

Appendix 2:



National Principals' Forum

Last Update: 13th June 2020

 Highlighted areas October 2020 denote areas where need was not met by DES to date...

Introduction

The National Principals' Forum is a lobbying group, made up entirely of practicing primary school Principals here in Ireland. Due to a strong sense of dissatisfaction from our members in terms of consultation and communication from the Department of Education and Skills, in particular during this Government-directed school closure period, we have put together a checklist of items that need to be considered immediately, ahead of reopening our schools.

Schools have continued to work throughout this period. 77% of Primary Principals surveyed by us have reported that their already stressful jobs are more stressful than usual. (principalsforum.org May 2020.) The “Planning for reopening schools in line with the Roadmap for reopening society and business” document produced by the Department of Education on 12th June, (<https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/planning-for-reopening-schools.pdf>) was shocking in its lack of detail. When the Minister announced that a plan would be in place within two weeks, principals believed they were going to receive some sort of plan for reopening schools. Instead, the document gives no clarity. It has rightly been lambasted in the media and has caused extra stress on principals and deputy principals. “Shocked” was the word used by a primary school principal on RTE News.

Even before this “plan” was produced, St.Senan’s Diocesan Acting Director emailed all schools under their remit stating the following:

“I am concerned for the welfare of principals. They are entitled to, and will need, a break during the summer and I encourage Chairpersons to talk to their Principals, in collaboration with the Board and the other members of the school leadership and management team, to endeavour to ensure that principals get an opportunity to take a significant break from schools at some point in July and August.”

The reopening of schools will bring significant challenges and will make for a challenging few months this coming Autumn. Principals need to have recharged and refreshed themselves for that challenge but their break will not happen by accident: it needs to be planned and provided for.”

Clarity is needed immediately. There are two weeks until July. This document is a live one - a checklist of considerations that a principal can use. Given that variables are likely to change between now and August, this document may have to change. This is the plan, we believe the

Department of Education should have produced on June 12th. They had all of the information from the stakeholders and they chose not to use it. The NPF welcomes all stakeholders and all principals to contribute to the development of this document.

Is sinne le meas,

The National Principals' Forum Administrative Team

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Recommendations

Based on the results of our research over the last 2 years, the NPF wish to recommend the following to the Department of Education to reduce workload and stress for principals:

Admin Days

- In the 2019/ 2020 school year, many teaching Principals could not use their admin days and have been floored by the extra administration (particularly during the COVID-19 school closure period,) along with teaching their classes. These days should be automatically carried over to support these Principals in the next academic year.
- However, accumulating the lost admin days and next year's admin days, and with the potential nightmare of trying to cover classes for absences etc., notwithstanding the extra administration work, we recommend that all teaching principals in all schools be made administrative Principals for the next school year with the proviso that they cover EPV and unsubstitutable absences in their schools.

Planning Days

- All schools open for 183 days per school year. We would recommend that 2-3 days are earmarked to facilitate the coordination at the beginning of the school year.
- While HR/ Croke Park hours are available to us, they will be absorbed very quickly next year, given what is ahead, and Principals will need buy-in from all staff members to facilitate planning/ training etc. Optically, it would also serve to acknowledge the weight of the task ahead.
- We would also ask that all schools be required to put together a task force/ committee to coordinate any actions needed. BOM must lead and be part of this as school staff already have duties.

Media Communications

- Department of Education documents should be sent to schools before they are released to the media. We request that this is addressed as a matter of basic courtesy.
- Releasing documents on a Friday evening shows scant disregard to schools and school leaders. Time and again, we hear about the guidelines first via Social Media on Friday evenings. Wait until the following Monday please.

July Provision

- Trying to pressurise schools to host July Provision by means of online coercion by antagonising parents of pupils with special educational needs does not fall within the parameters of good professional conduct. Timely health and safety guidance was not issued despite our desperate pleas well in advance of July, thus mitigating against this much needed facility for SEN pupils.

6th Class Graduations

- Many schools feel it is unsafe to hold socially distanced graduations in June and are coming under pressure from parents to do so. By now schools have spent time and effort in planning their graduations. A statement from DES against holding socially distanced graduations would be appreciated. Clarity is required.

Training

The DES should provide training for one member of the in-school management team on taking on the responsibility of being a COVID-19 link person. The training should include the use of PPE items for subsequent staff training. Indemnity must be provided for the staff member taking on this role.

Additional Staffing

More staff will be needed in schools. This includes teachers, SNAs, and potentially ancillary staff, especially cleaning staff. Schools may also need provision for additional bus escorts and other staff generally employed by Boards of Management. If Denmark can do it, so can we.

Extra Materials/Resources Schools will Require to Open

- Traffic cones
- Non-adhesive tape
- Non-touch sanitisers
- Sanitising gel
- Thermometers
- Masks (perspex) and Gloves

The above should be provided by the government through a centralised procurement rather than schools having to source them individually. This would ensure better pricing and would relieve liability of BOM and staff.

Considerations for Reopening Schools:

(Please note this list is not exhaustive)

Governance

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will the following templates be provided? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● COVID-19 Training for staff ● Covid-19 Response Plan ● Return to Work questionnaire ● Updates to relevant policies as a result of COVID-19 - AUP, Child Protection, Data Protection, Health & Safety, First Aid, etc. 	
Will necessary materials, resources, etc. be fully funded by the DES?	The procurement process, while welcomed, was not timely enough for efficient planning for principals.

Monitoring

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will we be required to take temperatures of pupils/ staff?	
Will temperatures need to be recorded?	
Who will take and record the temperatures?	
Thermometers: Specific brand needed for continuity? Would it need to be sanitised?	
Will we be provided with a clear timeline and specific guidelines for parents/ staff to follow if a pupil is sick?	
Will we be provided with a clear timeline and specific guidelines for staff to follow if one is sick?	

Hand Hygiene

Area for Consideration	Notes

Do schools need to provide sanitizer?	
Where is sanitizer purchased? Is extra funding available?	
Where should sanitizers be placed in the school? Every classroom? All entrances? Etc.	

Health and Safety

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will we be provided with specific health and safety regulations?	
Who will provide these?	
Who is responsible for monitoring these regulations?	Lead worker representative role was welcome but adequate time is not provided for this person to oversee their role in the school day or week.
Mask use: need to explicitly state who wears them and what grade. PPE needed- Gloves? Masks? Visors?	
What signage will be necessary?	
Fire evacuation procedures? Do they need to be updated	
First Aid procedures? How do these change?	

Cleaning

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will we be provided with specific protocols / step-by-step instructions / standards of cleaning?	
Will schools be inspected to ensure compliance?	Support, not inspection, is needed at this time.
Who is responsible for monitoring these regulations?	
How would this be managed through the day in terms of having areas clear for cleaning?	

Will training be provided to cleaning staff?	
How many hours of cleaning will be needed per day?	
How will this be funded?	
Prior to Return to school, will a deep clean be needed?	

Finance

Area for Consideration	Notes
PPE Equipment	
Signage	
Cleaning Products	
Extra Cleaning Staff	
All money to be paid electronically. No handling of money.	

Staffing

Area for Consideration	Notes
Staff will need to be symptom free. Do they sign a self-declaration to say that they are in good health?	
What if they are not and claim to be healthy?	
What about staff in at-risk groups?	Adequate work safety provisions are not provided for within a school work place context due to the complete inability to social distance.
Are teachers aged over 60 years considered to be in the high risk group and what provisions need to be made?	
What about staff that are pregnant?	Adequate work safety provisions are not provided for within a school work place context due to the complete inability to social distance.

Is the BOM indemnified?	BOM is liable for huge responsibility without either the autonomy or means to ensure school safety while schools are operating without social distancing in the middle of a pandemic.
What about staff who are looking after at-risk or vulnerable family members?	
What happens when teachers are sick and there is no substitute?	<p>Huge problem – eradicate pay inequality and increase supply panels across the country.</p> <p>Outside of pandemic arrangements, many staff absences are not covered, including the first day of self-certified illness, EPV days etc, necessitating class splits across the school. This places a huge strain on the school regularly.</p>
What if there is no available SNA substitutes?	
Are there arrangements in place for substitutes to declare their current health status?	
What provision is in place for leave that has been classified as not eligible for substitute cover?	
What accommodations are being made for EPV days?	Teachers are entitled to their EPV days. Cover for these is problematic at the best of time. A panel system with substitute cover needs to be rolled out across the country serving ALL schools.
What allowances will be made for vulnerable staff?	
What happens if a teacher becomes sick while in school and needs to go home? Who will supervise the class?	SET teaching time is heavily eroded covering such instances further disadvantaging SEN pupils
What happens if SNA becomes sick and needs to go home?	

In the case of children not being able to come to school every day, what do we do about staff members' own children?	
What about student teachers / work experience?	The expectations of teacher training colleges are unrealistic at this time.

Pupil Capacity

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will the government be flexible in terms of enrollment numbers?	
What happens in terms of an enrollment if parents decide to keep children at home until a vaccine is found?	
If pupils have to remain at home because of over-capacity, who will teach them and when?	
Is there a plan to stagger days etc. if social distancing is in place?	This needs to be a coherent national plan in the event of level 4+ being reached.

Arrival and Collection at School

Area for Consideration	Notes
How can children get to school on buses and stay within regulations?	They can't
How will transport for children in special classes work?	
Will there be a designated times for staff to enter / exit school building to ensure that there's no crowding?	
Will there be a designated times for pupils to enter / exit school building to ensure that there's no crowding?	
How do parents/guardians drop / pick up their children at school?	
How does school avoid parents congregating on the campus?	

Can parents enter the school building? What about pupils who are upset in the morning?	
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Initial Return to School

Area for Consideration	Notes
Do all pupils immediately go to their new teacher or do they “end” their school year with the previous teacher?	
What about new Junior Infants and parents not being able to bring them to the classroom?	

Tracking and Tracing

Area for Consideration	Notes
Do we need to log the details of all visitors for contact tracing?	
Who will be responsible for this?	

Visitors to the School

Area for Consideration	Notes
Is it safe for visitors to schools during the school day? (e.g. reps, parents dropping forgotten items, deliveries, inspectors)	
Are we able to accept forgotten lunches/sports gear/books and distribute them to the relevant children?	
Are children allowed to leave the premises during the day for appointments and then return to school on the same day?	
What is the role of the School Inspector now? WSE and incidental inspections are not appropriate in the current circumstances.	

Offices

Area for Consideration	Notes
Secretary's Office: is a Perspex screen required in front of open hatch?	
Principal's Office: is a Perspex screen required in front of principal's desk?	
Can a principal meet with parent(s)/guardian(s)? Consider the size of the office.	

Classrooms

Area for Consideration	Notes
How many children can safely fit into a classroom with: 1m / 2m social distancing?	SD completely unachievable
Is carpet in the classroom safe or should it be replaced?	
Can the sharing of toys and equipment in the room continue (particularly with Infants and maths resources)?	
Can Group Work in All Classrooms continue as it involves working in confined spaces, often sharing equipment?	
Storage of textbooks, copies, stationery	
Sharing of Art materials	
Use of ICT equipment, e.g. Chromebooks, iPads, etc.	
Can any classroom resources (anything above) be sent home?	

SET

How many children can safely fit into a SET room with: 1m / 2m social distancing?	SET guidance is wholly insufficient and places staff and pupils at unnecessary risk. SET needs to be safeguarded by sufficient sub teachers being available, supply
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	panels and also ADEQAUTE SET PROVISIONS in the first instance
How are teachers allocated caseloads to ensure there is as little potential cross-contamination between year groups?	
Should Support teachers go from class group to class group if groups are in different classes?	
Will timetables need to be changed to allow for cleaning between sessions with groups?	Not feasible with current level of funding
What about initiatives where books were shared like Literacy Lift Off / Guided reading?	
Will SET be permitted to be used to make class sizes smaller during this time?	
Can support teachers be shared between schools? How will this work?	No adequate guidance or provisions made. Operating on a wing and a prayer

Corridors

Area for Consideration	Notes
Does the width of the corridors allow for 2 way movement?	Not usually
Are stairways wide enough for two classes to go up and down?	
Managing travel on stairs? Walk on right?	

Toilets

Area for Consideration	Notes
How many toilets are available per person in school?	Inadequate in many schools
How often are they cleaned?	
Do they have hot water and soap available for washing hands?	Not available in many schools

What systems are in place for regular handwashing?	
Schedules needed for hand washing?	

Yard and Supervision

Area for Consideration	Notes
What capacity can the yard have if social distancing is required?	Teachers are not getting their breaks in many schools due to circumstances in their covid response plan, and undergoing a lot of unpaid extra morning and evening supervision also.
Do areas of yard need to be divided / marked?	
Who is responsible for sourcing / funding markings and/or dividers?	
Will breaks need to be staggered? What are the implications of this?	
What systems are in place for policing movement of children?	
How do we ensure safety in the Staff Room?	Many schools cannot facilitate social distancing in the staffroom rendering it unusable at this time. Other schools need to use the staffroom as a covid isolation space due to space constraints in the school. Therefore, in many instances staff have no where to take their breaks, if they get any.
How does one deal with minor injuries, e.g. cuts, falls, bruises (not necessarily first aid)	

School Hall / Library

Area for Consideration	Notes
Will PE classes be able to take place as normal in hall?	Many schools do not have a hall

Can the hall / library be used at all due to issues with shared usage?	
Will outside groups be able to use the hall?	
Can pupils borrow books from the library as normal?	

Food Provision

Area for Consideration	Notes
Provision of breakfast clubs in schools. How will this work if we are trying to keep children in class bubbles.	Cannot be done
Delivery of school lunches - to the school then to the classrooms. How will this work?	

Curriculum

Area for Consideration	Notes
How is Aistear facilitated?	With great difficulty, if possible at all in most school settings
Art Materials?	
Science equipment?	
Music equipment?	
Sharing ICT devices?	
How can PE be adapted?	
Swimming?	
Circle Time?	
Sitting on the “mat” at the front of the classroom?	
Will there be a “new” curriculum subject around COVID-19? How will this fit in the already overcrowded curriculum?	

Distance Learning

Area for Consideration	Notes
If capacity does not allow for all children to come to school, who is responsible for providing a distance learning programme?	
If a pupil has to self-isolate, does the school have to provide distance learning?	
Who provides the distance-learning if teacher is working full-time?	
What platform(s) will be used?	IT Infrastructure – where hardware, software or broadband is inconsistent across schools and locations. Many schools are paying a lot of money to access online platforms such as Aladdin, Zoom or Seesaw, to name a few. The digital divide that exists in pupils homes is very real and hinders remote teaching and learning significantly.
What will be the expectations of distance learning? (Live video? Full curriculum? etc.)	

Additional Needs

Area for Consideration	Notes
How to protect children and adults working with them in terms of social distancing, flight risk, moving children around?	Social distancing is not achievable in many school settings for senior classes (3 rd - 6 th).
Protecting staff working in the same rooms?	
Integration into mainstream, where applicable?	Guidance on this was very slow to come from stakeholders, especially the DES and NCSE. We are compromising the integrity of class bubbles to facilitate integration.
Intimate needs such as changing nappies, cleaning, etc.	

Restraint, where necessary?	
Shared spaces such as multisensory rooms, ball pits, OT facilities?	

Behaviour

Area for Consideration	Notes
How does behaviour policy have to adapt?	
What if pupil deliberately spits / coughs on other pupil / staff member?	
Dealing with aggressive behaviour?	

Mental Health / Wellbeing

Area for Consideration	Notes
What resources are available for pupils suffering from anxiety? (Not books for teachers, i.e. support from NEPS, etc.)	
What resources are available for staff who are suffering from stress, mental health, anxiety, etc.?	
What support is available to school leaders?	Very little, if any at all.