

**Ensuring that schools are open in a  
manner which is both safe and  
sustainable**



**Submission to Joint Committee on Education, Further and  
Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science**

*Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)*

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## TUI OPENING STATEMENT

To date, we have been successful in re-opening our schools. However, to ensure schools remain open, effective action by all of society is required and Government must provide the necessary levels of resourcing, clarity and assurance to the education sector.

The TUI welcomes COVID-19 inspections in schools. A minority of schools are not adhering to the public health measures. Compliance must be enforced. A school is a workplace and staff must be protected in their workplace.

The enhanced teaching/staffing allocation provided, while welcome, has been insufficient to meet additional requirements. Moreover, the discriminatory two-tier pay structure remains a huge obstacle to teacher recruitment and must be eliminated.

Also, not enough has been provided to ensure a satisfactory cleaning regime.

Additional funding must be made available to remedy these and other key deficits.

A TUI survey of teachers identified more physical space and smaller classes as the measures most likely to counter challenges posed by COVID-19. The TUI is calling for a full audit of each school to establish and quantify the resources needed to keep schools open.

Many second level school buildings are not fit for purpose. Ventilation and heating problems will occur during periods of colder weather and may force the closure of some schools. TUI is calling for the Department of Education to take the advice of the HPSC and install air quality meters in every classroom – this will ensure that student and teachers are not forced to teach and learn in freezing cold classrooms.

In the medium term, and to future-proof our education system, we must re-conceptualise school design. The current crisis has demonstrated the importance of infrastructure that is fit for purpose.

ICT infrastructure is deficient. Many of our students lack access to the technology, including broadband, to engage effectively in emergency remote learning. The TUI will not countenance a situation whereby students can access education only if they can afford the ICT. The poor and the marginalised suffer most in such an environment.

We welcome the Minister's stated intention to hold the traditional State examinations, something TUI had called for certainty on. However, we believe further adjustment to assessments and to curriculum content beyond those already made will be required due to the loss in tuition time.

Despite the sheer volume of additional COVID-related work, teachers, principals and deputy principals have made sure that their schools opened safely, while carrying out their normal, back-to-school duties. However, the additional workload is not sustainable. Targeted resources are imperative, including full restoration of [Middle Management structures](#).

TUI members will continue to operate in accordance with the relevant public health advice but Government must provide us with the certainty, clarity, information, resources and ongoing investment that is required keep schools open.