

COVID-19 Response Plan

Edition No. 3 (23rd August 2021)

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1. Edition Updates

- Edition No. 3 – published 23rd August 2021
- Edition No. 2 – published 5th November 2020
- Edition No. 1 – published 25th August 2020

2. Introduction

The Government's [Work Safely Protocol](#), which was published on 14th May 2021, is a revision of the "Return to Work Safely Protocol".

Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. A Covid-19 Response Plan is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that aim to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's 'Return to Work Safely Protocol', the Department of Education plan for school reopening and to prevent the introduction and spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work. The Department of Education has published a suite of documentation available to support schools. These publications have informed the school's revised COVID-19 Response Plan for 2021/22.

While there are some changes to the COVID-19 Response Plan, the control measures from 2020/ 21 remain in place.

One of the key challenges is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning. This plan identifies the steps all members of the school community can take to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school and the steps that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the spread within the school itself.

The overriding objective of this plan is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the pupils in the school.

The COVID-19 response plan is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice as appropriate for primary and special schools.

The assistance and cooperation of all staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

Note: The plan is a live working document, and it should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and amended to take into account new guidance.

3. COVID-19 Policy Statement

Sixmilebridge National School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID-19 Response Plan.

The BOM and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff, parents and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct handwashing techniques
- agree with staff, a lead worker representative (LWR) and assistant LWR who are easily identifiable to carry out the roles outlined in this plan
- inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education and the school
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education advice.

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s), who will be supported in line with the agreement between the Department and education partners.

4. Planning and Preparing for the Return to School

The planning and preparing phase is critical to ensure a safe return to work and covers such items as information and guidance, return-to-work forms, identifying lead worker representatives, revising our induction briefing, identifying and putting in place control measures and updating our safety statements, risk assessments and emergency plans.

4.1. Keeping Up-to-Date with the Latest Advice

The Health & Safety Postholder, Lead Worker Representative (LWR) and Assistant LWR will keep up to date with the latest advice from the Government and Department of Education and ensure that this advice is brought to the attention of senior management and staff and to adjust plans and procedures in line with that advice. This information is regularly updated at www.gov.ie/backtoschool and www.education.ie.

The Health & Safety Postholder and LWR (in collaboration with Assistant LWR) will bring updated/ new advice to the attention of the Principal and Deputy Principal as soon as possible upon its publication. This should be done by email.

4.2. Provision of Information

The school will make the full COVID-19 Response Plan available to staff. Sharing the plan in digital form from a shared folder will ensure that the document is kept live/ current. Staff will be directed to updates through staff memo.

Class teachers will be responsible for providing pupils with the necessary information to pupils, including guidance and details of the school's expectations of them, in an age-appropriate manner.

Relevant information for parents will be provided by means of Parents' Circulars. Parents will be expected to reinforce the school's policies and practices with their children.

4.3. Raising Concerns

Staff should raise issues or concerns through the Lead Worker Representative as detailed in Section 3.7.

Parents should raise issues or concerns through the Parental Complaints Procedure. This involves contacting the relevant class teacher in the first instance. Depending on the nature of the issue or concern, the assistance and/or involvement of school management may be required.

Parents who are dissatisfied with the school's COVID-19 Response Plan should present these concerns in writing to the Chairperson of the Board of Management. Where an issue cannot be resolved at local level, parents may be directed to the Ombudsman for Children in order to pursue a complaint.

4.4. Induction & Training

The attendance of each staff member at COVID-19 Induction & Training is required before school re-opens on 30th August.

Induction & Training of staff members will include the following:

New staff will be required to engage with the following online training materials which have been developed by the Department of Education:

- [Primary School Induction](#) (for all school staff)
- [Cleaning Induction](#)
- [Lead Worker Representative Induction](#)
- [Bus Escorts Induction](#)
- [SNA Induction training](#)
- [Primary Wellbeing webinar](#) (for all teachers)

- ????

4. 5. Building & Equipment

In advance of school re-opening, the water system will be thoroughly flushed to prevent Legionnaire’s Disease. The school’s Building Management Systems will be checked to ensure that the school building is ready to re-open.

The school will be closed in early August to facilitate deep cleaning. Further details in relation to cleaning and disinfecting are set out in Section 5.

4. 6. Procedures for Return to School

A Return to Work (RTW) form will be sent to all staff prior to returning to school. These **must** be completed and returned before returning to school.

All new staff members must attend Induction & Training before returning to school.

All teachers and SNAs must familiarise themselves with their pupils and ensure that they have access to the relevant information. Before school re-opens, SETs and SNAs will be provided with the names of pupils/ groups/ classes to whom they will be assigned. They must ensure to collaborate with the other relevant staff members.

Parents will be invited to contact the school, by phone or email, with any concerns or queries they may have in relation to their child(ren)’s return to school. This information will also be forwarded to the relevant staff members.

4. 7. Lead Worker Representative (LWR)

This section should be read in conjunction with:

- [Work Safely Protocol](#)
- [the COVID-19 Return to Work Safely Protocol](#)
- [the Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Response Plan for Primary and Special Schools](#)
- [Lead Worker Representative \(Appendix 3 to the Department of Education’s Roadmap for the Safe and Sustainable Re-Opening of Schools\)](#)

The Assistant Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in accordance with the Department of Education guidance. At this school, the Staff Safety Representative will assume the role of Lead Worker Representative. Lead Worker Representatives will receive induction and training and information on the role and the measures that have been put in place to help prevent the spread of the virus.

In schools with 30 or more staff and in all Special schools, an Assistant Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in addition to the LWR. The role of the Assistant LWR will be to:

- assist the LWR in their duties as set out above and
- deputise as LWR where the LWR is absent.

The details of the LWR and Assistant LWR are:

Lead Worker Representative	Ms. Elaine Rattigan (Staff Safety Representative)
Assistant Lead Worker Representative	Ms. Gonda Oyen

All staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

The Role of the LWR (and Assistant LWR) is a consultative and advisory one. It can be summarised as follows:

- Represent all staff in the workplace regardless of role, and be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts

- Work collaboratively with school management to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19
- Keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 public health advice
- In conjunction with school management, promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice
- Assist school management with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace in line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol and current public health advice
- In conjunction with school management, monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Conduct regular reviews of safety measures
- Report any issues of concern immediately to school management and keep records of such issues and actions taken to rectify them
- Consult with the school management on the school's COVID-19 Response Plan in the event of someone developing COVID-19 while in school including the location of an isolation area and a safe route to that area
- Following any incident, assess with the school management any follow up action that is required
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace
- Make representations to school management on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

The LWR may consult with, and make representations to, school management on any issue of concern in relation to COVID-19. These include issues in relation to:

- Cleaning protocols and their implementation
- Physical Distancing
- Implementation of one-way systems in the school to ensure social distancing including when entering and exiting the school
- Hand Hygiene facilities including their location and whether they are stocked and maintained
- Hand sanitising
- Staff awareness around hand hygiene in the school
- Respiratory hygiene
- Personal Protective Equipment
- At Risk Groups
- Visitors/Contractors

The LWR/ Assistant LWR shall be entitled to:

- Receive information and training in respect of their role
- Be consulted by school management on the control measures being put in place by the school to minimise the risk of being exposed to COVID-19
- Regular communication with school management on issues related to COVID-19
- Be informed of changes in practice arising from COVID-19 response measures.

Where a staff member wishes to raise a concern with the LWR, he/ she should do so by emailing the LWR at the designated email address (lwr@sixmilebridgens.ie). Where an issue of concern is identified by the LWR (or is notified to the LWR by a staff member), the LWR will bring this to the attention of the principal. Action points for addressing the issue should where possible be agreed between the LWR and the Principal. Staff should be informed of the outcome.

If agreement cannot be reached, the LWR may notify the Board of Management (Chairperson of the BoM in the first instance) of the issue. Action points for addressing the issue should where possible be agreed between the LWR and the BoM. Staff should be informed of the outcome.

4. 8. Display Signage & Pedestrian Management

COVID-19 posters and signs will be displayed in suitable locations highlighting the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and reminders of the control measures (see Section 4).

The Department will provide printed posters to schools, with age-appropriate key health messages – hand washing, sneeze and cough etiquette etc. The school will arrange to display the posters in prominent areas such as offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilets.

External signage will also be erected.

Infrastructure to manage the access of pupils on the school grounds at arrival/ dismissal times will be provided also. Teachers will teach pupils how this will operate.

4. 9. Updated Safety Statement & Risk Assessment

Sixmilebridge National School's Safety Statement and Risk Assessments will be reviewed and updated in line with Department advice to take account of any controls to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

THE COVID-19 Risk Assessment can be found [here](#).

Staff will be provided with these updated plans and risk assessments prior to school re-opening.

4. 10. Access to the School

Any new arrangements required to manage social distancing at arrival and dismissal times, including staggered times, will be communicated to staff and parents in writing. See Section 4.4.

Strict restrictions will be applied to visitors accessing the school. Details will be displayed on posters and signage at the school gate and entrance to the building.

Visits to the school during the school day must be by prior arrangement and visitors should be received by a designated person (e.g. staff member with whom the visitor is meeting) at a specific contact point (e.g. the school entrance) and should be subject to the same controls that apply to staff entering the school.

Physical distancing of 2 metres should be maintained between visitors and others where possible.

The school's outer entrance lobby can be a place where there is a high throughput of visitors. The number of persons permitted to the outer lobby at any one time will be limited.

All visitors will be required to use face coverings as per HPSC guidance.

Drop off of forgotten items (books lunch boxes) will not be permitted. A limited supply of school lunches will be available if needed.

4. 11. General Hygiene

Parents will be informed of the importance of proper hygiene. Pupils' general hygiene (e.g. bathing/ showering, hair-care, changing clothes etc.) is always very important – whether we are dealing with COVID-19 or not. Where the school has concerns regarding a pupil's general hygiene, the relevant teacher will notify the child's parents and advise them on what improvements could be made.

Uniforms should be washed regularly (e.g. at least twice a week). Families generally wash uniforms at the weekend. There will also be a chance for a mid-week wash around the P.E. day when pupils will be wearing the tracksuit. It will not necessary to have a uniform for each day of the week.

4. 12. Parent-Teacher Communication

Only in exceptional cases should parent-teacher meetings be held on-site.

Parents visiting for meeting with teachers should be by appointment and should be facilitated in a way that observes social distancing requirements (e.g. consider venue, layout of room etc.).

The teacher arranging the appointment must ensure that congregation of parents is avoided by:

- Instructing parents who travel by car to remain in the car until they receive a phone call from the teacher

- Be present at/ near reception to greet the parent(s) upon their arrival.

The following means of communication are seen as suitable alternatives:

- Telephone call: This is the most preferable means of communication as it facilitates a more meaningful communication especially where delicate/ sensitive issues are concerned. It also allows for one's tone to be more effectively communicated than other options below
- Aladdin Connect: For teachers to send home messages/ class notes etc. Thought should be given to making replies available to parents
- Email: All teachers should share their school email addresses with parents to enable them to initiate contact where necessary.
- Microsoft Teams: Video/ Audio meetings between parents and teachers can be arranged by teachers. [Click here to learn how to set up a MS Teams meeting with a guest/ external user.](#)
The following link can be copied and shared with parents to enable them to access the MS Teams Meeting link: [Parents – Joining a Microsoft Teams Meeting.](#)

Formal-parent teacher meetings are generally held in November.

NOTE: When communicating in writing, special care should be given to ensure that a professional/ appropriate spirit/ tone is effectively communicated. The message intended may not always be the one that is received!

4. 13. Contact Log

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. The completion of a Visitor Declaration Form & Contact Log (See Appendix A) by each visitor to the school will be overseen by the Officer Manager/ Administrator.

Staff will maintain a log of contacts they and their pupils have where this involves persons outside of the normal bubbles and pods.

4. 14. Pupils' Attendance & Absences

Pupils' attendance should be taken by 9.30am each morning. Parents will be required to provide a reason for their child's absences from school on the Aladdin App.

Teachers should notify the Attendance Postholder where attendance issues arise.

The return to school for some pupils may not be appropriate because the relevant public health guidelines indicate they are in the 'high risk' or "very high risk" groups. Parents will be directed to contact the child's G.P./ family doctor or hospital consultant for medical advice if they have concerns in this regard. If parents are advised that a child should not return to school they are asked to notify the school as soon as possible.

It is anticipated that a small proportion of parents may be reluctant to return their children to school due to general concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and the re-opening of schools. It is the position of the school and Túsła's Education Welfare Service (EWS) that all children registered at a particular school should be back to school unless the school is provided with medical certification stating that the child is not fit to return to school.

The school will, however, be very flexible in relation to pupils' attendance at school this year. Parents will be advised not worry if child exceeds the 20 days especially where due to illness. The school acknowledges that pupils will need to be kept at home if they are unwell. It is better to be too careful than not careful enough. The key message to parents in relation to attendance will be: 'You must not send your child to school is he/ she is unwell.'

In cases where parents opt to withhold their child(ren) from school indefinitely, the school will fulfil its obligations to report to Túsła's Education Welfare Service. Parents will be informed of their entitlement to register for 'home-schooling' with Túsła's Education Welfare Service as an alternative to formal schooling.

4. 15. Remote Learning

On 8th October the Department of Education published [Guidance on Remote Learning in a COVID-19 Context: September – December 2020](#).

The Remote Learning Plan was developed by school management in consultation with staff and published for use in January 2021

Refer to the school's Remote Learning Plan for more details.

4. 16. Travel Arrangements & School Transport

School Transport Section of the Department determines policy relating to school transport and administers the School Transport Schemes.

Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport services on behalf of the Department, engages a bus contractor to provide school transport. School transport is used by a small proportion of pupils at this school.

The HPSC advice, which has been provided to the bus contractor, as it pertains to school transport is as follows:

- Transport personnel should be empowered to decline to transport a child who has obvious symptoms
- When waiting for transport physical distancing should be maintained
- Children should disembark in a controlled way from the bus, that is one at a time
- Supplies of hand sanitizer, tissues, gloves or wipes should be supplied on board the transport vehicle for staff and children to use as needed
- Where physical distancing cannot be maintained on board the vehicle then those over the age of 13 who can wear a cloth face mask/covering should be encouraged to do so recognising however that for many with special educational needs this will not be appropriate.

5. Control Measures

This section deals with the measures we are implementing to prevent or minimise the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and in our communities.

5.1. Know the Symptoms of COVID-19

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. As part of the induction/ training, all staff and pupils are informed of the symptoms of COVID-19 which are:

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

Some people are asymptomatic (do not show symptoms).

Further details are available from the HSE below.

Posters outlining the symptoms will be located around the building.

5.2. Respiratory Hygiene

Respiratory hygiene will be included in the induction training prior to return to school.

Everyone is expected to follow, encourage and promote good respiratory hygiene.

All staff and pupils respiratory measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 include:

- avoid touching the face, eyes, nose and mouth
- cover coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue
- dispose of tissues in a bin

Posters outlining the proper respiratory hygiene will be located around the building.

5.3. Hand Hygiene

Unnecessary hand contact should be avoided where possible and discouraged among pupils. The practice of opening doors with elbows may be an appropriate strategy for senior pupils and adults.

Hand-washing and hand-sanitising products will be provided by the school. Caretaking staff will replenish dispensers in public/ shared areas at least once daily. Teachers will also have access to bulk refills in their own rooms.

It is not necessary for pupils to bring their own supply of hand-sanitiser. In fact, to do so could be distracting and harmful (e.g. ingestion, over-use etc.). When hand rubs/gels are being used in school care should be taken to ensure that pupils do not ingest them as they are flammable and toxic. This will need to be re-enforced by teachers in classrooms.

Pupils and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- On arrival at school (hand sanitiser)
- Before eating or drinking (hand-washing or hand-sanitiser)
- After using the toilet (hand-washing)
- Before/ after playing outdoors (hand-washing or hand-sanitiser)
- Before/ after using any shared item
- When their hands are physically dirty (hand-washing)
- When they cough or sneeze (hand-washing or hand-sanitiser)
- On leaving the building (hand-sanitiser)

On entry to the building each morning children will be required to use the hand sanitiser at the entrance door to the building.

Correct handwashing and hand sanitizing technique will form part of the induction training for staff. Staff and pupils should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands.

Parents and teachers will be expected to teach the correct hand-hygiene techniques to pupils.

Follow the [HSE guidelines on handwashing](#).¹ Follow the [WHO guidelines on using hand-sanitiser](#).²

Hand-hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean). Hand-washing with soap and water is preferable, especially for children with sensitive skin conditions (e.g. eczema) but not always possible when dealing with a class of pupils.

Handwashing facilities for pupils are available in each classroom. Designated handwashing and bathroom facilities for staff will be outlined to staff on their return to work. Designated handwashing facilities will be available to all visitors to the school (e.g. contractors, inspectors, multi-disciplinary team members etc.).

Hand sanitizing stations will be placed at high-use areas and at entrance and exit points. Hand sanitizer in line with WHO recommendations should contain 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol.

A system for monitoring hand washing facilities, logging supplies of soap, paper towels etc. and hand sanitising supplies will be put in place. Cleaning staff will replenish soap, hand-towels and toilet paper. Caretakers will replenish hand-sanitisers in communal areas.

Teachers should monitor hand-sanitiser levels in their own classrooms. Teachers should also monitor the handwashing facilities and supplies in each of their classrooms.

Use of hand hygiene facilities including wash hand basins needs to be managed by teachers so as to avoid congregation of people waiting to use wash hand basins and hand sanitisers.

There is a requirement for access to hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Hand sanitiser dispensers will be deployed more readily at exit and entry points of the building and classrooms and all staff members care should be taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risks of falls.

Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities will be provided in all toilets, kitchens and any food preparation areas.

Hand washing facilities will be maintained in good condition by cleaning staff and supplies of soap and towels should be topped up regularly to encourage everyone to use them.

Posters displaying hand washing techniques and promoting hand washing should be placed on walls adjacent to washing facilities and can be laminated or placed in a plastic sleeve.

The following hand-sanitising products will be available in each classroom:

- Wall-mounter dispenser near the classroom door
- Pump bottles for pods
- Pump bottle on teacher's desk

Teachers should be aware to any pupils with a sensitivity to alcohol-based hand-sanitiser.

5. 4. Physical Distancing

We will be applying physical distancing insofar as is possible. According to the Department of Education, physical must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by it.

Physical distancing will look different across the various class levels. It will not always be possible for staff to

¹ <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnSjFr6J9HI>

maintain physical distance from pupils and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so where this could have a negative impact on pupils.

Physical distancing falls into two categories:

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing interaction

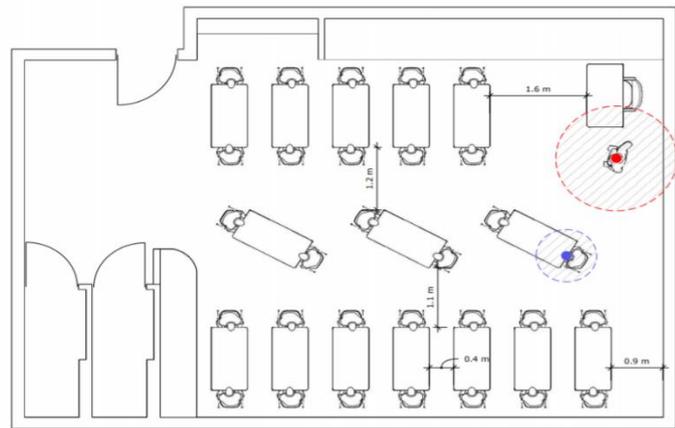
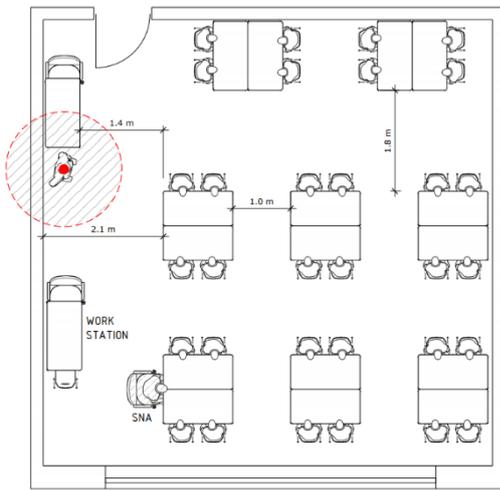
The following measures will help to increase separation and decrease interaction:

5.4.1. General (Adults)

- A. Where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1m distance and where possible 2m from pupils in all settings.
- B. Staff members should maintain a distance of 2m from other adults, including colleagues and visitors.
- C. Briefly passing someone in a hallway is very unlikely to contribute significantly to spread of infection and the same applies to passing someone on the path outside.

5.4.2. Classroom Bubbles & Pods

- A. Generally speaking, the objective of the Bubble & Pod System 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 which will not always be possible. The aim of the system within the building is that each Class Bubble will mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day (with the exception of the yard). The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measure, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble As an additional measure the formulation of pods is at the class teacher's discretion.
- B. Pupils up to 2nd class, and those with complex special needs, will not be expected to maintain physical distancing .
- C. However, distancing will apply to pupils in 3rd to 6th classes insofar as is possible. Classroom layouts will have to be changed, if necessary. However, the fact is that close contact between two pupils might be unavoidable.
- D. If formulating pods, teachers should consult each child's most recent teacher (and SET teacher if applicable). A number of factors will need to be considered when formulating pods (e.g. gender, facilitate a wider circle of friends, children with anxiety/ social difficulties, SEN, mixed-ability groupings, child with SNA access, potential for conflict/ behavioural difficulties). Teachers should exercise good professional judgement when making these decisions.
- E. To the greatest extent possible, pupils and staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will always not be possible.
- F. The contact of SETs and SNAs with more than one class/ class level may be unavoidable but will be kept to a minimum.
- G. Choir practices/performances and music practices/ performances involving wind instruments may pose a higher level of risk and should be avoided when indoors.
- H. When in the computer room, 3rd-6th class pupils should sit next to a pupil from the same Class Pod. An empty chair should be left between pupils from different Pods, insofar as is possible.
- I. Pupils from Cairdeas Gorm and Cairdeas Buí will continue to integrate to their respective mainstream classes commensurate with their abilities. In these cases, the children should be assigned to a consistent pod within the mainstream class.
- J. Where possible, work-stations should be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces that are shared.
- K. Having considered the suggested class layouts provided by the Department of Education, the following layouts are deemed acceptable. However, pods of up to 6 pupils will be acceptable from Junior Infant to 2nd Class.



5.4.3. **Break & Lunch Times**

- A. The risk of virus transmission from contact with outside surfaces or play areas is low. Playtime/outdoor activities will be adjusted to minimise crowding at entrance and exits. It is not possible to maintain physical distancing when primary school children play together outdoors, but in so far as practical it will be helpful to keep to consistent groups.
 - B. Outdoor Class Bubbles will comprise of a whole class level.
 - C. Break and lunch times will be staggered to enable each yard area to be designated for Outdoor Class Bubble (e.g. only two First Class Bubbles in a yard at any one time).
 - D. The dismissal of pupils from school will need to be carefully managed to ensure that it is safe and orderly. Teachers will accompany their pupils to the designated external points at break/ lunch and dismissal times.
 - E. Break and lunch times will be staggered to avoid congestion at entrances and exits. The new arrangements are as follows:
 - a. Break Times
 - i. 10.40-10.50am - Junior Classes (e.g. Junior Infants to 2nd Class)
 - ii. 11-11.10am – Senior Classes (e.g. 3rd to 6th Class)
 - b. Lunch Times
 - i. 12.30-1pm – Junior Classes
 - ii. 1-1.30pm – Senior Classes
- See Appendix C for further details.
- F. Adults, including staff members, should endeavour to maintain a 2m distance with other adults. Consequently, the staffroom layout will be organised to facilitate 2 metre recommendation. The occupancy of the staffroom will be limited.
 - G. 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.
 - H. Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible.
 - I. [See Appendix C](#) Re: Accompanying Pupils to/ from Yards

5.4.4. **Arrival & Dismissal Times**

- A. Staggered drop off/pick up times will apply, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time. The school's new starting/ finishing times will be the earlier times of 9am/ 2.40pm (1.40pm in the case of infants) respectively.
- B. Supervision will be provided from 8:40am (not before) and pupils/ families will be assigned to one of the following time slots during which they will be required to arrive to the school: 8:40-8:50am and 8:50-9am. Children will go directly to their classrooms.
- C. Pupils have been assigned to the following two groups for the purpose of arrival/ dismissal. To ensure a safe and orderly arrival for everyone, pupils must arrive during the time periods assigned to them:

Arrival Time	
8.40-8.50am	Group 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All pupils with siblings (brothers & sisters) at the school
8.50-9.00am	Group 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All pupils who do not have siblings at the school Pupils travelling to school on the school bus

**There will be a very small number of families for whom alternative arrangements are being made and we will contact them directly today.*

We want to ensure an orderly flow of pupils from entry through the school gate all the way to their classrooms. There will be no lining-up before school. We also want to avoid a rush of pupils at 8.40am or 8.50am. Each group will have a 10-minute window to make their way to their classrooms. School will not officially start for all pupils until 9am.

- D. The dismissal of pupils from school will need to be carefully managed to ensure that it is safe and orderly. Teachers will accompany their pupils to the designated external points at break/ lunch and dismissal times.
- E. There will be three dismissal times as follows:

Dismissal Time	Pupils
1.30pm	Junior Infants (from 13 th September)
1.40pm	Senior Infants
2.35pm	Group 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All other pupils with siblings (brothers & sisters) at the school
2.40pm	Group 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All other pupils who do not have siblings at the school Pupils travelling to school on the school bus

Parents will be advised make a plan their own meeting/ collection points with their child(ren) to ensure that there is no congestion at the gate while they try to find one another.

- F. Junior & Senior Infants are our youngest pupils. Senior Infants will finish at 1:40pm from the first day back to school. Junior Infants will be arriving to the school for the first time. It is very important that their early experiences at school, especially at busy times with lots of people around, are calm and positive.
- G. Special arrangements will be in place for their arrival and dismissal:

Junior Infants		
Week 1 (27 th & 28 th August) Monday 30 th August to Friday 3 rd September (inclusive)	Arrival Time: 9.30 am	Dismissal Time: 12.15pm
Week 2 Monday 6 th September to Friday 10 th September (inclusive)	Arrival Time: 9.00am	Dismissal Time: 12.15pm
Week 3 onwards	Arrival Time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8:40–8:50am for pupils with siblings (brothers & sisters) at the school 8:50-9am for pupils who do not have siblings at the school 	Dismissal Time: 1.30pm

To avoid a large number of adults and pupils at one time the collection arrangements from week 3 will be as follows:

- Junior Infants @ 1:30pm

- Senior Infants @ 1:40pm

At the infant collection times, parents will be provided with access to the playground to collect the children. A one-way system will operate at these times. There will be two gates. One entry gate and one exit gate.

H. See Appendix D for further information regarding dismissal arrangements.

5.4.5. Other

- I. Parents/ guardians and childminders will not be permitted onto the school grounds at any time, including at arrival/ dismissal times, except at infant collection times. All parents/ guardians and childminders will be expected to practice physical distancing of 2 meters from all other adults.
- J. There are multiple entrances to, and exits from, the grounds and building to reduce congestion of pupils.
- K. Briefly passing someone in a hallway is very unlikely to contribute significantly to spread of infection and the same applies to passing someone on the path outside.
- L. Now that the staff car park is open the problem of traffic congestion and parking problems should be much improved. Nevertheless, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children to avoid congestion, or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible.
- M. Staff meetings will generally take place in the hall to allow for physical distancing and minimal contact.

5.5. Shared Resources

- A. Equipment sharing will be minimised and shared equipment should be cleaned between shared uses. Teachers will need to ensure it is clean before use.
- B. The use of concrete materials and toys will have to be kept to a minimum. They should be cleaned at least weekly in accordance with the cleaning arrangements set out in this plan. This will remove dust and dirt that can harbour germs. However, a commitment cannot be given to the availability of cleaning staff for the purpose of cleaning all classroom materials and toys. Teachers should consider this when planning the use of toys and concrete materials.
- C. The ideal is for pupils to be given a set of resources (e.g. a box/ zip-lock bag of counters) for their use only, where possible.
- D. In general, items can be used after 72 hours quarantine.
- E. Where practical each pupil should have dedicated schoolbooks.
- F. Children should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene before/ after using any shared item.
- G. Pupils should have their own individual art and equipment supplies.
- H. Staff members should carry their own pens/ biro's at all times.
- I. Library books being returned will be quarantined for 72 hours.
- J. Shared electronics such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards must be cleaned between use. Pupils from 3rd class up can help by wiping down these items under the supervision of teachers. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products used on electronic devices.
- K. Staff must perform hand-hygiene before and after using the photocopiers and wipe the keypad down after use.
- L. Resources that are visibly dirty or contaminated with blood or body fluids should be taken out of use immediately for cleaning or disposal.
- M. Clean toys and equipment should be stored in a clean container or clean cupboard.
- N. At this time, soft modelling materials and play dough where used should be for individual use only.

5.6. Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The school will provide the required PPE to staff. PPE use cannot take the place of other preventative measures.

4.6.1. Face Coverings

The HSE's Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSPC) has confirmed that all recommendations published in the public health advice by the Minister at the beginning of July including physical distancing guidelines as

set out in the recently published roadmap still apply in all schools, with the exception of the recommendations on face coverings which has been updated to reflect the latest research and expertise.

It is now recommended that primary school staff wear face coverings, in accordance with the [HSE's advice on face coverings](#)³, when a physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.

Staff members should, where possible, wear a cloth face covering/ mask (e.g. not visor). There is substantial evidence to indicate that masks are far more effective at spreading respiratory droplets than visors.

Each staff member will be provided with receive an allocation for the purchase of face coverings each term. The school will also provide a supply of disposable face masks for unforeseen reasons.

The HSE's Health Protection & Surveillance Centre (HPSC) published additional [Guidance for Schools regarding SNAs Supporting Children and Young People with Additional Care Needs in the Context of COVID-19](#). When SNAs and Bus Escorts are within 2m of a pupil and performing personal **healthcare-like tasks (e.g. toileting/ eliminations; feeding; personal cleansing/ dressing)** the face covering should normally be a surgical mask. A supply of surgical-grade masks will be provided to all SNAs and Bus Escort.

Eye protection (e.g. visor) should be used where there is a concern that there will be prolonged close contact and that exposure to fluid/respiratory droplets is likely e.g. where there are behavioural issues with problems such as spitting.

Cloth face coverings are not suitable for children under the age of 13 and anyone who:

- has trouble breathing
- is unconscious or incapacitated
- is unable to remove it without help
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering

It is essential that those wearing a cloth face covering understand:

- The purpose is not to protect themselves but to reduce onward transmission and the benefit is reliant on ensuring the mask is worn appropriately see guidance on mask wearing.
- Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.
- It is not a teachers responsibility to enforce mask use by pupils.

4.6.2. Gloves

The use of disposable gloves in the school setting by pupils or teachers is not appropriate. It does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves. Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene. Washing or use of hand sanitiser on gloved hands is not appropriate.

4.6.3. Other

Acute PPE (safety glasses, masks, tissues, aprons, gloves, waste bags) will be available for cases when dealing with a suspected case and face coverings / glasses may be worn when 2m distancing cannot be maintained when attending to children who fall, need first aid, etc.

Cleaning staff should wear aprons while at work. Goggles, visors and gloves will be provided also. These must be worn in accordance with the HSE's advice.

5.7. Ventilation

Managing ventilation is just one of a suite of public health measures in place to keep our schools safe.

Updated guidance for schools on [Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools](#) was provided at the end of May 2021 following the work of an expert group that carefully considered the role of ventilation in managing COVID-19.

³ <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>

The over-arching approach in the guidance is for schools to have windows open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance outlines that Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) monitors can play a part in providing a useful general indication that areas/rooms may not be adequately ventilated. They can enable occupants to become familiar with the impacts of activities, outdoor weather and window openings on levels of good ventilation. In this regard, the Department is procuring a number of portable monitors that will be distributed to schools in August and September.

5. Cleaning & Disinfecting

New cleaning and disinfection arrangements will be provided to ensure a safe working environment and reduce any potential spread of infection including COVID-19. A new cleaning schedule will be operated by 5 Star Facility Services. Teachers will be required to clean their own workspaces (e.g. teachers' desks and whiteboards/ interactive panels).

Senior pupils (e.g. 3rd – 6th classes) will be expected to help with cleaning of their own workspaces with the wipes provided. The computer room and library will be disinfected using the fogging machine daily. Pupils should clean the computer room keyboards and ipads with wipes after use.

6. Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19

Staff or pupils must not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. Any pupils who are unwell while at school will be sent home. This includes pupils who are showing symptoms of COVID-19.

Teachers will use their professional judgment when deciding whether or not a child should be sent home.

6. 1. Pupils who are Unwell or Displaying Symptoms of COVID-19

If a pupil displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school the following are the procedures to be implemented:

- A. The relevant teacher (Staff Member A) will call Staff Member B (e.g. neighbouring class teacher, adjoining SET, SNA etc.) to assist.
- B. Whichever staff member remains in the classroom supervising the other children will ensure that the child's parents are notified immediately that the child is displaying COVID-19 symptoms and instructed to collect the child without delay.
- C. The staff member who is accompanying the pupil to the isolation room will keep at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person and wear a face covering.
- D. Gloves and aprons will be available but their use are not substitutes for other control measures (e.g. hand-hygiene, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette etc.).
- E. Instruct the child presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a waste bag.
- F. If they are too unwell to wait to be collected or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that pupil is a COVID-19 suspect.
- G. Hand the child over to his/ her parent or guardian outside the front door (under canopy) and advise that the family doctor/ G.P. is consulted by telephone immediately in accordance with school policy.
- H. Report the need to senior management.
- I. Place the 'Do Not' Enter' Sign on the door to ensure there is no access until the area is cleaned in accordance with Section 5.3 of this plan. The pupil's classroom will also be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible.
- J. Ensure that the child's collection from school is recorded in the school office.

6. 2. Procedure Where a Staff Member is Displaying Symptoms

- A. Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms if one is available. If the person is an adult, he or she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premise.
- B. Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by an immediate family member who will call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home.
- C. Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects.
- D. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided.
- E. If the person is well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used.
- F. If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a COVID-19 suspect.
- G. Report the need to senior management.
- H. Report the room for urgent cleaning.
- I. Place the 'Do Not' Enter' Sign on the door to ensure there is no access until the area is cleaned in accordance with Section 5.3 of this plan. The staff member's workspace/ room will also be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible.

6. 3. Follow-Up

- A. In general, the school will not be notifying parents unless there is a confirmed case of COVID-19. Doing so could cause unnecessary worry and anxiety.

- B. However, the HSE and the school will inform any parents whose children have come into close contact with a diagnosed case. The instruction of the HSE must be followed and the confidentiality of all persons will be ensured. It's important that we don't stigmatise anyone.
- C. The HSE will advise the Board of Management of the actions that the school should take.

6.4. Isolation Areas

The designated isolation areas within the school building will be:

- The Servery
- Meeting Room A

7. Staff Duties

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play.

In this regard and in order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- adhere to the School COVID-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined
- complete the Return to Work (RTW) form before they return to work
- must inform the principal if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace
- must complete COVID-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school
- must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices
- coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained
- make themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own well-being
- self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of COVID-19
- not return to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances
- if they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above
- keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

8. Management of Staff Absences

COVID-19-related absences of teachers and SNAs will be managed in line with [Circular 42/ 2021](#)⁴. COVID-19-related absences for Ancillary Staff is covered by Circular [54/ 2020](#)⁵.

Teachers should notify all absences as per staff handbook(s).

The school has been selected by the Department of Education as a base school for three Teacher Supply Panel positions.

The school will retain a local supply panel for SNA, and ancillary staff absences.

⁴ <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0042-2021.pdf>

⁵ [Circular 54/ 2020: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Arrangements for certain employees of recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools](#)

9. Wellbeing

The Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019)* proposes that well-being is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of life, takes care of their physical well-being and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life.

Promoting the wellbeing of our school community is a fundamental element of the overall plan to ensure a successful return to school as we continue to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are living through exceptional times and this impacts on the well-being of everyone in different ways, at different times. People have been naturally worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones and have been challenged to varying degrees by the public health measures that were put in place in Ireland to control the spread of the virus, such as staying at home and school closures.

People have an inbuilt capacity to adapt. This is what is at the heart of resilience. Most people are weathering this storm and will emerge stronger and with new skills. Most respond really well to information and practical advice on new ways of managing and staying active and connected. Some will, for a variety of reasons, struggle a little to adapt and will need greater levels of practical and social support to make the adjustments needed to stay well. A very small number may find the changes brought about by COVID-19 very challenging, and may need higher levels of practical and mental health supports.

As we prepare for the reopening of the school we know that most pupils, and indeed their families and school staff will be looking forward to going back, reconnecting with school, reconnecting with staff and friends and settling back into school work. This will be a time of change, with new rules and routines to learn, in order to keep everyone safe. Some pupils may feel anxious about the return to school. In times of change some worry or anxiety is a normal response. Most will settle and re-engage with little difficulty after an initial settling in period.

It is important that children and young people are supported to experience a successful transition back to school, recognising that transition is a process over time rather than a once-off event. Teachers must recognise that pupils' well-being and successful transition back to school must be given the necessary time and attention. Teachers and other relevant school staff must also ensure they are caring, kind and supportive towards all pupils, especially those who are struggling.

The measures contained within this section of the plan will form our Well-being Strategy and will help school staff support their pupils on this transition journey. It will also provide resources and suggestions to promote the well-being of school staff. The Wellbeing Strategy will be informed by the Wellbeing Toolkit for Primary Schools (August, 2020).

The SPHE curriculum is the primary means through which content and skills associated with Wellbeing will be explored and delivered.

9.1. Raising Awareness

Teachers will have a critical role in leading the induction/ awareness-raising of their pupils. Key areas which should be covered (in an age-appropriate way) include:

- New school routines (e.g. arrival/ dismissal, break/ lunch times etc.)
- The key control measures:
 - Knowing the symptoms
 - Hand-hygiene
 - Respiratory hygiene
 - Physical distancing
- Creating ways in which pupils can express/ share concerns or worries with the teacher in a private way.

9.2. Resources for Schools

The school's approach to well-being will be informed by additional resources and support for school communities, including:

- [Well-being Webinars developed by NEPS](#)
- [Well-being Toolkits for Primary Schools](#)
- Further guidance and resources will be linked on the gov.ie/backtoschool webpage

9.3. The Five Key Principles for Supporting a Successful Transition:

Pupils will be supported in their successful transition back to what will be our new normal through the promotion of the following five key principles of psychological care:

- a sense of safety – so that people feel that they are safe, and that those around them are safe
- a sense of calm – so that people feel relaxed, composed and grounded (regulated)
- a sense of belonging and connectedness – so that people experience having meaningful relationships with others who understand and support them
- a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy – so that people believe that they can manage and do what is needed, and so can their school community
- a sense of hope – so that people believe that things will work out well.



Key Goals for the School Community

Figure 1

9.4. A Continuum of Support for Pupils' Transition and Wellbeing

When the school re-opens there will be changes for everyone. Pupils will be changing classes, some may be changing teachers and some will have changed schools. There will be new school rules and routines to learn to keep everyone safe. All schools are different, and each school will know how best to support the process of transition within their own school. It is important to adopt a whole-school approach to supporting a successful transition back to school.

The Continuum of Support framework (Figure 2) supports a whole-school approach to planning for the return to school and helps to ensure that staff, pupils and parents feel welcome, safe and secure. It also recognises that some pupils will require more targeted intervention and planning to help them reconnect with their school community and re-engage with learning.



Figure 1

6.4.1. Level 1: Universal Response for All Pupils

At a universal level a whole school response will be required to support the well-being of all within the school community as we reopen schools. This response encompasses the following elements:

Schools have now been provided with practical guidance and support around the safety measures that need to be put in place in order to support a safe return to school for all. Understanding the importance of the safety measures that need to be in place requires clear messaging and school staff, parent and pupil awareness-raising. This may involve sharing briefing letters, with pictures of changes to the physical organisation of the school. Younger children or those with special educational or additional needs may benefit from developmentally appropriate language and visual support to help explain new rules for staying safe at school.

The school environment will be orderly. Routines and procedures will be systematic and embedded consistently and with patience

A. Implementing Physical Safety Measures

The school has now been provided with practical guidance and support around the safety measures that need to be put in place in order to support a safe return to school for all. Understanding the importance of the safety measures that need to be in place requires clear messaging and school staff, parent and pupil awareness-raising. This may involve sharing briefing letters, with pictures of changes to the physical organisation of the school. Younger children or those with special educational or additional needs may benefit from developmentally appropriate language and visual support to help explain new rules for staying safe at school.

B. Settling In - Slow Down to Catch Up

It will take time for staff and pupils to adjust to being back in the school environment and be ready and available to fully engage with teaching and learning. A sense of urgency about returning to the curriculum is natural but time spent on settling the pupils and getting the pupils ready for learning will yield positive outcomes in the longer term and will likely reduce stress. So it is important that teachers and school staff do not rush into a focus on formal teaching and learning before first considering readiness, and focusing on well-being. Teachers should consider the following:

- i. Routines create a sense of psychological safety by providing predictability. Re-establishing routines or creating new ones will contribute to a safe and calm learning environment and give pupils a sense of security.
- ii. Revising and reinforcing classroom routines and whole-school routines around respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, social distancing and orderly break and lunch times and arrival and dismissal will be critical in creating a **sense of safety**.

- iii. All classes and groups across the school will ringfence time – 20 to 30 minutes - each morning for the **morning meeting**. The morning meeting will offer pupils, teachers and SNAs the opportunity to be together in a calm, low-demand, non-academic atmosphere where pupils can share news or stories, discuss the day to come and play and chat with each other and the adults in their classroom. This time will support the principle of **a sense of calm** and a **sense of connectedness and togetherness**. Teachers are encouraged to view tips on the “Opening Session” in the NEPS toolkit (p. 37) which will be the first time pupils and staff have been together since the summer holidays and which will effectively be the first morning meeting.
- iv. Remember that adults in the school are important role models for pupils. Modelling calm responses and coping strategies will help pupils learn helpful ways of managing their fears and anxieties. Modelling hopeful thinking and attitudes towards Covid-19 will reassure pupils and will help develop **a sense of hope**.
- v. It is important that children’s questions, concerns and anxieties pertaining to both Covid-19 and the return to the school should be listened to and responded to with consistency. The NEPS toolkit provides worthwhile resources to help teachers respond to children’s questions in a way that will promote **a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy**.
- vi. Some pupils may find it more difficult to sit, focus and concentrate for the lengths of time they may have been able to manage prior to school closure, because they have not practised these skills for a number of months. We usually see this when pupils return to school after summer holidays. Shorter learning intervals, followed by safe movement breaks (even standing up and stretching), will help to support increased concentration and focus. Many will benefit from relaxation techniques and calming activities, such as mindfulness, drawing, physical activity, music, and relaxation/ breathing exercises.
- vii. Teachers are encouraged to use the ideas and strategies for teaching relaxation techniques and activities as well as lessons outlined in the **NEPS back-to-school toolkit**.
- viii. Pupils will have had widely varying experiences of the time during school closures arising from COVID-19. It is recommended that teachers ask pupils and parent(s)/guardian(s) to fill in inventories/surveys of children’s experience over the past 6 months (see NEPS toolkit p. 34-40). These documents will provide worthwhile information and may identify pupils in need of extra support.
- ix. The Daily Mile will be a project undertaken by all classes this year. Physical activity is an important aspect of wellbeing and is a protective factor against the development of mental health problems among children and young people.
- x. Different cohorts of pupils may require a different well-being focus.
- xi. Pupils transitioning into our school for the first time will need particular attention to be focused on establishing relationships. To support new pupils – both incoming Junior Infants and pupils transferring into other classes – children will be invited to meet their new teachers and see their classrooms before the school year begins on August 26.
- xii. Collectively the staff will need to consider the needs within the school community, and how the school might best promote well-being in order to achieve our goal.
- xiii. The **NEPS Well-being Webinar** and using the **NEPS Well-being Toolkit** for Teachers (available on the Teachers Team under “Files”) will provide further advice, suggestions and resources to support staff to generate ideas and a plan for well-being promotion for our school during this settling in period. These resources are available at gov.ie/backtoschool.

6.4.2. Levels 2 and 3: Targeted and Individualised Response for Some or Few Children

Some pupils and their families may need additional help to settle back into school. It is important to take notice of and plan to support pupils who don’t settle after an initial period, despite having had access to universal support.

Pupils who struggle to settle back into school may require support that is in addition to the universal well-being supports being provided for all pupils.

These may include those who:

- are reluctant to attend school
- are absent due to illness or for medical reasons
- were previously identified as having special educational or additional needs
- have experienced loss or grief (bereaved/illness/family illness)
- have become or are at risk of becoming disengaged from learning
- whose behaviour seems different or out of character

For some of these pupils their needs may have emerged during the pandemic, while some others may have had existing needs prior to school closure. These pupils may find the return to school challenging and require additional support to help them to adjust to changes in schools' routines and environments.

Actively involving pupils in the planning for their return to schools will help reduce their worries and rebuild a sense of belonging and connection. Taking time to re-engage with class teachers, special education teachers and special needs assistants, as appropriate, will help support the transition back to school. Pupil support plans should be developed in collaboration with parents to identify current strengths and needs and enhance the effectiveness of intervention planning. For those pupils unable to return to school immediately (for example, due to health concerns), ongoing distant learning supports will be required.

For pupils who continue to struggle the following approaches may be helpful:

- adopting a strengths-based approach – using the pupil's strengths, interests and abilities to build resilience and foster a sense of belonging
- helping pupils to cope with worries by using strategies such as deep breathing, relaxation techniques, focusing on positive thoughts, problem-solving by breaking tasks into small, more manageable steps, providing information in accessible format, and using story-telling and other techniques to navigate fears, create solutions and build resilience
- fostering social connections and friendships
- differentiating universal approaches and responses using social stories, schedules, visual approaches and so on. Teaching skills to support adapting to new routines when at school, including explicit teaching and support about hygiene requirements using visuals, videos and repetition to reinforce key messages
- using targeted programmes to develop social and emotional competence
- ensuring ongoing collaboration between parents, pupils and teachers
- in developing an appropriate response and support plan for pupils requiring more than universal support teachers should consult the Wellbeing Toolkit for advice and strategies relating to reluctant attenders, panic attacks, stress and anxiety such as Psychological First Aid.

Schools will be supported with this response by the provision of a range of further guidance and support from DES Support Services and Agencies, the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) and HSE Services. These will be communicated via the [gov.ie/backtoschool](https://www.gov.ie/backtoschool) webpage.

9.5. Promoting School Staff Well-being

Everyone will have had different experiences of the pandemic and it will take time to adjust to the 'new normal'. It is especially important that adults in the school are proactive and look after their own well-being. Pupil well-being is influenced by the well-being of the adults around them. Pupils pick up on the stress of others so it is important that adults model positive ways of coping with change and the return to school.

The Department recognises the need for school staff well-being and collective selfcare. Support for school staff well-being will be provided by Department Support Services including the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team.

An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and well-being of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention.

The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life. They are providing this support under the banner of 'Well-being Together: Folláinne Le Chéile'. Under the EAS, employees have a dedicated free-

phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as well-being, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc.

Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home). A bespoke well-being portal and app which offers access to podcasts and blogs on topics around well-being and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition is also available. In addition online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. Spectrum Life will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote staff well-being in schools as schools reopen and during the upcoming school year.

In this context, staff will be provided with:

- Clear messages about the arrangements in place to reopen schools
- Access to guidance and resources to build knowledge and awareness of how best to support the well-being of pupils on return to schools
- Strategies to build collective staff wellness and resilience
- Knowing how and where to get support (gov.ie/backtoschool)

Staff wellbeing will be supported through the same principles of psychological care as listed above for pupils and through fostering a sense of safety, a sense of calm, a sense of belonging and connectedness, a sense of self-efficacy and community efficacy, a sense of hope. Staff members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Covid-19 response plan and with new routines and procedures – these plans and policies have been developed with the **safety** of all members of the school community in mind.

School staff should safeguard time each day for themselves, for self-care and relaxation and should be reassured that this school year will begin very differently to any that has gone before and that changed priorities mean we cannot expect to race back to implementing an overloaded curriculum. In effort to catch up we must first slow down and establish a sense of **calm** within ourselves and within our school.

Staff members are encouraged to maintain and renew relationships after the prolonged school closure and to check in with one another. Our school has traditionally enjoyed very positive and cooperative relationships among staff and the nurturing of these relationships will help to further develop a sense of **togetherness and connectedness** as we transition back to school. It would be particularly useful if staff members working closely together, either by geography, class level or caseload could check in with each other regularly. Senior Management can only help to support colleagues if issues or problems around wellbeing are brought to their attention.

Staff members should be proud of their efforts on behalf of pupils during the closure and should focus on the strengths and talents, both individually and collectively, of the school community in meeting the challenges that lie ahead. Familiarity with the Covid-19 response plan, critical incident policy and new procedures will help staff to develop a sense of **self-efficacy** and **community-efficacy**.

School staff should reflect on past successes of the school and on hopes and goals for the coming school year. Staff members should discuss these hopes and goals with each other and with pupils. We should practise expressing gratitude for what we have, for what is going well and for each other. Through these practices we can help to develop a sense of **hope** for the future.

The fostering of staff wellbeing is of critical importance for teachers, SNAs and ancillary staff but it will also be a powerful example for pupils if teachers prioritise their own wellbeing and model positive and hopeful attitudes.

9.6. Partnering with Parents/ Carers

It is important to partner with families to ensure a whole school community, aligned response to the return to school. Parents/carers will benefit from clear messages about:

- being invited to share with the school if they have concerns or are worried about their children with the school
- knowing how and where to get support

9.7. Encouraging Pupil Voice and Agency

It is important to remember to provide ongoing opportunities for the voices of the children/ young people in a school to be heard and responded to in a meaningful way. It is also important to consider the involvement pupils

in the school plans to ensure safety as we reopen schools. Pupils will benefit from clear messages, communicated in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate way, about:

- the arrangements in place to reopen schools, and the rationale for these arrangements
- how the school will support their well-being on return to school, which will in turn support their reengagement with learning
- their own responsibilities in helping to keep the school environment safe

This may involve parents supporting the communication of these messages in advance of the pupil returning to school, depending on their age or stage of development.

- Being invited to contribute to reviews of the whole school approach
- Understanding how they can proactively support their own well-being by getting enough sleep, establishing routines, eating healthily, getting physical exercise, taking time for creativity etc.
- Hearing that it's normal to feel anxious or worried about coming back to school. This is a time of change, and it's normal to feel anxious or worried at times of change.
- Being invited to share with the school, within a safe forum, if they have concerns or are worried
- As appropriate to their age and stage of development, knowing how and where to get support.

10. Curriculum Matters/ Teaching & Learning

Curriculum considerations for 2021/22 must take account of the variable learning experiences of pupils during the period of school closure and the practical contexts in which teaching and learning will be taking place in the new school year. It is likely that pupils with special educational needs, pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and pupils experiencing homelessness or living in direct provision have been the most adversely affected by the lack of classroom contact time.

The school community and relevant organisations and agencies need to ensure that those pupils receive the necessary supports in their learning in the 2021/22 school year. In addition, explicit provision must be made for contingency curriculum planning for a situation in which there might be an unexpected period of school closure.

10.1. Initial Priorities

This will be a somewhat unusual start to the school year. School leaders, the in-school leadership team and teachers will have a particular role to play in establishing secure and safe learning environments, in supporting the well-being of all, and in preparing collaboratively for teaching and learning in a way that enables all pupils to progress and flourish in the 2021/22 school year.

Helping all pupils to make the transition back to school, to reconnect with their teachers and friends and to establish new school routines that support their health and safety will be a priority at the start of the new school year.

While the specific focus of preparation will vary from school to school in light of the individual school context, there are themes and areas that all schools will need to consider:

- Implementation of all health requirements that help to prevent Covid-19 from coming into the school or spreading among pupils and staff, including requirements regarding physical distancing
- Supporting all pupils in settling back to school, ensuring that pupils starting school, pupils with SEN, and pupils at risk of educational disadvantage are well supported
- Preparing for how the curriculum can be mediated in a context that acknowledges that children have had different experiences while learning from home
- Progressing the school's priorities regarding well-being, teaching, learning and assessment
- Building on the experience of using digital technology during the school closure period to support contingency arrangements in the event that some pupils need to continue their learning in a distance learning environment for a period during the 2021/22 school year
- Updating school policies to support effective digital and blended learning; these should include the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), Child Protection procedures, and Data Protection and Critical Incident policies

10.2. Managing Transitions

The start of any new school year may be regarded as a transition. Some pupils and parents may be anxious. However, the return to school offers a welcome opportunity for children to revive social connections, to re-bond with their friends, make new friends, and to spend time with adults who are significant to them. For these reasons it will be important for school management and teachers to:

- Communicate in advance with parents and pupils about the practicalities of the start of the new school year, welcoming them and re-assuring them that the school is following the public health guidance to ensure the health and well-being of all pupils
- Ensure that, at the start of the year, pupils have space, time and planned activities to re-connect with their classmates and re-form relationships with staff
- Allow time to enable pupils to develop those relationships and connections so that they will be available and ready to participate in a meaningful way with their learning; 'Slow down to catch up' will be a key message from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to schools in the initial weeks of the new school year
- Include routines that create a safe space where pupils can openly communicate their needs, thoughts and emotions, as well as their learning at the start of the school year and throughout the terms that follow. This

could include the use of circle time, partner conversations or listening triads. Further information on these and other useful strategies is available from PDST at <https://pdst.ie/node/5897>

- Ensure that necessary supports are put in place to meet the learning and well-being needs of all pupils.

6.4.3. Welcoming Junior Infants

Junior Infant pupils have been invited to book a time slot for a visit their new teachers and classrooms on Thursday 26th August. To ensure a calming and positive experience on their first days at school, their starting time will be later than that of other class levels.

To ensure children starting in primary school are supported as fully as possible, a wide range of resources and support materials have been prepared and published by both the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration (DCDEI). They include:

- Let's Get Ready, a resource to provide guidance for parents, teachers and Early Learning and Care (ELC) practitioners in supporting children's transition from ELC settings to primary school, available [here](#)⁶.
- The Let's Play Ireland website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/lets-playireland/>
- Guidance developed by NEPS on how the transition from pre-school to primary school can be supported is available [here](#)⁷.
- A series of short webinars, entitled Insights, developed by the Department of Education's Inspectorate, that address a range of topics relevant to teachers of infant classes in primary schools and include a focus on transitions is available [here](#)⁸.
- 70,000 transitions packs are being made available to parents to support children starting school. Each pack includes the Mo Scéal template developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), available [here](#)⁹.

6.4.4. Transition from Senior Infants to First Class

The transition from senior infants to first class (the shorter school day to the longer school day) can be challenging for some children. It will be necessary for schools to take account of this in the types of activities and experiences planned for the pupils, especially in the initial weeks of September.

10.3. Curriculum Structure & Time Allocation

In recognition of the much-needed focus on pupils' well-being, transitions and the importance of ensuring pupils' progress in the 'core subjects', the curriculum's structure and time allocation will be revised and re-arranged.

This NCCA's 'Draft Primary Curriculum Framework 2020' will guide the school's new approach to the time allocated to each curricular area.

In recognition of the priorities set out in Section 11.1, there will be a substantial proportion of time allocated to areas which are explicitly connected with Well-Being (e.g. SPHE and PE), Language (e.g. English and Gaeilge) and Maths.

- Well-Being (Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (P.E.)) and
- Language (English and Gaeilge)
- Digital Learning

⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a8d8f-ready-for-school/>

⁷ <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/govieassets/77926/a9fd6c42-4262-457b-95b5-49b44f148b0c.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>

⁹ <https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-sc%C3%A9al>

6.4.5. Timetabling

These time allocations are intended to assist teachers in their work with the curriculum in these new and challenging circumstances and to ensure that children's priority learning needs are addressed to the greatest extent possible.

The following subjects/ curricular areas will be taught weekly:

- Well-being (SPHE & PE)
- Language (Language 1 & 2)
- Maths

These subjects/ curricular areas will be timetabled over a four-week period at the teacher's discretion:

- Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE)
- Arts Education
- Patron's Programme

The four-time allocations below set out the time requirements for each subject/ curricular area as well as Roll Call & Assembly, Breaks and Recreation (Lunch).

*It may not be possible to afford subject/ curricular areas timetabled around breaks/ lunch and dismissal times the proposed time allocation. That is perfectly understandable as time will be needed for hand-hygiene and managing the orderly collection/ dismissal of pupils.

Stage 1 (Junior & Senior Infants)			
Weekly Allocations		Monthly Allocations (4 Weeks)	
Well-Being (SPHE & PE)	3 hours		12 hours
Language	5 hours 45 minutes		23 hours
Language 1	3 hours 15 minutes		13 hours
Language 2	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
Maths	3 hours		12 hours
		Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE)	8 hours
		Arts Education	8 hours
		Patron's Programme	6 hours
Roll Call & Assembly Time	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Flexible time	1 hour
		Total	93 hours 20 minutes

Stage 2 (First & Second Class)			
Weekly Allocations		Monthly Allocations (4 Weeks)	
Well-Being (SPHE & PE)	3 hours 30 minutes		14 hours
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Language 1	4 hours 45 minutes		19 hours
Language 2	3 hours		12 hours
Maths	4 hours		16 hours
		Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE)	8 hours 30 minutes
		Arts Education	8 hours 30 minutes
		Patron's Programme	8 hours
Roll Call & Assembly Time	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Flexible time	4 hours
		Total	113 hours 20 minutes

Stage 3 (Third & Fourth Class)			
Weekly Allocations		Monthly Allocations (4 Weeks)	
Well-Being (SPHE & PE)	3 hours 30 minutes		14 hours
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Language 1	4 hours 45 minutes		19 hours
Language 2	3 hours		12 hours
Maths	4 hours		16 hours
		Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE)	8 hours 30 minutes
		Arts Education	8 hours 30 minutes
		Patron's Programme	8 hours
Roll Call & Assembly Time	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Flexible time	4 hours
		Total	113 hours 20 minutes

Stage 4 (Fifth & Sixth Class)			
Weekly Allocations		Monthly Allocations (4 Weeks)	
Well-Being (SPHE & PE)	4 hours		16 hours
Language	7 hours 45 minutes		31 hours
Language 1	4 hours 45 minutes		19 hours
Language 2	3 hours		12 hours
Maths	5 hours		20 hours
		Social, Environmental & Scientific Education (SESE)	9 hours
		Arts Education	6 hours
		Patron's Programme	6 hours
Roll Call & Assembly Time	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
Breaks	50 minutes		3 hours 20 minutes
Recreation	2 hours 30 minutes		10 hours
		Flexible time	2 hours
		Total	113 hours 20 minutes

6.4.6. Arrival Times, Assembly Time & Morning Meetings

As outlined above in Sections above, pupils' transitions including the transition from home to school each day needs to be carefully and successfully managed.

Some pupils will arrive to their classrooms 20 minutes before school starts. It will be very important that teachers establish a suitably calm and orderly routine for this period of the day.

This applies to the time period of 8.40-9.30am (arrival period plus assembly time).

Many will benefit from relaxation techniques and calming activities, such as mindfulness, drawing, music, and relaxation/ breathing exercises.

Teachers will incorporate a form of Morning Meetings into their morning schedule. They will also support pupils' Well-Being and the principle of 'Settling in: Slow Down to Catch Up'.

During a Morning Meeting, the classroom community – pupils and adults – gather together, generally in a circle, at the beginning of each day to greet each other, share information from their daily lives, develop and sustain positive relationships, engage in a specific activity, read a daily message from the teacher, and hear the format/ schedule for the day. Morning meetings offer valuable opportunities for children to practise social-emotional that carry over to the rest of the day. Each Morning Meeting will last twenty to thirty minutes during the daily Roll Call & Assembly Time.

The goals of Morning Meetings are:

- To build community in the classroom and fulfil children's need to belong, feel significant and have fun
- To build positive relationships
- To promote well-being
- To develop and practice social-emotional skills
- To build trust and set a positive tone for learning

Further information on Morning Meetings for teachers is available [here](#)¹⁰ and there are some video examples [here](#)¹¹.

6.4.7. Physical Activity/ Daily Mile

Physical activity will be hugely beneficial to pupils especially as it applies to physical/ mental well-being and the development of pupils to concentrate when learning.

Each class should incorporate the Daily Mile (15 minutes) into the daily schedule three times a week (more if preferred). This time would contribute to the well-being time allocation or flexible time could also be used.

10.4. Children with Special Education Needs

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) will require particular support at the time of transition back to school. As they return to school, the quality of the social and emotional aspects of the curriculum will be critical to their successful re-engagement in school life and their learning across the curriculum. Particular attention will need to be given to supporting their well-being, reducing potential anxiety and planning learning experiences that take account of the effect of the school closure period on their progress and their engagement in learning.

A useful strategy in supporting the re-engagement of pupils with SEN as the new school year commences is to assign special education teachers to them for morning meet and greets, daily check-ins and communications with home.

Some pupils with SEN will have availed of the Department's Summer Provision programme for children with SEN. All teachers delivering either the school based or the home-based strands of the Summer Provision programme

¹⁰ https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/pdf_files/SMMbooklet.pdf

¹¹ https://www.google.com/search?q=morning+meetings+videos&rlz=1C1GCEJ_enIE849IE849&source=lnms&tbm=vid&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi57My82pLrAhULURUIHdqIB3YQ_AUoAXoECA4QAw&biw=1920&bih=937

were required to complete a record of progress for each individual child and to make this available to the child's school. The record of progress should be forwarded to each participating school. It will be important for the relevant teachers to consider this record when planning for the learning needs of pupils with SEN in the new term.

For many pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), the impact of the school closure periods will have been very significant. Accordingly, schools will need to plan carefully for the learning experiences, routines and sensory needs of children with ASD. It will be important to:

- Create a calm space for the children/pupils before they return to school. If it is not feasible to use sensory or quiet rooms, teachers may need to create an area of their classroom where individual children can take a comfort break. In addition, individual packs could be created with appropriate sensory or movement materials. The website of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) contains a comprehensive suite of resources designed to assist teachers to create such packs and materials
- Place an initial focus on transition and change to support the pupils as they adjust to new social rules and learning routines at school and at home. This can be achieved through, for example, the use of social stories that are developed with the pupils, either on a one-to-one basis or in a whole class environment. More information about the use of social stories in a Covid-19 context can be found [here](#)¹².
- Establish a routine in supporting pupils to regulate their feelings and behaviour through, for example, schedules that highlight key transitions within their day and 'exit strategies' ranging from 'first/then' to a full-day visual or written schedule. This can be either paper based or added to pupils' devices where these exist
- Allow pupils with ASD to have a time out card or exit pass to indicate to teaching staff that they are feeling anxious and need to leave the classroom
- Have an agreed safe and quiet place for pupils with ASD to go to when they feel anxiety building or are overloaded by sensory stimuli.

¹² <https://ncse.ie/supporting-transition-from-home-back-to-school>

11. Impact of COVID-19 on Certain School Activities

All extra-curricular and after-school programmes will be postponed until further notice. Swimming lessons will be deferred until further notice.

There will be no school trips/ tours until further notice.