



I thank the Chairperson and members of the committee for the invitation to present to them today. My name is Alan Mongey President of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and I am a school principal of a school of over 1000. I am joined today by Paul Byrne Deputy Director of NAPD.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, NAPD has represented the post-primary school leaders and supported them in their task of ensuring the continuity of learning and teaching following schools closing last March. NAPD has listen, support and engage with our members remotely through regional online meetings and indeed have seen our highest levels of participation and engagement during the past few months. We were actively involved in supporting the continuity of learning and teaching and in the calculated grades process. We have been analysing the challenges and seeking to find safe solutions to reopen schools in line with Department of Health and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) guidance and the support our members need in this complex process.

NAPD would like to see a full return of all students to school in late August-September, provided it is safe, practical and possible to do so for students, all school staff and school leaders.

Post-Primary schools vary in size from 100 pupils to over 1500. Each has its own unique contextual factors which will impact on what a return to school may look. Schools are extremely complex organisations and factors adding to the complexity of safe and practical reopening include building facilities (room numbers, size, age, condition, hot water, canteen, break time space etc), staffing, resources and capacity, staff and student health and wellbeing, curriculum offered, timetabling, ICT facilities to name but a few.

A one size fits all solution to school reopening will not work. However centralised support, guidance, procurement and direction is essential to reduce the burden which will be placed on school leaders, as it is, it will be them alone who are tasked with leading and managing the re-opening of schools.

NAPD acknowledges and welcomes the collaborative approach taken by the Department of Education with the education partners and the emerging guidelines and protocols for school reopening, most notably last week in relation to the HSPC guidance on school reopening and the Draft Response plan for Primary schools. However, applying in this guidance will prove extremely challenging. We also welcome the centralised development of policies and procurement frameworks for Hygiene Supplies and Equipment.

In order to ensure that a Response Plan for Post-Primary Schools is actionable and achievable a number of things must be actioned urgently.

Each school requires the appointment or reallocation of a member of staff to act as a COVID 19 Assistant. The workload for school leaders is already acknowledged as being a significant issue. This is a fact supported by research commissioned by NAPD and over the last number of years and supported by European research. School leaders need this support to ensure that their core focus is on ensuring quality teaching and learning.

A financial package is needed to purchase items from the framework and to implement the practices outlined in the HSPC guidance. This includes resources to ensure adequate levels of cleaning and caretaking staff can be employed. The levels of staffing in this area were depleted during our last recession.

The combined response in moving to distance education overnight, without warning needs to be acknowledged. We now, however, have the time to plan for the next academic year. Blended learning for post-primary education will form part of our future practice. There must be clarity however as to what we mean by blended learning and what are the expectations of schools in this regard. There must be clear guidance produced by the Department of Education and Skills to ensure equity of provision for all students.

Contrary to popular believe teachers do not begin work in late August when students first come through the doors of the school. They spend considerable time during the summer months reflecting and planning and preparing for the coming academic year. This year more than any other requires immediate clarity for teachers, students and school leaders in relation to curriculum and assessment. School leaders will have developed timetables for next year which take weeks and sometimes months to prepare. Teachers will be preparing schemes of work and subject plans to prepare students for the year ahead and students and parents of students going into in 3rd and 6th year are very concerned about time missed and are already asking about state examinations in 2021. We understand that the NCCA and the DES are actively working on this and we would request that clarity be provided as a matter of urgency.

In Conclusion I thank committee members for their time today. Please be assured that NAPD are committed to working in partnership with all the stakeholders in education towards the safe reopening of schools. Providing the best education for all students in our schools in a safe and caring environment is, as always, our priority. Investment in education, especially in a time like this, is investment in the future of our country.

We are very happy to answer any questions you may have.

Alan Mongey

Paul Byrne

President

Deputy Director

National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)