



27 July 2020

Dear Colleague,

Since I was appointed Minister for Education on 27 June, my first priority has been the full re-opening of schools. Today the Government approved a Roadmap for Reopening of Schools, and a funding package of €376 million to support this. I am confident that the supports and additional resources we have provided will enable our schools to open safely.

An enormous amount of work has been done to prepare detailed guidance based on the interim public health advice for schools, which we received in late June.

The plan has been developed by consulting with those who know best how schools run: representatives of students, parents, principals, teachers, SNAs, support staff and school management bodies. Their expertise has been crucial in putting this together and I am very grateful to all involved for their hard work over many weeks.

As school Principals I know that you have a big job ahead in leading your team of teachers, SNAs and support staff to prepare for the return to school. My aim and that of the staff in the Department is to provide as much support as possible centrally to minimise the burden on schools and on you as school leaders. We have put in place some practical supports and a significant financial package to help. This includes funding to make physical changes that your school may need, funding to employ an aide to move furniture, help re-organise rooms and get things ready before schools reopen, and funding for substitution and replacement of teachers and SNAs. We will also be providing funding for hand sanitiser and for personal protective equipment, where appropriate.

Every school building and circumstance is different, so each school will have decisions to make in finalising your own plan. As Principals I am asking that you communicate directly with parents and students about the changes that they can expect when term begins.

COVID response plans for schools have been published today, along with documents providing guidance on curriculum at primary and post-primary level, and guidance on supporting wellbeing in the whole school environment, for both students and for all staff employed in the school.

Every school will have decisions to make in relation to their own unique circumstances, and the plans and checklists will enable you to do that.

I am pleased that we have put in place a new wellbeing provider to support staff, and further information is available in the Roadmap on gov.ie/backtoschool and in the COVID-19 Response Plans. Arrangements for staff who cannot return to the workplace due to being “at very high risk” from COVID-19 will be finalised with education partners and issued to schools by way of circular.



Online training will be made available by my Department to all staff before the return to school, and all staff will be required to complete this training before returning to work.

Before the return to school, the Department will provide schools with some communications materials that are age-appropriate, to help schools and parents support the return to school. They will also be available on Gov.ie/backtoschool. These will help to augment the communications to parents about what changes they can expect in September.

I know that you have faced a challenging time in these last months, and the return to school will bring new challenges. School communities have experienced severe disruption as a result of COVID-19. Pupils, parents, teachers and schools have made enormous efforts to keep teaching and learning. But school is a special place, and some of the best parts of learning are being in a classroom with other children, and everyone has missed out on that.

I recognise some children and young people and some staff may be nervous about returning. We have put in place additional resources and supports and I know we will all be working to support everyone to settle in, to feel safe and to be happy in their work, when schools return.

Throughout this pandemic, we've all been in this together. This will be a time of change, and there will be new routines for the students and for us all to learn. We will learn this together, because we all have a role to play in keeping the whole school community safe. With every good wish

With every good wish,

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education