



3 February 2021

Dear Principal,

I am pleased to advise that following intensive engagement and input from primary and special education partners a framework has been developed and agreed with all partners, including unions and management in order to achieve a phased return to in-school provision for children with special educational needs. This remains a high priority for all partners.

The framework (attached) is an interim arrangement as the Department and the education partners' work together to ensure that special schools and special classes can safely reopen in line with public health advice at the earliest opportunity.

Under the framework the following phased return to in-school provision has been agreed:

Phase 1: Special schools will reopen from Thursday 11th February 2021. In accordance with this agreement pupils will attend on a 50 per cent basis to allow for attendance of reduced numbers within the school setting. This will be reviewed in line with public health advice.

Phase 2: Primary Special Classes will reopen from Monday 22nd February 2021.

In order to support schools to plan and prepare for this limited reopening I want to bring a number of things to your attention as follows:

1. Appendix 1 Framework document



2. Appendix 2 - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance on the re-opening of schools
3. Appendix 3 - Summary of additions to COVID-19 Response Plan required by 'Work Safely Protocol'
4. Appendix 4 - COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools – in Word format for ease of updating
5. Circulars on temporary changes to the parental leave scheme and unpaid leave and other temporary arrangements for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in recognised primary schools – these circulars will follow under separate cover.

The Department is very appreciative of the ongoing efforts of the school community working to limit the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in schools and ensuring that the infection control measures put in place in line with the school COVID-19 response plans are effective in making schools safe for children and staff. Discussions are ongoing about the further reopening of schools at the earliest opportunity in line with public health advice.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley
Assistant Secretary