



25 March 2021

Dear Principal,

As you are aware the Government decided on a phased return of pupils to school during March and April. As we are now approaching Easter, I wish to reaffirm to you the government's intention that all students will return to school from Monday 12 April.

This is the final stage in the phased reopening of all schools and will see the return of all children to in-school learning, including the first to fourth year groups at post-primary level.

The Department is aware of the immense efforts made by school communities to ensure remote teaching and learning was running well for students and to plan and arrange for the return to school for those students that have returned. Thank you for your leadership and for the effort of all of your teams.

The Department of Education, the Department of Health and the HSE are monitoring and reviewing the operation of schools on an ongoing basis. Weekly reports on the testing of close contact within the education system are published and available [here](#).

Public health keep the infection prevention and control measures in place for schools under review. The current measures in place to ensure safe operation of schools are effective in minimising the risk of Covid-19 in schools. It is important that all measures are followed carefully by pupils, staff and parents.

- **Funding for cleaning and PPE:**

Arrangements are currently being made for the payment of the next installment of Covid-19 grants to schools for cleaning, PPE etc.

- **Staffing Arrangements:**

The temporary flexible staffing arrangements in place during the phased reopening will cease from April 12th. Further clarification will follow in relation to pregnant staff pending further consideration by the HSE. An updated staffing circular to replace 49/20 will issue on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

The Department will continue to communicate with schools through email and by posting details of new messages on Esinet and all information will be available through [gov.ie/schools](http://gov.ie/schools) and on Twitter [@Education\\_IRE](https://twitter.com/Education_IRE).



It is important that we all continue to follow public health advice and limit our contacts during this period in order to minimise any opportunity for the virus to spread within our families and our communities. The Government and the Department will continue to support this with public health messaging to parents and students on the need to abide by the public health advice, emphasising hygiene practices, social distancing and recognising symptoms of Covid. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of socialising and playdates.

In relation to school transport and in advance of the return after the Easter break, Bus Eireann will issue reminders to bus contractors, parents and students of their obligations to adhere rigorously to public health recommendations developed for school transport. Social distancing on post primary services of 50% capacity has now been achieved on virtually all routes on the post-primary scheme and for post-primary provision on the SEN scheme.

The Department acknowledges the ongoing significant effort of all school staff and the whole school community to support the education of children during this difficult time for all of society. I hope you and your school community have a safe and peaceful Easter break and a good term ahead.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley

Assistant Secretary