



## **National Parents Council Primary**

**Submission to the Special Committee on  
Covid-19 Response**

**Reopening of Primary and Secondary Schools.**



**Supporting Parents  
Supporting Children**

**June 2020**

## Introduction

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education. NPC was established as a charitable organisation in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school. It received statutory recognition in the Education Act 1998.

### **NPC Vision**

NPC want to see an Ireland where **every** child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

### **NPC Mission**

NPC exists to ensure that all parents are supported and empowered to become effective partners in their children's education. NPC will work to increase the capacity and capability of the primary education sector, to achieve true partnership and deliver better outcomes for all children.

### **NPC's Key Activities are:**

Representing the parents' voice in primary education  
Advocacy  
Building participation  
Service delivery

### **NPC Service Delivery**

NPC services are aimed at empowering parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of education.

### **Helpline**

The NPC helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen, and gives information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children.

### **Training and Development**

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education at every level.

### **Website**

The NPC's website [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie) aims to provide parents with information regarding primary education. The site also allows parents an opportunity to give NPC their views regarding primary education issues.

## NPC Submission

NPC welcomes the opportunity to make its submission to the Special Committee on COVID-19 Response regarding the reopening and operation of primary schools. Whilst NPC believes there are many considerations in the reopening of schools, this submission will focus on what we believe are the top four key issues that need to be considered.

1. **Partnership**-planning for the reopening and operation at national policy level and at local school level must be done in partnership with all stakeholders. Whilst this has started at national level it is vital that the reopening of schools at a local level also takes place in partnership. For the whole school community to feel safe in the return to school, children, parents, school staff and the Board of Management need to have an input in the local arrangements that will be made in that individual school's context. Better outcomes will be arrived at when all voices are taken into consideration regarding the challenges and solution in the local setting. This may include:
  - a. The establishment of stakeholder partnership team of students, parents (representatives from the parents' association where one exists), school staff and Board of Management representatives.
  - b. Survey of parents, children and school staff
  - c. Agreed local procedures for behaviour particularly relating to COVID 19 and adherence to public health advice. This should be within the context of the existing schools code of behaviour.
2. **Prioritisation of meeting the needs of children that the long school closure has impacted more severely than other children** – all schools should be resourced and supported to identify and support those children that the long school closure may have had a greater impact on than others. This may include learning, social or emotional impacts. Whilst schools may already know of children who may fit in to this category before the school closure, lives may have been impacted in ways that schools are unaware of during the six months since they will have seen their pupils and their families. In the normal course of life, negative events happen however under the current circumstances and restrictions families will have had an increased possibility of being affected by serious illness, bereavement and family relationship issues that due to school closure the school may be unaware of.
3. **Prioritisation of Social and Emotional needs of the school community** - need to be addressed in the first instance of schools re-opening. Whilst curriculum learning is usually the core business of the school, this will not be successful if the social and emotional needs are not addressed first. The whole school community will need

support in this area; parents needs reassurance that their children will be safe, children will need to know they are safe, will need to reconnect with school life and routine and need support in the changed environment and school staff will also need to know they are safe and supported; this to name but a few areas that will need attention. In the initial stages of the school reopening schools will need support and resources to support them through this work. This should include the NEPS existing supports for schools in relation to wellbeing with adaptations and enhancements where needed.

4. **Structure-** Children and parents need certainty about the structure of the school day and school week. Parents have raised concerns with NPC regarding the possibilities of shorter days/weeks and blended learning. The logistical minefield such arrangements would bring for families in some cases would make it impossible for some children to return to school however much the child and parents wanted this to happen. Particular concerns raised have been:
  - a. Motivation for home learning in a blended learning model
  - b. Concerns regarding transition from primary to post-primary if a child moved from home schooling in their primary school to a blended learning model in their new secondary school.
  - c. Logistical considerations particularly in the instance of more than one child in different class levels or different schools.
  - d. Logistical considerations in relation to parents working arrangements with an uncertain school timetable.

The NPC are grateful for the opportunity to submit these views and would like to draw attention to the fact that this is not an exhaustive list but the main key issues.