



Information Note SD 0002/2022

To: The Managerial Authorities of all recognised Post Primary Schools

COVID-19: Updated Arrangements for all recognised Post Primary Schools – January 2022

1. Introduction

The purpose of this information note is to provide an outline of the operational supports that are available to post primary schools to help minimise the risk associated with COVID-19 and in light of the prevalence of the Omicron variant. Full details of all the arrangements and supports which are available to schools are available on [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie). The arrangements outlined in this information note cover the period between reopening on 6th January up to Friday 18th February 2022. Arrangements in respect of teacher substitution during this period are also outlined.

Throughout the pandemic and over the Christmas period, the Department has continued to engage with public health authorities. Public Health has fully reviewed the measures in effect in schools. Public Health continues to advise that the two most important actions to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 (and other respiratory viruses), are:

- ensuring no-one with new onset symptoms attends school, and;
- that all recommended infection prevention and control measures are in place in line with school COVID-19 response plans.

The key infection prevention and control measures that are focused on keeping COVID-19 out of schools and reducing the risk of spread of infection in schools are the use of appropriate hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning, good ventilation practices, mask wearing requirement, maximising physical distancing and antigen testing. Public Health has confirmed that there is no change to these infection prevention and control measures.

2. Hand Hygiene, PPE and Enhanced Cleaning supports

The COVID-19 capitation grant will continue to be the mechanism through which funding will be provided to cater for school costs related to hand hygiene measures, PPE requirements and enhanced cleaning supports. Information has issued to schools in respect of payments for term 2 – January to March 2022 and further information will issue to schools in advance of future payments of capitation grants. Schools may use this funding to provide PPE for their staff.



3. Ventilation

As been advised previously, in supporting schools in undertaking ventilation improvements, good guidance is available at

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad236-guidance-on-ventilation-in-schools/> on:

- Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices;
- Carbon Dioxide Monitors (Your Questions Answered)
- Air Cleaners (Guidance for schools including HEPA Air Cleaner Technical Guidance, Your Questions Answered).

As per Section 1 of the above Guidance, it should be noted that windows do not need to be open as wide in windy/colder weather in order to achieve the same level of airflow into the classroom. This will assist in achieving the appropriate balance between ventilation and comfort levels during periods of colder weather. Opening windows fully for a short period at the end of each school day avoids the need to do the same again before the start of classes in the morning and further assists in managing comfort levels in the classroom in the mornings (partially opened windows should enable good ventilation to be achieved when classrooms are occupied).

Given that each school setting is different, individual schools are best placed to decide on the appropriate measures for their school and have flexibility in this regard. Enhanced Minor Works Grant funding has been provided to schools to support any improvement works, including ventilation improvements where needed. Schools can apply under the Emergency Works Grant Scheme if larger scale ventilation improvement works are required.

As previously advised, specialist advice/assistance of a Chartered Engineer or Registered Architect is an important source of support for schools.

An engineer or architect who is currently, or has previously, worked on a project at the school may be well placed to give a school some initial advice on ventilation matters. In circumstances where poor ventilation continues to exist in a particular room/area after the recommended measures in the *Practical Steps* have been applied, this may include advice on the appropriate HEPA Air Cleaner Unit to be used as an additional measure in conjunction with other methods of ventilation. Account will have to be taken of how the appropriate HEPA Air Cleaner unit is matched to the specific room size, volume, and existing ventilation arrangements.

A dedicated team has been established in the Department of Education to support schools that may have concerns about ventilation. Contact can be made by email to Schools_Ventilation@education.gov.ie. The team is also available to contact schools where required, walking through the steps that schools should take to deploy good ventilation practices etc. Where it is not possible for a school to access the expertise of an engineer or architect, and



where necessary, a technical assessment to assist the school can be facilitated through the Department.

4. Students and COVID-19 (Post Primary Schools)

If a post primary student has tested positive for COVID-19:

- They will be contact traced by the National Contact Tracing Team.
- The National Contact Tracing Team will contact them and ask them to identify their close contacts.
- The student who tested positive will have to isolate for 10 days from the day their symptoms started or for 10 days from the day they had the positive PCR test. The student can return to school after this isolation period, provided they do not have a fever/temperature during the last 5 days of their isolation period.

Students who have symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home, isolate and arrange to have a COVID-19 test.

There are 2 types of COVID-19 test available from the HSE: antigen tests (home test kits) and PCR tests (done at a test centre and sent to a lab).

Students (or anyone between 4 to 39 years of age) who has symptoms of COVID-19 are offered antigen tests firstly and they do not book a PCR test unless they get a positive antigen test result.

Note – If a student is identified as a CLOSE CONTACT of a case in their HOUSEHOLD they will have to restrict their movement as per national guidelines for household close contact and get a COVID-19 test as soon as possible.

Further information is available at

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/testing/get-tested/>

5. Students and COVID-19 (Special Classes)

Where a positive case occurs in a special educational setting (special classes), Public Health will undertake a public health risk assessment.

The purpose of this public risk assessment is to identify the appropriate next steps in the best interests of all of the students in these settings. This is in recognition that within these settings there is a higher probability that there are students with medical vulnerabilities and students who may have greater difficulties with infection prevention and control measures.



6. HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line

For specific queries relating to confirmed cases of Covid-19 within a school, please continue to use the **'HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line'** on **(01) 240 8785**. The phone number will operate 7 days a week, from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 4.30pm Saturday and Sunday. The operator will take basic details and provide these directly to the relevant Public Health department. Each Public Health Department will have designated clinical staff to respond to queries that are escalated from the principals' line to the departments.

7. Substitution for post primary teachers

Given the current high case numbers the Department recognises that schools will continue to require additional substitute cover in the period leading up to the mid-term break to assist in dealing with absences during this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [Information Note SD 0002/2021](#) provides details of a range of measures put in place for post primary schools to assist with the availability of substitutes until the February 2022 mid-term break, when it will be reviewed.

If operational challenges occur due to staff absences schools are expected to maximise on-site education for state examination year groups and fifth year classes.

At all times schools should facilitate as many students attending as possible while providing remote teaching to classes in these circumstances.

School should also prioritise in-person teaching for children with special educational needs.

Schools should continue to make every effort to obtain a substitute for all teacher absences. Where a school has done so and continues to experience difficulties in sourcing sufficient substitute cover, schools are advised to contact the Department of Education in these circumstances by email covid19_alert@education.gov.ie or telephone 057 9324461 and an Inspector will provide further support. This helpline will operate from Monday-Friday 08.00-19.00 and Saturday and Sunday 14.00-19.00 during this period.

Where it is not possible to make contact in advance, school management may use their discretion but are advised to make contact with the Department as soon as practicable thereafter.



Where teachers are required to restrict their movements, they will avail of special leave with pay, in line with [Information Note TC 0027/2021](#) and [Circular 0042/2021](#). These teachers should follow the advice outlined in the Circular and adhere to any new public health guidance. Any teacher who is medically fit for work but has been advised to restrict his/her movements shall be available to work remotely.

8. Supporting students learning and wellbeing during this time

Schools should continue to support pupils' learning and wellbeing during this time.

The measures above should be exhausted before a school has to implement emergency remote teaching and learning plans. Schools should implement their emergency remote teaching and learning plans for these circumstances.

Schools and teachers should use their professional autonomy and discretion to ensure that the highest quality teaching and learning experiences are provided.

To this end, the key expectations are:

- Regular engagement with students: Teachers should, as far as possible, engage with students as per the normal school timetable.
- A blend of guided and independent learning tasks/experiences: Teacher-student engagement should involve both direct teaching by the teacher and the assignment of independent learning tasks for completion by the students.
- Appropriate and engaging learning opportunities: Teachers should ensure that the chosen learning tasks give students an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a clear and concise way.
- Learning tasks: The tasks chosen should be specifically aligned to the needs of the student, including students with special educational needs SEN, and should enable the teacher to monitor progress and give constructive, developmental feedback to support the next stages in their learning.
- Two-way feedback between home and school: Schools should ensure that two-way feedback between teachers and parents/guardians and between teachers and their students is encouraged and supported.

9. Department Helpline for school principals

For further queries in relation to this information note, please contact the Department's Helpline **057 9324461**. This helpline will operate from Monday-Friday 08.00-19.00 and Saturday and Sunday 14.00-19.00 during this period. Queries can also be sent by email to covid19_alert@education.gov.ie



Deirdre Shanley
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