

31 December 2020

Message to all schools

Education Minister Peter Weir has announced revised plans for schools reopening after the Christmas break.

This follows the Minister receiving updated advice on the current health situation.

From the week commencing next Monday (4 January 2021):

- **Pre-school education settings, including nursery schools, nursery units and non-statutory pre-school education settings participating in the Pre-School Education Programme to be open as usual;**
- **Primary school pupils will be taught remotely until 8th January, after which they will attend school for face to face teaching;**
- **Post-primary pupils will also be taught remotely during the first week of January. From Monday 11th January pupils in years 8 to 11 will continue to be taught remotely until the end of January, while pupils in years 12 to 14 will attend school for face-to-face teaching;**
- **Special schools to be open as usual;**
- **EOTAS settings to be open as usual;**
- **External exams due to take place in January will be facilitated compliant with public health guidance and schools will have flexibility to deliver face-to-face teaching to pupils due to sit those exams, should they wish to do so;**
- **Schools will accommodate vulnerable children and the children of key workers from the start of term;**
- **Childcare provision including those settings that are located on school premises to be open as usual.**

The first day of the normal school term can be used by primary and post-primary schools to prepare for remote learning. It is not an Optional Day but rather pupils attending face to face should be coded accordingly. All other pupils should be coded as Code] - Covid-19 Learning from Home - Social Distancing as per DE Circular 2020/08 Addendum issued 16 December.

While previous arrangements have been informed by the advice of the Department of Health, unfortunately the deteriorating nature of the epidemic and the risks to public health has

necessitated these much more substantial changes being announced today, which reflect a fair and balanced position by both Education and Health.

In addition to the adjusted restart arrangement described above, further improvements to school mitigations will be taken forward as indicated in the Minister's statement to the Assembly on 21st December including: face coverings being required in all post primary settings, including the classroom, improved signage and stronger public messaging. These will add to the already significant range of mitigations that have been put in place and operated by schools.

The Education Authority will issue further operational guidance and DE will issue updated guidance in January.

Further details

Schools will be expected to open on the first scheduled day of term.

It is expected that all teaching and non-teaching staff will be in school, as required by the Principal, to deliver and plan remote learning, which will also facilitate supervised learning to vulnerable and key worker children. If possible schools should provide this on the first day of term. This facility is to be offered by all schools, and access is available to substitute staff if required. It is not an Optional Day but rather pupils attending face to face should be coded accordingly. All other pupils should be coded as Code] - Covid-19 Learning from Home - Social Distancing as per DE Circular 2020/08 Addendum issued 16 December.

Schools should continue to follow the existing Departmental guidance last issued on 8 December 2020: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance for School and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

[In particular, hand hygiene and social distancing should continue to be followed by all staff and pupils.](#)

In particular, when schools are planning for the new term staff are reminded that the guidance limits physical meetings to a maximum of 6 people, appropriately socially distanced.

Where schools are scheduled to run mock examinations in the first week of term, these should be re-scheduled to later in the term.

Schools who have students enrolled for the January exam series commencing on 11th January should exercise professional judgement on the need to deliver face to face preparation or revision classes which cannot be delivered remotely. Equally, for schools in the Dickson Plan, they may wish to make similar arrangements for their year 10 pupils.

The definition of Vulnerable Children as set out in the cross-departmental Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan 2020 is: (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-cross-departmental-covid-19-vulnerable-children-and-young-peoples-plan>)

- A child who has an assigned social worker because he or she is a child in need, in need of protection (or on the child protection register) or is a looked after child.
- A child in need includes young carers, children with disabilities, and children living in families where there is domestic abuse, substance abuse, and / or mental health difficulties.
- A child who is receiving support from, or has been referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- A child who has a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), a child who is accessing EOTAS, or a child who normally accesses Education Nurture Units.
- A child who is 'on-the-edge' of receiving support from children's social services.
- A child who is in need, including in need of protection, but whose need is not known to statutory services.
- A child who is not known to statutory or voluntary and community support services but who is vulnerable because their family is under increased pressure due to Covid-19 related circumstances.
- A young person who was previously a looked after child, whether or not they are receiving support from statutory services.
- A child who has been placed for adoption.

- Asylum seeking and refugee children and children whose parents have no recourse to public funds.

Key workers are defined as:

- Health and Social Care. This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers and staff required to maintain our health and social care sector;
- Education and childcare. This includes pre-school and teaching staff, social workers, youth workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response;
- Public safety and national security. This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire and Rescue Service, prison service and other national security roles;
- Transport. This will include those keeping air, water, road and rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response;
- Utilities, and Communication. This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery, banking and waste disposal;
- Financial Services - This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure);
- Food and other necessary goods. This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (e.g. hygiene, medical, etc.);
- Retail. This includes those workers who have been working throughout the pandemic in food retail, for example, and will now extend to those working in other retail businesses permitted to operate by the Executive from June 2020;
- Other workers essential to delivering key public services such as the National Crime Agency; and
- Key national and local government including those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response.

DE Education Restart Team