



March 2021

Returning to School Guidance for teaching, learning and assessment Post-primary students

This guidance document provides practical advice for school leaders and teachers as schools recommence face-to-face provision for students in 5th year from **Monday 15 March 2021** and for the remaining year groups from **Monday 12 April 2021**. It should be read in conjunction with previously published guidance on teaching, learning and assessment in a COVID-19 context available [here](#) and Return to School Guidance for Practical Subjects in Post-Primary Schools and Centres for Education, available [here](#).

As students return to school, teachers should:



Allow time for students to settle back to school and adapt to school procedures and routines.



Create a calm, reassuring atmosphere for students with positive language and praise.



Be flexible in addressing the needs of students emerging from school closures.




Observe and consider students' individual learning needs and be mindful of students who may have felt isolated or who have not settled well.


Teaching and learning approaches


Schools are best placed to make decisions and to exercise their professional judgement and autonomy in relation to teaching, learning and assessment approaches as students return to school.


In planning their work, teachers should consider:

 Prioritising active, inquiry based, practical activities during lessons to enable students to demonstrate skills and knowledge developed during the period of remote teaching, learning and assessment.

 How to stimulate students' interest, motivate them to learn and support positive learning outcomes.

 Avoiding the over use of teacher-directed and didactic approaches to teaching and learning in an effort to 'catch up' or 'cover lost ground'.


 Providing safe collaborative learning experiences based on pair work and group work in order to further develop student interaction, peer relationships and engagement so they can learn from the ideas, perceptions and opinions of others.

 How they can continue to integrate the use of digital technologies to support teaching, learning and assessment.


Assessment


Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning process and is essential to inform effective planning to progress learning for all students. It is important that school management and teaching staff are mindful of the purpose, modes and frequency of assessment planned for the remainder of this academic year 2020/21.


The following are important considerations:

 Assessment of students' learning should reflect the aims and learning outcomes of the specifications.

 All assessment of students' learning should serve a clear purpose, provide formative feedback and be focused on improvement.

 Over-assessment should be avoided and an appropriate balance between formative and summative assessment should be achieved.


 Balancing the number of assessments up to the end of term with the need to progress learning and complete programmes of work.

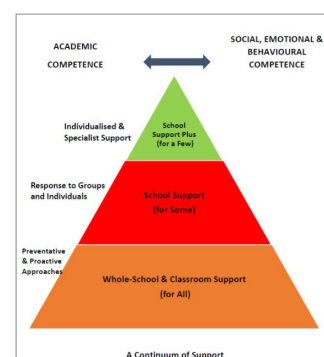
 Classroom based assessments: Updated advice for 2nd and 3rd year and L1/L2LP at [NCCA](#) website.

Continuum of Support: Planning for All, Some and Few

Subject teachers should collaborate with the SET department to plan appropriate learning experiences to ensure differentiated supports are in place to meet the needs of all students, including those at risk of educational disadvantage.

Planning should:

 Focus on moving student' learning forward following the period of remote teaching and learning and undue time should not be spent on revision. Support mediating the curriculum in a context that acknowledges that students have had different experiences while learning from home. Practical supports and guidance for special education teaching are available from the National Council for Special Education [here](#)





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Digital Technologies

Digital skills acquired as a result of remote learning experiences can continue to be developed and enhanced as students return to school.

Teachers should consider how best to continue to use online-learning platforms to support and embed the key skills of junior cycle.

In planning their work, teachers should consider how to:



Maximise opportunities to develop students' digital skills to enable them to utilise the features of online platforms to their full potential.



Use digital portfolios to provide constructive feedback for improving learning.



Continue the use of digital technology to support partnership and communication between the school, home and the wider community.



Share digital recordings of learning materials including music, poetry, interviews, orals, webinars and slideshows.



Use these online-learning platforms to facilitate peer assessment and collaboration which involves creating, sharing and discussing their work.

Promoting safe working and learning environments

School leaders and teachers should familiarise themselves with the revised COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of schools, available [here](#).

Schools can reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by:



Encouraging subject departments to plan appropriately to enable a safe working environment. Detailed guidance for practical subjects is available [here](#).



Promoting awareness of protocols for all school personnel, students, families and visitors.



Advising teachers and staff not to attend work and to self-isolate if unwell or identified as a close contact.



Ensuring that the layout of classrooms and staffrooms maximises physical distancing.



Developing seating plans for each class group to be retained by the subject teacher. Where possible, students from the same base class should be seated together.



The COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of Post Primary Schools and the requirements for the use of face coverings in Post Primary schools can be accessed [here](#).

Wellbeing



Considering that both 1st and 2nd year students have experienced disruption in their early years in post-primary school due to COVID-19, schools should explore how wellbeing for these groups is best supported.



Teachers will be aware of the ongoing emotional, physical and social impacts of COVID-19 on all students and should plan learning experiences that enable all students to progress and flourish for the remainder of the 2020/21 school year.



Young people do not respond to challenges in the same way and each young person will have their own unique coping mechanism, some students may experience additional challenges. The student support team will play a crucial role in identifying these students and making appropriate referrals.



Students should be encouraged to pay attention to and take proactive steps to promote their physical, emotional and mental well-being.



RSE programmes not completed during remote teaching and learning should be completed on the return to school. If anxiety is impacting on a student's day-to-day life, they may need short term extra support.



Wellbeing resources are also available from the NCCA [here](#) and NEPS [here](#).