originated in schools (Beijing in China, Singapore, Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Portugal).

46. My Department will continue to monitor international experiences of schools re-opening and the impact on transmission rates.

Approach

47. Based on the rationale provided previously, I am recommending that the Executive agree that my Department revisits its existing New School Day Guidance to reflect the following. Ultimately, CMO advice will be required on each of these issues.

Social distancing.

48. Firstly, while schools should continue to implement as much social distancing as is practical and where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit, **strict**

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social distancing requirements between all pupils will be relaxed from a specific distance to the best spacing that can be achieved. Schools can therefore facilitate the whole class to return with appropriate and practical protections put in place. Strict social distancing requirements between all pupils will be removed, but will remain in place between adults and, as far as is practicable between adults and pupils. Schools can obviously continue to implement as much social distancing as is practical and where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit. However,

47.49. Therefore, where current requirements cannot enable a whole class to return the overriding provision will be a full class return with all appropriate and practical protections put in place.

48.50. It is self-evident that any requirements for strict social distancing amongst pupils will hinder a more normal return to operations and attendance patterns and limit many school buildings to 50% face to face teaching time, or less. I am content that based on the medical advice and considering the approaches in other countries that strict social distancing can be removed amongst pupils, providing other risk mitigation strategies are in place.

49.51. Social distancing will be retained between adults, and insofar as is reasonably possible between adults and pupils. I appreciate there will be circumstances where social distancing between adults and pupils will be practically difficult and this will require some further consideration e.g. classroom assistants.

Protective bubbles

50.52. Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action where possible.

Protective bubbles will be used to segment pupils into consistent group or groups as far as is practicable. The purpose of using consistent groups is to limit the number of different interactions in any single day. This will reduce the risk of transmission and improve the ability to focus the tracking and tracing of the virus in circumstances where there is a positive test. This should also reduce the need for whole school closures.

51.53. The approach will vary depending on age group. In pre-schools, primary and special schools, it is envisaged that in most cases a relatively straightforward approach can be adopted. A class will act as a single consistent group or bubble, with minimal prolonged interaction with other classes within the school.

52.54. At post-primary, the nature of curricular delivery makes it more difficult to implement a single consistent class group or bubble. It may be possible in some schools for Years 8-10, however, others will require limited mixing into different class groups to adhere to legal requirements for practical subjects. For Years 11-

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14, it is recognised that a single consistent class group will not be possible, as pupils will be in mixed classes based on their choice of examination courses but schools will be encouraged to keep movements and interactions within these year groups to a minimum. However, schools will be asked to avoid prolonged interactions between different year groups (for example in canteens or assembly halls).

53.55. It is important to emphasise that the use of consistent groups or bubbles is not an all-or-nothing approach and will bring public health benefits even if logistics mean they can be implemented only partially (e.g. with groups maintained for the majority of the day but some limited mixing into wider groups permitted for practical subjects or transport.).

Hygiene and cleaning measures

54.56. **Hygiene and cleaning measures will remain as previously detailed in guidance and are viewed as both vital and non-negotiable.** Staff and pupils will wash their hands as soon as they arrive at school and regularly through the day. School cleaning will be carried out in accordance with Public Health Agency (PHA) Guidance and routine cleaning will take place daily, with regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. Schools should also remove unnecessary items from the classroom.

Face ~~masks~~ coverings

55.57. There are clear distinctions between face masks (PPE) and face coverings. Consideration must be given to the practicalities of mandating the use of ~~facemasks~~ face coverings for children and young people, especially younger pupils/ many of whom are unlikely to be able to manage ~~masks~~ coverings independently. Pupils are frequently in school for more than six hours and will have to remove ~~masks~~ coverings to eat and drink. There is also a potential impact on the quality of teaching and learning across all subjects and in particular the practical delivery of certain subjects for example modern languages, music, drama, or physical education. It will also significantly impact on the nature of some GCSE and A-Levels assessments (speaking and listening in English, drama and music performances, and modern language orals). Stakeholders have raised concerns around the impact on deaf or hearing-impaired children. The impact for learners who are acquiring English and rely on visual cues, should also be carefully considered. The integrity of face ~~masks~~ coverings in schools may also be questionable with pupils removing and re-applying throughout the day.

56.58. **Any specific PHA guidance will be followed regarding use of face masks and face coverings for teachers and pupils.** This will be kept under regular review, particularly for certain groups such as teachers, classroom assistants, older

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pupils and those with underlying health conditions. It is worth noting that current guidance from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is that whilst there is enough evidence to support recommendation of community use of cloth face [maskscoverings](#), for short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible, it has not been determined whether the benefits were the same for adults and children.

[57-59](#). There are genuine practical concerns regarding their use which should be considered but we must of course be guided by our medical colleagues.

Home to school transport

[58-60](#). All home to school transport is provided by the Education Authority on either dedicated school transport services or on public transport services. Dedicated school transport includes EA yellow buses, Translink buses that are only used by school children and not used by the general public, privately operated school bus services that are only used by pupils and taxis. Pupils using public transport services do so alongside the general public.

[59-61](#). In 2019-20, home to school transport provided around 77,800 pupils with a seat in a vehicle. The application of social distancing on these vehicles would significantly jeopardise the ambition of a more normal return to education operations. At 2m social distancing, it is estimated that only around 11,100 pupils would be able to be transported and 21,000 at a 1m social distance. This risks a significant number of pupils not being able to attend school. This has consequences in terms of pupils' mental health, their access to school based safeguarding support, their engagement with the education system and ultimately their educational outcomes.

[60-62](#). Pupils on all buses should always seek to maintain a social distance from others wherever possible, however it is proposed that the guidance for public transport on social distancing will not apply on dedicated school transport in the new school year. It is therefore proposed that there is no longer a requirement for social distancing on dedicated home to school transport vehicles. A series of mitigating actions for transport on these vehicles would be enacted. Pupils using public transport services will continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines for the general public.

[61-63](#). The Departments of Education in England and Scotland have recently announced guidance that social distancing will not apply on dedicated school transport, provided additional mitigating measures are in place. The Irish Minister of Education, Norma Foley TD, has indicated to me that this will also be the position in the Republic of Ireland.

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62-64. I believe that [the guidance for public transport on social distancing not applying on dedicated school transport](#) ~~no distancing on dedicated school transport~~ should be based upon the following principles:

- the overall risk to children and young people from COVID-19 being very low
- pupils on school transport vehicles will almost always be facing the same direction and will not be facing each other
- pupils on dedicated school transport do not mix with the general public on those journeys
- home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and those children may also be together in school.
- the predictability, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place.

63-65. Alongside this, I would plan to take forward a range of additional mitigating measures to ensure that the risks to all are minimised.

- An extensive communications campaign aimed at parents in terms of active travel being strongly promoted, only using public transport if there is no alternative with the use of Park and Stride being encouraged, pupils following the PHA advice not to leave their home to attend/travel to school if they or anyone in their family has COVID symptoms; encouraging the use of face coverings by all pupils on a vehicle, where appropriate; implementing good hygiene measures including the PHA's "Catch it, bin it, kills it" messages and the need for pupils to clean their hands before they leave their home.
- Pupils being provided with seats that all face forward with only a small number of exceptions, for example for some pupils with special educational needs.
- The EA will explore if it is practicable on some/all dedicated school bus services to ensure areas of a vehicle can group pupils, for example those in the same year group.
- Windows on vehicles should be kept open, where possible, to increase ventilation; or use air conditioning.
- Enhanced vehicle cleaning.
- Not permitting food or drink to be consumed on board a vehicle (other than for medical reasons) in order to reduce the potential for sharing between pupils.
- Vehicles to be either isolated for 48-72 hours or deep cleaned if a positive case is identified as a pupil that has used a vehicle.
- Any pupils showing symptoms while at school will be collected by parents/guardians and will not use home to school transport services to return home.

66. If [the guidance for public transport on social distancing will not apply on dedicated school transport](#) ~~social distancing is not required on board dedicated school~~

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transport, this will make a very significant contribution to enabling all pupils to attend school from the start of the school term. However, there are still substantial numbers of pupils who are provided with a bus pass to use on Translink's public bus services where social distancing would continue to apply. Officials in DE and DfI are working closely with the EA and Translink to increase the number of dedicated school bus runs in areas of significant demand. ~~An additional bid is likely to be required to fund these additional dedicated school bus runs.~~

64.

67. ~~I would like to acknowledge the very significant role that public transport plays in transporting pupils to school on both dedicated school transport services and also on wider public transport services, including on buses, trains and ferries. These services are accessed by both pupils eligible for home to school transport assistance and fare paying pupils and are vital in facilitating a return of all pupils to school on a full time basis. DE officials will continue to work with DfI, EA and Translink colleagues in working to maximise the capacity on the home to school transport network in a way that seeks to alleviate pressure on public transport services. This will include increasing the number of dedicated school transport runs. An additional bid is likely to be required to fund these additional dedicated school bus runs and DE officials will continue to engage with DfI and Translink to quantify the likely requirements with a view to a DE bid being made as soon as possible. I will also want to ensure a strong message is communicated to parents that they should only use public transport for their child's journey to school if there is no alternative and that they should seek to use active travel methods wherever possible.~~

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School Meals

~~65-68.~~ The Summer Food Payment scheme will end on 31 August 2020 and it is my intention that school meals will be available in schools from w/c 31 August. It is expected that where possible a hot meal, suitable as the main meal of the day, will be available for free school meals pupils and other pupils who wish to avail of them. This is particularly important for pupils entitled to free school meals for whom this might be their only meal that day.

~~66-69.~~ Acknowledging the importance of nutritious food to enable children's learning, all food provided must be in keeping with the Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in School³. Schools and school caterers will need to ensure that pupils with special dietary requirements or allergies are catered for as per the Education Authority's guidance⁴ for the provision of special diets in schools.

³ Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food and Drinks in School

⁴ Education Authority Guidance for the Provision of Special Diets in Schools

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~~67.70.~~ Of course there will be the requirement for flexibility in the delivery of school meals services to ensure PHA guidance is met. Schools may wish to consider staggered break and lunch times etc. It is important that schools and school caterers work closely to agree localised solutions to deliver school meals safely and in keeping with PHA guidance.

~~68.71.~~ School catering staff will be required to socially distance, appropriate PPE will be available to them and appropriate hygiene and cleaning measures will be applied.

Actions

~~69.72.~~ Should the Executive agree to the proposed approach there are a range of actions my Department will undertake as detailed below.

Update of the New School Day Guidance

~~70.73.~~ To implement this guidance in schools / settings, the existing guidance on the New School Day will need to be revised. This will be carried out using existing consultation processes. I appreciate that school leaders will require appropriate notice to enable any changes to be delivered. Therefore, I would be hopeful that, subject to CMO/CSA consideration, revised guidance would be available w/c 10 August and communicated accordingly to enable school leaders to plan for implementation for the start of the new school year.

~~71.74.~~ As stated, it is essential that final guidance for schools is in line with the prevailing health and medical advice and is cleared with CMO / DoH / PHA colleagues as appropriate. I am also keen to ensure that there is engagement with school leaders and TUS to enable the support of the education profession, parents and pupils. It is essential that all stakeholders are confident that the proposed changes are safe and deliverable.

~~72.75.~~ It is important that the guidance to schools remains a "living document" and is regularly revised to ensure it aligns with the public health position.

~~73.76.~~ My Department will also consider the need for changes to other linked guidance including the special school guidance which will require engagement with the Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group and PHA on any changes.

Managing localised COVID-19 outbreaks

~~74.77.~~ As part of the revisions to the New School Day Guidance, my Department will develop clear guidance and agree processes to managing localised Covid-19 outbreaks. These processes will be informed by and align with overarching PHA policy and procedures. As detailed, my approach to planning for the re-opening of

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schools will be focussed on restricting opportunities for the virus to enter the school and limit the risk of transmission in school. It is, however, essential that in the event of an outbreak we are in a position to deploy a rapid track, trace and test programme within the school community to reduce the risk of further onward transmission and to ensure any future school closures (if required) are for a minimal period of time.

75-78. Having an agreed and effective method for managing a Covid-19 outbreak in a school will be essential for the confidence of teachers, parents and pupils. My officials have already engaged with DoH colleagues regarding how existing testing processes and be utilised, at pace, in schools and settings as required.

Public Messaging

76-79. I fully expect school leaders will rise to the challenge and deploy effective measures to manage risk but they will require the continued support of parents, pupils and wider society to be vigilant and act responsibly within the overarching public health guidelines. I believe it is therefore essential to have targeted and ongoing communications to reinforce public health messaging and specifically highlight safety and hygiene requirements to parents and children and young people attending school.

77-80. It is possible that a more normal return to education attendance will create a sense of complacency amongst society. In order to ensure the virus is kept out of schools and the risk of transmission minimised it is vital that the education workforce, parents and carers, and children and young people are alert to the ongoing threat. Schools will only be safe if society continues to act responsibly. This means maintaining appropriate hygiene measures and self-isolating in suspected and confirmed cases. Public messaging will be important in this regard.

Financial Implications

78-81. The Department and Education Authority have worked together to quantify the anticipated costs resulting from the additional support necessary to facilitate the re-opening of schools (e.g. PPE, additional staffing, transport, school meals, etc.). There is presently no additional funding in the Education budget to address the significant level of funding pressures anticipated.

79-82. Executive colleagues will be aware that the Irish Government has recently announced the allocation of €375m (£342m) to facilitate its schools restart plan, covering additional requirements such as extra teachers, counselling, enhanced/hygiene, PPE and premises. Similar such pressures have formed the basis of the return which the Department recently submitted to the Department of

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Finance (DoF) to seek additional funding to enable the safe re-opening of schools in August.

[80-83](#). Changes to the existing New School Day guidance will, in all likelihood, impact the funding pressures which the Department has already submitted to DoF. The Department would therefore need to have an opportunity to reassess the financial impact on the re-opening of schools in light of any agreed changes to the guidance. Whilst the funding impact of revising the guidance is largely unknown, it could be assumed that a more normal school attendance pattern will somewhat ease the need for additional childcare capacity, however this will require further analysis.

Recommendation

[84-84](#). The relaxation of any Covid-19 related restrictions is not without risk. In the same way, the re-opening of schools is not and cannot be risk free. However, I would argue that the risks related to a full re-opening can be mitigated, they can be managed and that they need to be balanced against the risks associated with ongoing disruption to children and young people.

[82-85](#). The experience and approach in other jurisdictions must also be considered. The approach outlined in this paper is not cavalier, it is balanced and it is consistent with other nations. Nor is this approach inflexible. The approach to managing our schools must always be consistent with the prevailing public health position and I am cognisant of the fact that there may be further disruption should the situation worsen.

[83-86](#). I therefore ask Executive colleagues to:

- a) Note the paper and the update on Education Restart planning and delivery;
- b) Agree to a more ambitious approach to Education Restart planning (subject to the revision of guidance in line with public health requirements and the engagements outlined in this paper), namely;
 - i. The resumption of more normal patterns of operation and attendance in line with standard legislative requirements for all education settings for all pupils during week commencing 31 August.
 - ii. The ~~removal~~ [relaxing](#) of strict social distancing restrictions amongst all pupils, in school and on dedicated home to school transport.
 - iii. The use of appropriate public health mitigations including protective bubbles or consistent class groups possible, enhanced cleaning and hygiene and effective track and trace processes.
- c) Agree to the outlined approach and note the required actions.

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**PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

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Education Restart – Guidance documents

Some of the recent outputs of Education Restart include the following:

- **Childcare Recovery Plan⁵** was published on 18 June. The plan aims to restore the childcare sector to pre-Covid-19 capacity levels as quickly as possible.
- **New School Day⁶** guidance was published on 19 June. The guidance was prepared to provide a planning framework for the restart of schools. It provided strategic guidelines on issues including start dates, attendance patterns, cleaning processes and risk mitigations. It was co-designed with school leaders.
- **DE Guidance on Safe Working Practices in Education Establishments⁷**, including youth settings was revised and published on 22 June.
- **Curriculum Planning⁸** circular issued to all schools on 23 June. The guidance provides advice and support to schools as they consider how to tailor and adapt delivery of the curriculum to support recovery when pupils return for the new academic year
- **Pre-School Education⁹** guidance issued to pre-school settings on 23 June. This is additional guidance to be read alongside the strategic New School Day document (published on 19 June).
- **Frequently asked questions relating to the Childcare Recovery Plan¹⁰ and Education Restart¹¹** were published on 24 June. Work is underway in the Department to compile a fuller list of frequently asked questions specifically prepared for teachers, parents and children and young people.
- **Guidance on supporting staff to return to schools¹²** was issued to schools on 26 June. This was produced through co-design with the Practitioners Group, through consultation with Trade Unions and Sectoral Bodies; and through engagement with Public Health Agency (PHA). The purpose is to support Principals / line managers and staff when planning their return to the work place. It sets expectations on how to support staff and outlines key considerations and responsibilities. Appended to the document is guidance on risk assessment for individual staff and templates based on category (clinically

⁵ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-childcare-recovery-plan>

⁶ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-re-opening-school-guidance-new-school-day>

⁷ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-support-safe-working-educational-settings-june-2020>

⁸ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-202006-curriculum-planning-202021>

⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-re-opening-school-guidance-new-school-day-pre-school-education-supplementary>

¹⁰ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/faqs-childcare-recovery-plans-24-june-2020>

¹¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/faqs-education-restart-programme-24-june-2020>

¹² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools>

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vulnerable; clinically extremely vulnerable; pregnant; and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic).

- **Risk assessments templates for schools and settings.** Again, these were co-designed with school leaders and have been subject to consultation with TUS. The templates cover nursery schools, primary schools, post-primary schools and special schools. The Risk Assessments and risk scoring matrix are based on the HSENI recognised and approved risk assessment process.
- **Special Schools**¹³ guidance was published on 26 June, again this is supplementary to New School Day guidance. The document sets out how special schools should plan for the new school day. The guidance was co-designed with members of the Special Schools Leadership Group and the Education Authority (EA). Comments of the guidance were also received from teaching and non-teaching unions, Managing Authorities and sectoral support bodies.
- A range of **Youth Work**¹⁴ guidance has been published which is intended to aid youth workers and youth organisations to deliver youth services in a safe and effective manner and to support young people returning to these services. In addition, an EA training webinar will be available in August 2020 based on the documents provided, supported by open meetings (remotely) to deal with queries and questions raised by voluntary organisations management committees based on their re-engagement with their children, young people, staff and the wider community.

Summer Schools and support for disadvantaged pupils

As part of efforts to address the impact of Covid-19, my Department has helped schools in a number of different ways:

- Funding for the provision of approximately 50 **Summer Schools** to enable pupils to take part in a range of activities which gets them socialising again, learning and having fun;
- The purchase of online **Virtual Learning** resources for children going into Year 7 to help with literacy and numeracy skills as pupils return to school and over the next year; and
- The “**Engage**” programme will help all pupils but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who would most benefit from additional support to engage with learning following the COVID-19 lockdown period.

With support from the Executive, my Department received £12m to take forward these programmes during the summer and over the next academic year. Additional funding will be needed from April 2021 if we are to continue to support children's learning,

¹³ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/re-opening-guidance-special-schools>

¹⁴ <https://www.eani.org.uk/supporting-children-and-young-people>

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particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. I also announced plans in May to lend digital devices to vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in order to assist with their learning from home. That work is in train with many thousands of digital devices delivered.

The EA's Special School summer provision for 2020 for children with severe and complex needs has proceeded but not in the usual format. The EA is working in partnership with Special Schools to provide ideas and activities online for pupils during the summer period and also tailored school-based summer schemes. In the main, provision is a mixture of morning school based activities supplemented by afternoon online provision. Each school's provision is for their pupils for whom they hold health care plans and have trained staff. The 21 Special Schools which normally provide a scheme have confirmed dates for summer provision this year, across various dates in July and August.

Childcare Support

On 18 June, the Executive published a Childcare Recovery Plan. The Plan aims to restore the childcare sector to pre-COVID-19 capacity levels as quickly and as safely as possible, and ensure more parents can access childcare over the next few months. School re-opening plans and the availability of childcare are inextricably linked and further work will be required to build the capacity of the childcare sector as quickly as possible, to ensure that any potential shortfall is kept to a minimum.

On 30 June, the Executive agreed £10.5m for the Childcare Recovery Support Scheme. The primary objective is to support and incentivise the reopening of childcare provision. The Scheme aims to protect the current childcare places whilst providers operate at a reduced capacity, encourage those that are open to increase their capacity if able to do so and incentivise more providers to open before September.

The Scheme formally launched to applications on Monday 27 July. Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) has been appointed to administer the new Scheme. It is open to registered daycare and school-age childcare settings, playgroups and childminders and approved home childcarers that are open during July and August.

The Childcare Recovery Support Scheme for July and August takes on board the lessons learned from the April-June scheme and has been developed to ensure a more efficient, effective and straightforward application process. Payments will be backdated until 1 July 2020, and the funding period is 1 July to 31 August 2020.

Free School Meal Support

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I have also sought to provide support for pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM) during the disruption through the FSM Direct payment scheme. This Scheme made fortnightly payments to families of £27 (£2.70 per school day) and has helped over 102,000 children, including FE students funded by DfE, who would normally receive free school meals when at school. The Scheme ran from 23 March until the end of the school term on 30 June. The scheme has cost over £19 million.

Further to this, the Executive has approved a similar but separate Summer Food payment scheme to make payments to families of over 102,000 children, including FE students funded by DfE, who were entitled to free school meals on 30 June 2020, to ensure the welfare of their children is not impacted by going hungry during the summer holidays.

The summer food payment scheme will make grant payments to the total value of £118.80 per child at school and £148.50 per student at FE college to be paid to the parents/guardians of that child to cover the period 1st July 2020 to 31st August 2020. The scheme will cost in the region of £12 million. These payments will help ensure that those children most in need do not go hungry during the summer months.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support Services & Special Schools Planning

During the pandemic the EA has continued to deliver support services to children and young people, their families and schools, in creative ways and by optimising the use of available technologies. The EA has developed an extensive suite of on-line resources and videos, provided advice and support via telephone and email, and moved predominately to remote learning for pupils. Due to the pandemic face-to-face contact has been paused, however this will be re-instated alongside delivery of therapies in line with PHA and government guidance when it is safe to do so and resources are available.

Planning is well underway for school restart, the Department and EA continue to actively engage with Health and Social Care (HSC) authorities through collaborative planning to deliver the necessary SEN support services such as pupil support services, language and communication, nursing and occupational therapy to support children with special educational needs when they return to school.

In relation to special schools, class sizes are usually smaller (6-8 per class for profound needs, 10-12 for moderate needs) and children generally remain in their classes during school so the usual class based arrangements can apply. Children may leave classes for breaks, or for therapies or sensory room activities. Special schools will develop locally based arrangements for these activities in line with public health advice. Current PHA advice in relation to classroom assistants is that specific PPE will not be required unless for use in the provision of intimate care needs or for

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administering certain medication or aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) for a small number of pupils. The EA is liaising with PHA on identifying these children and ensuring appropriate PPE is in place for staff. The need for changes to the special school guidance will be kept under review and my Department will engage with the Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group and PHA on any changes.

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Annex B*

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ETI Research Based Evidence Paper v2.0: summary of UK and ROI reopening arrangements¹⁵

The paper is an updated summary of UK and ROI re-opening arrangements for schools based on evidence research currently available to the Department of Education.

The detail below is accurate as of 5 August 2020.

	England ¹⁶	Scotland ¹⁷	Wales ¹⁸	Ireland ¹⁹	International Examples ²⁰
Start date for new academic year	Autumn Term (September 2020).	11 August 2020. All pupils to be in school full-time by 18 August 2020.	The autumn term will start on 1 September 2020. All pupils to be in school full-time by 14 September 2020.	All schools to re-open for all pupils at the end of August 2020.	In 25 of 28 countries, there has been a partial (for vulnerable and/or priority groups) or full re-opening of schools last updated 9 July 2020. Sweden - schools for under-16s never closed. Italy re-opens on 1 September 2020 to allow pupils to revise; with return to regular classes on 14 September 2020. Germany ²¹ – return of all schools after the summer holidays, in early August. Distancing requirements are to be lifted, with fixed class cohorts limiting the risk of infection. 1.5m distance should still be kept wherever possible outside of the classroom. Australia- All States have now returned to full-time on-site learning after the school holidays (13 July 2020) but recent outbreaks in Victoria are seeing decisions reversed. State Premier warned of further changes.
Priority group(s) for new academic year	All pupils.	All pupils.	From 1 September 2020 schools that can accommodate all pupils should do so. From the second week of term it is expected that schools and settings will need to maximise the number of learners in attendance leading to a full return on 14 September 2020 when school attendance will be compulsory for all pupils. There will be a period of flexibility for schools who want to focus on priority year groups such as Years 7, 12, 13 and Special Units for post-primary and	All pupils.	Germany – all pupils to return. Prior to summer holidays, classes were often divided in two, with half of pupils attending one day, the other half the next, and each for two to three hours a day. Priority was given to older pupils who had exams, with primary school pupils the last to return. China - Phased approach for each province - mostly starting with exam years in upper and lower post-primary, followed by other post-primary years, the top two years of primary, then first two years of primaries. No dates yet for most nurseries. (Beijing – new cluster of cases; all pupils studying remotely from 17 June 2020). Finland - School term for pre-school, primary schools and post-primary

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¹⁵ As of 5 August 2020

¹⁶ Evidence based on guidance for full opening: schools, updated 27 July 2020, guidance for special schools updated 2 July 2020 and local lockdown guidance (updated 31 July 2020).

¹⁷ Evidence based on reopening schools guidance published 28 May 2020, A Strategic Framework for Reopening Schools, Early Learning and Childcare Provision in Scotland published 21 May 2020 and guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020 published 30 July 2020

¹⁸ Evidence based on Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term published 13 July 2020 and Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term published 13 July 2020.

¹⁹ Evidence based on COVID-19 Interim Recommendations for the reopening of schools and educational facilities published 24 June 2020, planning for re-opening paper for government published 12 June 2020, The Roadmap for the Full Return to School updated 28 July 2020, Reopening our primary and special schools updated 1 August 2020 and Reopening our post-primary schools updated 4 August 2020.

²⁰ Evidence based on PHA Behaviour Change Group Health Intelligence Briefing (3 July 2020) and International Education Intelligence Updates on Covid-19 (up to and including Issue 14 4/8/2020) OFFICIAL SENSITIVE: Appendix 1

²¹ Rules vary considerably across sixteen states in Germany

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			<p>early years and Year 6 in the primary sector.</p> <p>This will also allow time for any planning and reorganisation. It is expected that planning and preparation days will take place at the start of term to enable schools and settings to work with their staff on reviewing their risk assessments, processes and associated systems.</p>		<p>schools ended on 30 May 2020. Schools will start the next semester in early August for all pupils.</p>
<p><u>Pattern of teaching (blended/in class/FT/PT) for new academic year</u></p>	<p>Intent: In class (F/T return) with remote and blended approach for some pupils, and remote provision in the case of a local lockdown. All schools expected to plan to ensure any pupils educated at home for some of the time are given the support they need to master the curriculum and so make good progress.</p> <p>The key principles that underpin advice on curriculum planning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> education is not optional; the curriculum remains broad and ambitious; and remote education, where needed, is high quality and aligns as closely as possible with in-school provision. 	<p>Intent: In class (F/T return) with remote and blended approach for some pupils; appropriate provision should be made for remote learning pursuant to local circumstances. Where pupils are unable to attend school due to ill health, provision should be made elsewhere than a school, in line with statutory responsibilities. There should be a particular focus on addressing digital exclusion as part of these arrangements.</p>	<p>Intent: In class (F/T return) with remote and blended approach for some pupils, and planned remote provision in the case of a further local lockdown.</p>	<p>Intent: In class (F/T return) with remote and blended approach for some pupils including those following a transition year; explicit provision must be made for contingency curriculum planning for a situation in which there might be an unexpected period of school closure.</p>	<p>Finland - for primary and vocational education, the plan is to maintain contact teaching throughout the next academic year. Blended learning speculated to increase in post-primary and higher education. France – undecided; but government aims for all children to return to school full time in September, except in the case of re-confinement. Italy - distance-learning component for at least for the first semester. Singapore - aims to review the curriculum to include more blended learning, to 'make the best of both worlds.' Switzerland - see this as an opportunity to develop a long-term blended learning strategy beyond Covid-19.</p>
<p><u>Physical Distancing</u></p>	<p>There is no requirement for physical distancing between children in primary schools and between pupils in post-primary schools. For children old enough, they should be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff and their peers where possible. Schools should make small adaptations to the classroom to support distancing where possible; for example, seating pupils side by side and facing forwards, rather than face to face or side on. 'Bubble' groups of pupils should be kept apart. Adults should maintain 2 metre distance from each other, and from children; they should avoid close face</p>	<p>There is no requirement for physical distancing between children in primary schools and between pupils in post-primary schools. As a precautionary approach post-primary schools should encourage distancing where possible between young people particularly in the senior phase. Schools should ensure that the particular approaches adopted do not introduce capacity constraints and/or prevent a return to full-time learning in school. Mitigations that post-primary schools may consider could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage young people to maintain distance where possible, particularly indoors – this does not have to be strict distancing of 2m if this is unachievable, but encouraging young 	<p>As of 9 July 2020, pupils do not have to socially distance with those in their class or "contact group".</p> <p>The overarching principle is to reduce the number of contacts between learners and staff; this can be achieved through keeping groups separate and through maintaining distance between individuals. The balance between them will change depending on the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> learners' ability to distance; layout of the school; and 	<p>Physical distancing measures: increasing separation and decreasing interaction. Where possible, work-stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces that are shared. Primary: A distance of 1 metre should be maintained between desks or between individual pupils. It is recognized that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore, achieving this recommendation in the first 4 years of primary school, is not a prerequisite to reopening a primary school for all pupils. To maintain physical distancing in the classroom, primary schools and special schools should:</p>	<p>Germany - The 1.5m distancing rule will be lifted for schools to fully re-open to all pupils provided infection rates allow. Netherlands - distance of 1.5m must be guaranteed between students and teachers (but not between students). Denmark - social distancing has decreased to 1M to increase capacity. New Zealand - schools observed physical distancing requirements, including 1m inside and 2m outside (alert level 3). Country is now at alert level 1²² (as of 3 July 2020); physical distancing is not a requirement but where possible or practicable is encouraged when around people you don't know.</p>

²² <https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/>

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	<p>to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of anyone.</p>	<p>people not to crowd together or touch their peers is recommended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discourage social physical contact (hand to hand greeting/hugs) • Use all the available space in classrooms, halls, libraries or social spaces to promote distancing where possible. • Adjust class space if required, and where possible, to maintain spacing between desks or between individual young people • Seat young people side by side and facing forwards, rather than face to face. <p>Two metre physical distancing between adults, and between adults and children and young people who are not from the same household should be maintained. This is not always possible or desirable, particularly when working with younger primary school children or children with additional support needs who may require personal or intimate care.</p> <p>Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for a sustained period (about 15 minutes or more), face coverings should be worn (or in certain limited circumstances, PPE).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feasibility of keeping distinct groups separate while offering a broad curriculum. <p>It is likely that for younger learners the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older learners it will be on social distancing.</p> <p>For learners old enough, they should be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff where possible.</p> <p>Ideally, adults should maintain a 2 metre distance from each other, and from learners. They should avoid close face-to-face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of anyone.</p>	<p>1. Reconfigure class spaces to maximise physical distancing</p> <p>2. Utilise and reconfigure all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing</p> <p>Post-primary: Physical distancing of 2 metres where possible or at least 1 metre should be maintained between desks or between individual students or staff.</p> <p>Where possible teachers should maintain a minimum of 1m distance from pupils and where possible 2m. They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down.</p> <p>Staff: A distance of 2 metres is recommended for physical distancing by staff. If a distance of 2m cannot be maintained in staff group interactions, as much distance as possible should be maintained and guidance on face coverings should be observed.</p> <p>Physical distancing should be observed between staff members within the staff room through the use of staggered breaks etc. In particular at post primary level, this could also be facilitated through the formation of school staff 'pods' / teams who work together and take breaks together.</p>	
Bubble methods	<p>Primary school and KS3: group bubble size of a full class.</p> <p>KS4 and 5: group bubble size of a year group. Schools should take steps to limit interaction, sharing of rooms and social spaces between groups as much as possible.</p>	<p>In both primary and post-primary settings efforts should be made to keep pupils within the same groups for the duration of the school day. The general approach should be to keep groups consistent where practically possible, taking into account the feasibility of doing this while delivering a broad, meaningful curriculum and promoting children and young people's health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Schools should make efforts to keep groups apart from other groups where possible.</p> <p>In open plan settings with large numbers of children or young people consideration should be given to ensuring clear demarcation and separation between the areas in which different groups learn. Schools should consider how to reduce the movement of groups across different parts of the school estate where possible.</p> <p>As a precautionary approach, post-primary schools should encourage distancing where possible between young people, particularly in the senior</p>	<p>In post-primary schools, particularly in the older age groups at Key Stage 4 and 5, the contact groups are likely to need to be the size of a year group to enable schools to deliver the full range of curriculum subjects and for learners to receive specialist teaching. If this can be achieved with small groups, they are recommended.</p> <p>At primary school, and in the younger years at secondary (Key Stage 3), schools may be able to implement smaller groups the size of a full class.</p> <p>Whatever the size of the group, they should be kept apart from other groups where possible and older learners should be encouraged to keep their distance within groups.</p>	<p>The risk of spread of infection may be reduced by structuring pupils and their teachers into Class Bubbles (i.e. a class grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as possible) and discrete groups or 'Pods' within those class bubbles, to the extent that this is practical.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a class is divided into Pods, there should be at least 1m distance between individual Pods within the Class Bubble and between individuals in the pod, whenever possible. • Objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as latter will not always be possible. • Aim of the system is that each class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measure, to 	<p>Arrangements applied in other countries have also extended to use of designated fixed places (desks) for individual children and young people.</p> <p>Greece - Schools initially began opening for post-primary students on May 25; pre-school and primary students on June 1. Class sizes have been cut to 15 in order to keep pupils 1.5m apart.</p> <p>Denmark - first phase of re-opening (April/May) reported: micro-groups of approximately 12 pupils arrive at separate times to other groups, eat lunch separately, stayed in distinct zones in the playground, use different entrances/exits and are taught by separate teachers.</p>

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		phase. <u>This does not have to be strict adherence to 2m physical distancing.</u>		limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble. <u>Pod sizes should be kept as small as is likely to be reasonably practical in the specific classroom context.</u> To the greatest extent possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will not be possible at all times. Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided/minimised where possible. Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible.	
<u>Transport</u>	<p>Dedicated school transport: strict social distancing guidelines will not apply; use of face coverings for children (except those under the age of 11) for debate by school if pupils are likely to come into very close contact with people outside of their group or who they do not normally meet.</p> <p>Schools should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how pupils are grouped together on transport, where possible this should reflect the bubbles that are adopted within school • use of hand sanitiser upon boarding and/or disembarking • additional cleaning of vehicles • organised queuing and boarding where possible • distancing within vehicles wherever possible <p>DfE to publish new guidance to local authorities on providing dedicated school transport.</p> <p>Public transport: face coverings mandatory and maintain a 2 metre distance where possible. If you cannot keep a 2 metre distance, reduce the risk to yourself and others by maintaining a 1 metre distance where possible, and taking suitable precautions.</p> <p>Schools should encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school if at all possible. Schools may want to consider using 'walking buses'</p>	<p>Dedicated school transport is an extension of the school estate. Enhanced cleaning of dedicated school transport vehicles important, as well as personal hand and respiratory hygiene, including sanitisation of hands prior to boarding.</p> <p>Distancing between children and young people on dedicated school transport is not required, although where possible some practical approaches to grouping and distancing are provided.</p> <p>Face coverings are not required for children and young people (those who wish to wear a face covering should be permitted to do so).</p> <p>Any adults travelling by dedicated school transport should conform to the requirements for public transport and wear face coverings (and 1m distancing).</p> <p>The creation of "dedicated zones/carriages" on certain limited types of public transport is permitted, with rules on distancing the same as for dedicated school transport. Face coverings in dedicated zones will not be required where the service is a local authority-contracted school bus service but must be worn in dedicated zones on all other forms of public transport.</p> <p>Children and young people travelling on all other public transport, where there is no dedicated zone, must follow the requirements on face coverings and distancing for public transport.</p> <p>As far as it is safe to do so, the use of active travel routes by parents/carers, staff and children and young people should be encouraged.</p>	<p>Arrangements for a return to school in September and therefore for school transport are being considered separately.</p> <p>The latest advice and guidance in relation to public transport is being issued shortly, this will include the use of face coverings on public transport. In any school transport, priority should be given to those who are unable to attend without it.</p>	<p>It is expected that School Transport Scheme services operated by Bus Éireann will fully operate as normal, in line with public health advice. In planning for normal resumption of school transport services consideration has been taken of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School transport services are controlled environments; • Each transport service carries the same children on a daily basis to their school of attendance; and • It is a restricted group of transport users which will facilitate contact tracing if required. <p>Observing hygiene requirements will be a key priority and clear communication to all parents of children or to older students using school transport services will set out the following requirements for those travelling on school transport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to use school transport if they are displaying symptoms; • To maintain physical distancing while waiting for transport; • To always sit in pre-assigned seating and next to a sibling or child from their class group (this should be the same child at all times); • To use hand sanitizer on boarding the bus; • To observe respiratory etiquette at all times while waiting for and on-board transport services; • To disembark the bus one by one in an orderly fashion; and • With the exception of those children who for medical or special educational needs reasons are not in a position to wear a facemask or face covering, all other students travelling on the post-primary scheme are required to wear 	<p>Transport to school is reported as an issue affecting pupils' return by Norway and Portugal. In Norway, the government is starting to look at measures to address this issue, such as an increase of buses and departure times.</p> <p>The Netherlands - students encouraged to walk or cycle if they live within five miles of the school.</p> <p>New Zealand (alert level 1 as of 3 July 2020) report that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Good hygiene practices are still a priority. Vehicles will continue to be cleaned regularly in accordance with Ministry of Health guidance; and 2. No physical distancing is required on Ministry, regional council or Auckland Transport school bus or public transport services.

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	(a supervised group of children being walked to, or from, school), or working with their local authority to promote safe cycling routes.	Schools should undertake a survey of families as early as possible to understand how children and young people will be travelling to school when they return, to aid in quantifying the potential public transport issues in local authority areas. All transport arrangements have been informed by Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues about school transport ²³ .		facemasks while waiting for and on-board transport services. Funding supports will be made available to schools for the provision of masks or visors to School Bus Escorts where required, bearing in mind the SEN needs of the child/children on the service, and where physical distancing cannot be maintained	
Catering	<p>Staggered break times and lunch times (and time for cleaning surfaces in the dining hall between groups). Expectation that kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and normal legal requirements will apply about provision of food to all pupils who want it, including for those eligible for benefits-related free school meals or universal infant free school meals.</p> <p>School kitchens but must comply with the guidance for food businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)²⁴.</p>	<p>Local authorities' duty to provide free school meals to children and young people who are eligible for them remains. The universal provision of free school meals to all children in P1-P3 who are attending school to continue and all food provided should comply with the School Food and Drink Nutritional Standards²⁵. Staff can safely eat in the dining hall if they wish. They should use their own crockery/cutlery in staff areas and ensure these are cleaned with warm general purpose detergent and dried thoroughly before being stored for re-use. Schools may wish to consider staggered break and lunch times (although these will not be suitable for all schools, and staggering break and lunch times to an extent that they could reduce the overall amount of time children and young people can spend learning in school should be avoided). Localised solutions should be agreed and, as far as possible, children, young people and parents/carers should be involved in these discussions. If children and young people go offsite for lunch, they should follow the rules in place for wider society, for example wearing a face covering when entering a shop. Risk assessments should consider procedures for when children and young people leave and return to school premises, including hand hygiene. Schools may wish to contact local shops in advance to alert them to plans.</p>	<p>Expectation that kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and normal legal requirements will apply about provision of food to all pupils who want it, including for those eligible for free school meals.</p> <p>Further information and guidance to be provided, to cover any potential issues with the provision of free school meals either on a national or local basis if the need arises.</p> <p>Schools should deliver meals in accordance with the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013²⁶.</p> <p>Schools to consider staggered break times and lunch times (and time for cleaning surfaces in the dining hall between groups). Schools and settings should also plan how shared staff spaces are set up and used to help staff to distance from each other. Use of staff rooms should be minimised, although staff must still have a break of a reasonable length during the day.</p>	<p>Ensure physical distancing is applied in canteen facilities Stagger canteen use and extend serving times where possible to align with class groupings. Implement a queue management system. Make sure students clean their hands before and after entering the canteen area.</p>	<p>Most countries reference staggered break and lunch times for pupils as well as increased cleaning, and hand washing practices. Greece – separate breaks for each class to avoid crowding in the playground.</p>

²³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues---advisory-note-on-school-transport/>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthy-eating-schools-guide-implementing-nutritional-requirements-food-drink-schools-9780755958306/>

²⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2013/1984/made>

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<p><u>PPE/hygiene</u></p>	<p>It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments (building on the learning to date and the practices they have already developed), to consider the additional risks and control measures to enable a return to full capacity in the autumn term.</p> <p>System of controls is the set of actions schools must take. They are grouped into 'prevention' and 'response to any infection' such as enhanced cleaning, respiratory hygiene and handwashing. Schools must ensure they understand the NHS Test and Trace process and how to contact their local Public Health England health protection team.</p> <p>Majority of staff in education, will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 metres from others. Schools should have a process for removing face coverings when pupils and staff who use them arrive at school and communicate it clearly to them.</p>	<p>It is a legal requirement that local authorities and head teachers ensure that risk assessments are conducted or updated to reflect the revised planning assumption of a full return to school. All risk assessments should be reviewed regularly and as circumstances change. Risk assessments should be shared with staff and trade unions, including catering and facilities management teams and contractors where appropriate. Schools should communicate with all school staff, children, young people and parents/carers regarding health and safety.</p> <p>Key COVID-secure personal hygiene measures that all children, young people and staff should follow such as regular hand hygiene; maintaining physical distancing; application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.</p> <p>Schools should ensure adequate levels of ventilation.</p> <p>For the majority of staff in schools, PPE will not normally be required or necessary except in specific circumstances such as suspected COVID-19 and intimate care.</p> <p>Face coverings should not be required for most children and young people. Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for a sustained period (about 15 minutes or more), face coverings should be worn. In other circumstances, adults in schools should not need to wear face coverings as long as they can maintain 2m distancing. Schools should raise awareness amongst children, young people and staff about the correct way to remove and store face coverings when those who use them (e.g. on public transport) arrive at school.</p>	<p>It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments by building on the learning to date and the practices they have already developed.</p> <p>Infection prevention and control (hygiene measures) such as enhanced cleaning, respiratory hygiene, handwashing.</p> <p>Active engagement with Test, Trace, Protect strategy²⁷ implemented across Wales from 1 June.</p> <p>PPE is not required when undertaking routine educational activities in classroom or school settings.</p> <p>Schools should have a process for removing face coverings when learners and staff who use them arrive at school and communicate it clearly to them.</p> <p>It is still recommended that learners limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day. Learners and staff can take books and other shared resources home, although unnecessary sharing should be avoided, especially where this does not contribute to learners' education and development.</p>	<p>Minimising risk of introduction of infection include: regular hand hygiene; maintaining physical distancing; application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and environmental hygiene.</p> <p>PPE will not be required to be worn within schools except in specific circumstances such as suspected COVID-19 and intimate care:</p> <p>The use of face coverings/masks by primary school pupils should not occur.</p> <p>In post primary schools, the use of face coverings/masks by students may be a feature where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student themselves wishes to wear a facial covering in circumstances where physical distancing is difficult to maintain within the school; and/or • In the exceptional circumstances, where physical distancing by organisational means for a larger class proves not to be possible. <p>Students should not be required to wear face coverings or visors for the duration of the whole school day. For staff, face coverings should not be required if physical distancing is possible and practiced appropriately.</p> <p>The use of face coverings/visors must be implemented where the 1 metre distance cannot be achieved. For example:</p> <p>(a) more than 24 students in a 49sq classroom that has been fully cleared</p> <p>(b) more than 20 students in a 42sqm classroom.</p> <p>Staff or students who cannot wear face coverings or visors for health reasons should be based in other classrooms or areas wherever possible.</p>	<p>Most countries report that mandated hygiene and social distancing measures, as well as test and trace systems, were implemented ahead of school re-openings.</p> <p>New Zealand - PPE is not mandated in schools.</p> <p>Denmark - Masks are not used in schools – the emphasis is on social distancing and hygiene policies. The Ministry of Children and Education and the Ministry of Health issued statutory guidelines for the safe reopening process to include implementation of hourly handwashing and sterilising. Handwashing stations have been installed outside buildings; it has now been noted that this is causing skin irritation and eczema in some students.</p> <p>France - teachers and children over 11 are expected to wear masks.</p> <p>Finland – pupils were advised to wear gloves to help protect them against the virus.</p> <p>Switzerland - All cantons are keeping to national safety requirements drawn up by the Federal Office of Public Health, which include handwashing, not sharing snacks and social distancing (although children among themselves are exempt from distancing rules); no masks.</p>
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²⁷ <https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect.html>

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<p><u>Any other relevant information</u></p>	<p>School attendance will be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term. Schools should consider resuming any breakfast and after-school provision, where possible, from the start of the autumn term. As with physical activity during the school day, contact sports should not take place.</p>	<p>It has been indicated that schools may wish to consider the increased use of outdoor spaces when they reopen. Suitable facilities may include school playgrounds, local greenspaces and/or community areas. Children, young people and staff can take books and other resources home, although unnecessary resource sharing including textbooks should be avoided, especially where this does not contribute to education and development. It has been recognised that some parents and carers may be concerned about their child returning to school, and consider withholding their child until reassurance is provided. In these circumstances schools and local authorities should engage with those parents and carers to provide reassurance on any concerns, overcome any barriers to learning, and support attendance</p>	<p>£29m 'Recruit, recover and raising standards' plan; to recruit around 900 teaching staff for 2020/21 academic year to provide support for learners most affected by school closures. Priority cohorts are Years 11, 12, and 13 in post-primary schools, and vulnerable learners.</p> <p><u>When considering approach to autumn term learning, schools and settings should consider:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health and well-being; • purpose; • literacy, numeracy and digital competence; • broad and balanced learning experiences; • progression and assessment; and • partnership with parents, carers and learners. <p><u>The Government's view is that it would be difficult for a local authority/school to justify issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) or commencing proceedings for non-school attendance. The situation will be monitored over the first half term.</u></p>	<p>All staff to undertake and complete DES COVID-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. Completion and implementation of a Covid-19 Response Plan by each school is a living document which will be adapted over time to reflect the evolving COVID-19 context. €375 million support package: support and guidance for primary and post-primary schools to return safely in the new term;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1000 additional teachers in post-primary schools to help reduce class sizes; • Additional substitution, supervision, guidance counsellors and psychologists; and • Safety and wellbeing of school community a key focus of practical guidance. <p><u>Each workplace to appoint a Lead Worker Representative (LWR). The LWR will work in collaboration with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and monitor adherence to those measures and to be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID-19 in the workplace.</u></p>	<p>Italy – awaiting guidance but reported that when schools reopen they will probably need to maintain a 1M physical distance rule in classrooms, ensure that children over six wear masks and deny entrance to anyone with a temperature of more than 37.5C. School opening hours may also be reduced and lessons staggered. Spain - draft plans include physical distancing of 1.5 metres between students and masks obligatory for children over the age of six, while children aged 10 and under could be taught in "bubbles" without the need for distancing.</p>
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