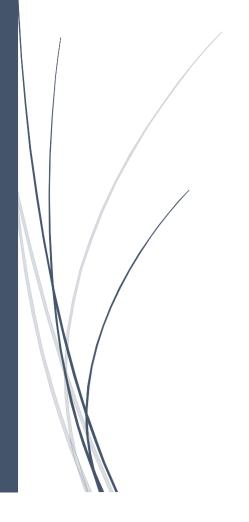# Submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response

Seamus Mulconry
GENERAL SECRETARY

Contents

Submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response

The Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) is the representative Association for the Boards of Management of over 2800 Catholic Primary Schools and has 23,000 members. CPSMA provides advice, guidance, and training to Chairs and Principals of Primary Schools and represents their interests in negotiations with the Department of Education.

CPSMA;

- Operates a telephone support line which dealt with approx. 9500 calls in 2019, dealing with queries across a broad spectrum of management issues;
- Provides a management voice in discussions, consultation and negotiations with the DES on a range of primary school issues;
- Represents member schools the Primary Education Forum, Teaching Council, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), National Council for Special Education (NCSE). CPSMA represents Primary Management on the Terms and Conditions Committee (TCC);
- Publishes a member newsletter and *A Handbook for Chairpersons;*
- Designs and facilitates face to face and webinar training for Boards of Management nationwide annually. Most recent training centred around school admission policies, the role of the chairperson and appointments;
- Conducts surveys and research projects e.g. *Feeling the Strain – Report on Principal Workload* 2019, *Grant Thornton Report on Primary School Finances* 2018.

Key Success Factors for a Successful Return to School

CPSMA is currently focused on supporting schools as they plan for a safe and orderly return to school in the autumn and has been working with the other Education partners to support the DE in planning to deliver this objective.

However, CPSMA wishes to flag to the Committee that poor communication - i.e. the announcement of initiatives in the Dáil or in the media without first communicating announcements to schools, coupled with incomplete guidance has undermined relations with school stakeholders, increased stress levels and reduced trust in the system.

The Department of Education has committed to providing central guidance, documentation, training and resources (grant aiding the provision of PPE, enhanced cleaning and signage), all of which are welcome.

However the following Key Success Factors will have to be implemented if the schools are reopen successfully including;

- **Admin Support** – Teaching Principals require additional principal release days to manage an increased administrative burden;
- **Resources** – More teachers will be needed in autumn to cover brief absences and short term sick leave not covered by substitution. To provide continuity of appointment in schools, CPSMA requests that the Minister sanction, as an emergency measure, the appointment of additional supernumerary teacher(s) to each school in a fixed-term capacity as an alleviation measure to cover all absences of teachers in our schools over the course of the 2020/2021 academic year;
- **Funding/Capitation**- Fundraising, which is worth €46 to primary schools, has been, and will continue to be affected by the pandemic. Schools will need additional funding to fill the resulting gap;
- **Structured Communication Programme** – to ensure that Boards of Management and Principals have the information they need to plan for school reopening and an advice line for Covid-19 related queries. There is also a need for a communications programme for parents to ensure a partnership approach with regard to school reopening.

There remain a great many critical areas to work through before schools can reopen in August/ September.

In particular CPSMA would highlight the following critical issues that need to be addressed;

- Advice for schools regarding vulnerable staff (teachers, SNAs and ancillary staff) who are considered "high risk" with regard to Covid-19;
- Direction regarding SEN teachers, shared SEN teachers and supply teachers who will be moving from class to class and/or school to school each week;
- School transport;
- Specific guidance for special schools and special classes;
- Procedures with regard to arrival and dispersal at schools.

Appendix A – CPSMA Submission to DES

September Return to School

In the absence of vaccine for Covid-19, preparing for a return to school in the Autumn will be complex, challenging and costly.

It will require;

- **A robust national roadmap** for a safe return to school, which is based on the best health information available;
- Clear and timely **communication** with all stakeholders so that expectations are managed and all stakeholders, parents, pupils, principals, teachers and staff, and management understand their roles and responsibilities;
- **Consultation** to ensure that the roadmap is realistic, offers sufficient guidance and direction to be useful and sufficient flexibility to be implementable at local level;
- Sufficient additional **resources** to implement the Roadmap.

The first concern must be the safety of the children in our care, and of the staff who work in our schools. It is therefore essential that any re-opening roadmap be based on the latest and best healthcare information and that the rationale behind that advice is understood by those who draft the plan and those charged with implementing it.

Public health advice must dictate the planning framework and the parameters for a return, for example how many pupils can schools accommodate safely, how often must classrooms and other areas be cleaned etc.

CPSMA recommends that;

- The Primary Forum be used to assist the DES in preparing a roadmap for a return to school, to surface the issues which need to be addressed and provide feedback on draft plans;
- A communications strategy be put in place to ensure clear, timely, and targeted communication with stakeholders. This may require a dedicated communications function;
- An immediate halt to all initiatives due to be introduced in the academic year 2020-21. The recommencement of the school year 2020-21 will place immense pressure upon school communities who will be working in a vastly altered environment and so a pause on new initiatives is essential.
- Mechanisms are put in place to ensure consultation with stakeholders on the ground to stress test plans and guidance before release into the system;
- Additional resources are secured from DPER in advance, and announced, so that principals and boards of management are reassured that they will have the resources necessary to implement the recommendations of the roadmap.

- Active consideration be given to the appointment of an experienced project manager to support the development and roll out of the Road Map, and a dedicated communications executive to design and implement a structured communications plan.

Given the scale of the challenge and the numbers involved, it may be prudent to prepare for a phased return to schools, and a rolling cycle of attendance (either by time, day or weekly) to manage the numbers in a school at any given time.

If such an approach is adopted, this must be clearly flagged to schools and parents well in advance.

In addition to this, if a full school re-opening is not possible, it will be necessary for the Department of Education and Skills to develop a coherent, structured distance learning plan for all schools. The development of any such plan must be fully informed by the principles of child protection and data protection. Any resources developed by the Department in this area must be fully GDPR compliant, with the provision of checklists and templates for schools. The NCCA must also provide guidance on the adaptation of the child centred primary school curriculum for this purpose. Furthermore, the provision of any such distance learning plan must be underpinned by adequate resourcing and the principles of equity of access for all pupils and schools.

Implementing any plan at local level will require;

- Risk assessments to be carried out in each school building and grounds to ascertain how many pupils could be accommodated in each classroom, social distancing measures required (cleaning procedures and routines, signage, markings, hot water requirements, PPE, hand sanitiser etc.) and any other specific requirements for individual schools.
- Communication to parents from school outlining the protocols that will be put in place and survey of how many intend on returning at the start of the school year (experience in other jurisdictions indicates a minority of parents will not send children to school at least initially).
- Clear guidance for principals and boards of management, including checklists and templates for risk assessments.
- Tailored guidance and supports for special schools and DEIS schools.
- Adequate resources (e.g. hand sanitisers etc) to implement the local plan, which must be in place prior to a return to school.

As stated above, preparation for a return to school in the autumn will be complex. The following issues and key questions were identified through a workshop with CPSMA Education Advisors and from consultation with our members. Where appropriate we have flagged resource implications.

Pupil Return

<u>Issues</u>
- Identifying the percentage of pupils who will return and how they will remain socially distanced from each other when schools open will be key, as will building trust with parents in advance and communicating the return to school and provisions in place will be key to its success.
- Assessment of available space in each school/classroom to determine how many pupils could be facilitated. Reduced number in the school on any one day. Options of rotating on half days, daily basis, half weeks or week on, week off rota for pupils. Individual schools to have flexibility on what suits them best in consultation with all stakeholders.
- Survey of parents in advance of return to identify the numbers of pupils initially returning
- Markings to delineate 2m between individuals in general school community
- Pupils in special schools or special classes with intimate care needs and individual school transport arrangements

<u>Key Questions</u>
- How is suitable amount per room calculated? Is it different in junior/senior classes?
- How do they get to school? Will buses be available? **(resource implications – additional transport)**
- How will Bus Escorts / bus drivers manage social distancing?
- How is the school kept clean every day? Pupils to clean as they go? School cleaned at intervals or deep clean at the end of each day thoroughly? **(resource implications including hand sanitizer in every**
  classroom, additional ancillary hours/additional staff to assist with cleaning and provision of hot water as per p.10 of *Management of Infectious Disease in Schools 2014.*
  ***"Liquid soap and warm running water should be provided"* and *"hot and cold mixer taps that are thermostatically controlled to deliver hot water at a maximum temperature of 43◦C to avoid scalding"*)**
- How is breaktime organised?
- How is social distancing ensured in yard, at school gate, at entrance to classrooms, at school door entrances? **(resource implications for signs/markings to do so)**
- Should start and finish times be staggered to avoid large crowds arriving/leaving at the same time? One in one out system at gate etc.?
- Possibility of one-way system of movement in school where possible?
- How do we give consideration for the fact that school routines may have to be relearned due to the amount of time out of school ?
- How do we support pupils with specific needs who may struggle and require additional support?

- How parents are reassured? Methods of communication and when?
- Can July Provision go ahead in advance of the return in September?

Staff Return

<u>Issues</u>
- Staff fall into a number of categories – those who are ready to return, those who have underlying conditions, are in the vulnerable category, those who must cocoon and those who are caring for family members, and those who have young children that need childcare among others.

- By having a comprehensive plan in place, including CPD **(resource implication)**, in advance of the return to school, staff anxiety, which will be factor, may be reduced

<u>Thoughts</u>
- Will a risk assessment be required to assess how staff safety is best addressed? What criteria are used to determine who returns to work?
- Will CPD required for staff on how to work under restrictions and what should and should not be done to prevent spread of coronavirus, dealing with pupil anxiety, gradual return to teaching and learning, revision of child safeguarding training etc. **(resource implication)**
- What levels of PPE is any required and available in schools before reopening? **(resource implication)**
- Yard duty guidelines and congregation in the staff room?
- Allowances for staff who feel that they cannot return and staff rota for return?
- Provision of increased levels of substitution to support staff absenteeism? **(significant resource implication)**
- Continuation of distance learning provision for pupils opting not to return to school, do we need a national strategy?
- What are the implications for staff dealing with children with behavioural challenges?
- Staff working with young pupils with less understanding of social distancing?
- How will staff attend to injured pupils?

Pupil Wellbeing

<u>Issues</u>
- School communities will have lost family or community members as a result of coronavirus.
- Pupil wellbeing issues as a result of separation from family and friends, bereavement of family members, social anxiety, peer/online abuse and pupils returning to school coming from homes where domestic abuse or substance abuse and other child protection concerns is a reality.

- Can resources in place proactively to support vulnerable children who have lost family members to the pandemic ? **(resource implication)**
- How do we deal with an increase in child protection referrals on return to school?
- Can we provide a space for pupils to speak on return to school?
- Can we communicate this to parents in advance to assist in building confidence that schools are prepared to support pupils on their return?

Curriculum Planning

Issues
- There may be a wide range of learning taking place during restrictions for a wide variety of reasons. Schools to consider what pupils have learned during the restrictions and to create informal forms of assessment to guide next stages in teaching and learning.
- Also, a cohort of the school community will not be returning to school and will require continued support from home.
- There may be a reduction in the amount of books that return to school in September due to wear and tear or damage. On return, pupils will also not have the facility to share books/folders as is commonly done in schools **(resource implication for Book Rental)**
- The quality of teaching and learning will be different on return.

Key Questions

- Should schools consider project based approaches (e.g. arts projects) to teaching and learning initially on return, with less of a focus on heavily structured teaching and learning until a baseline of pupil attainment is established?
- Schools to adopt a softly, softly approach to re-engagement with the curriculum on return. The priority is the safety and wellbeing of the pupils and that they feel safe at school
- Education on prevention of coronavirus and how we can keep each other safe in the school to be prioritised
- Continued distance learning support for pupils who do not return. Who coordinates this, what will constitute engagement and will there be an onus on schools to insist on engagement? Also, there will be a need for CPD for teachers to support such pupils **(resource implication)**
- Clarity on how inspectors will re-engage with schools and in what capacity? Support or evaluation? How will this happen?

- What level of expectation will there be on schools with regard to quality teaching and learning? What will quality teaching and learning look like? Will inspections continue as before in these circumstances?
- How do schools assess which pupils are prioritised for ICT resources?
- Should the NCCA be tasked with creating curriculum guidelines for learning under a social distancing regime?

School Management

Issues
- There will be huge pressure on boards of management, and in particular, Chairpersons and principals to get the return to school right. Principals especially, have already been co-ordinating distance learning in their
schools and engaging teachers and parents in this endeavour, continuing OLCS payroll provisions e.g. dealing with leave queries, substitute payments etc., continuing ancillary staff payments, drafting Admissions policies and planning for staffing for the coming year.
- Boards will have to make difficult decisions with regard to re-opening in response to anxious parents and staff. The pattern of schools thinking on their feet first followed by DES guidance afterwards will have to be reversed. DES guidance and support in advance in this regard will be crucial.
- Leave and substitution – all categories of leave will require substitute cover and availability of a substitute – no longer adequate to split classes given social distancing requirements. Furthermore, this may require expedited Garda vetting processes for those employed as sub teachers under 5 day rule or as sub SNAs.
- Special category leave – currently the CMO is speaking about how it will be socially unacceptable to present at work with a cough / cold symptoms - a specific leave category will be required to ensure that teachers and SNAs

Primary School Leaders' Concerns about Reopening Schools After the Covid-19 Closure

CPSMA Member Survey

12th May 2020

Analysed and written by Dr Jolanta Burke, CPsychol., Maynooth University.

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1. All themes

A total of 453 lines of entry were analysed. They related to the primary school principals' response to a question: What concerns do you have about your school reopening after the Covid-19 closure?

Most of the principals' concerns related to practical management of school activities to ensure pupils, teachers and the community's safety, such as reinforcing social distancing, risk management and cleaning.

The following concerns were mentioned most frequently:

1. Reinforcing social distancing in school (105 mentions)

2. Risk assessment (73 mentions)

3. Cleaning (56 mentions)

4. Staff management (44 mentions)

5. Staggered activities (33 mentions)

6. PPE (29 mentions)

7. Sharing equipment (26 mentions)

8. SEN students (23 mentions)

9. Teaching and learning (21 mentions)

10. Funding (21 mentions)

11. Guidelines (16 mentions)

12. Extra-curricular activities and gatherings (13 mentions)

The following concerns were mentioned by 10 or less participants:

- Teacher wellbeing

- Pupils' mental health

- Parents

- Junior Infants

- Insurance liability

2. Reinforcing social distancing in school

This was leaders' most mentioned and most elaborated on concern. They wondered about the ways, in which they can ensure social distancing in the following situations:

- Classroom – some complained about the physical limitations of their classrooms, others wondered what would happen to the remaining pupils given that some of them had usually 30 children in the room.

- Transport – many leaders were concerned about social distancing on the way to school and wondered what guidelines should be given to drivers, who sometimes have to undo seatbelts.

- Yard – leaders wondered how to ensure social distancing during the break.

- Entry and exit from the school – leaders wondered what guidelines can be put in place so that pupils and parents who are dropping them off or picking them up don't bump into each other.

- Staff room – leaders wondered how they should reinforce social distancing in the staff room. Should they allow teachers to take breaks at the same time, or not.

- SNA – many leaders were concerned with SNA pupils and their teachers who may find it particularly difficult to social distance.

2.1 Comments

Social distancing within the classroom a very challenging demand – reducing numbers by using family clusters/pods may help but the nature of children and their tactile behaviour will be difficult to manage.

How can we function to teach properly 2m apart, particularly in infant classes, with SETs and SNAs? Infants and children with SEN tend to lack awareness around personal space.

How will social distancing be managed on school buses coming and going from school? If there is staggered attendance will buses transport kids according to the new timetable for school. Buses already have several routes and cater for several schools during the day.

These isn't a spare foot anywhere in the school as it is eg When school nurse comes to school or any other outside agency visits they have to come at a time when the SET teacher is at the other school because there is no place to put them. How would you put social distancing in place.

What will social distancing look? In a Special School as it is highly unlikely that this will be possible in this context.

How will social distancing be implemented in set down area and car park?

Our staffroom is small, would it be expected that the staff would we stay in the classrooms for lunch?

What if schools can't comply with these restriction?

What happens if a child falls, hurts themselves, needs a plaster/gets sick?

3. Risk assessment

The following were leaders' concerns in relation to risk assessment:

- Testing before the school commences – some leaders suggested that perhaps all staff and maybe students should be tested.

- Protecting the most vulnerable – leaders were concerned about children with underlying condition, or children whose family members had underlying conditions.

- Sick children – leaders wondered about the protocol for sick children, should they be turned back when they have any symptoms of covid-19.

- Visitors – some leaders suggested that new procedures should be put in place to limit the number of visitors to the school and not allowing parents to come in.

- Health and Safety – leaders wondered if risk assessment is going to be a requirement.

3.1 Comments

What arrangements will be put in place for teachers/ children with underlying conditions/live with an elderly/vulnerable person?

What about children whose parents are front line health workers, what precautions will need to be in place.

How will schools manage visitors to the school especially parents of younger / special needs children who often have to accompany their child/children to and from the classroom?

Concern that all discussion around school opening seems to be based upon the belief that children are not affected as severely as adults. School staff feel no one is taking into account staff and teacher safety, their underlying illnesses, worry that they could transmit Covid 19 to their vulnerable family members at home etc.

If staff member or pupils have a cold or possible symptoms should they immediately self isolate at home?

For me personally I am a teaching Principal of a two-teacher school. I have endured sleepless nights and still continue with anxiety over my return to work and the pressure with having to possibly reorganise things on return to school. I am anxious and worried because I am currently isolating and have been since we closed (…) To be honest I am terrified of the prospect of returning to work.

4. Cleaning

Leaders are concerned about the following aspects of cleaning:

- Deep-clean – some wondered if they should do a deep-clean before the school commences and if so they wondered what standards they should adhere to.

- Protocol for daily cleaning – leaders wondered about the frequency of cleaning and the standard of it. Some schools have cleaners coming twice a week and now they will need to ensure that cleaning is carried out daily, which will result in additional costs. Others were wondering whether cleaning is needed at break time or only once a day. If it is required at break time, they wonder who is supposed to do it in their schools. An area that was specifically mentioned as a concern was a toilet, both pupils' and teachers'.
- Cleaning products – leaders wondered if DES will provide antiviral products in schools. A few participants mentioned anti-bacterial door handles.

4.1 Comments

What specific upgrading of cleaning services is needed?

Where do we source all the necessary sanitizers, masks, gloves etc as currently any attempt to source such material is coming up with 'temporarily unavailable' on several websites.

Lots of schools have no running hot/warm water for hand cleaning.

Deep clean of the school on a regular basis and the cost of contract cleaners – our cleaners are older and more vulnerable health-wise.

Cleaning of classrooms and school will reach another level. Most cleaners only do 3/4 days and do not do a deep clean or have the equipment for such work.

(We will need) regular health and safety announcements over intercom re: handwashing, coughing and sneezing etc.

We only have one staff toilet between 11 staff members, who will disinfect and clean this and what are the practicalities around breaks and lunch times? (Again without a full time cleaner/caretaker and teaching principal).

5. Staff management

The following were leaders' concerns in relation to managing their human resources:

- Substitute teachers – This is the most prevalent concern leaders have had about staff management. Many expressed their worry about inviting substitute teachers into their schools, given that they move from school to school, meaning they may easily spread the virus. Others were concerned about a potential shortage of substitute teachers next year and suggested that perhaps some substitute teachers should be offered a contract.

- Employees with underlying condition – they wondered if they were allowed to work from home, given that they are at a higher risk. Also, they wondered about the provisions that should be put in place for their vulnerable staff.

- Higher teachers' absence – leaders predicted higher level of teacher absenteeism next year and are concerned about managing schools on a skeleton of staff.

- Interviewing for jobs – they wondered if they should arrange interviews online or in person.

Childminding for teachers – many leaders were concerned about their teachers not being able to leave their children in crèches or schools, given that distance learning may continue in some

schools and due to the staggering of classes, teachers might not have the childcare facilities available to them. Some leaders called for DES to ensure that childcare facilities are provided for teachers.

5.1 Comments

As we expect that staff absences will be higher next year how are schools going to be supported with accessing substitute teachers/SNAs? Or will schools be allowed to operate a distance learning at home structure if subs are unavailable and Health and Safety risks mean there are not enough staff to supervise/teach the pupils?

Teacher absence - it won't be possible to split classes in the event of a substitute teacher not being available. Children will have to be sent home.

Conducting interviews will be very challenging as well as deliberating on challenging and complex matters at BOM, ISM and staff meetings. Personally I would rather conduct an interview in the school hall using social distancing than using the Zoom, Skype or Google classrooms platforms.

How is it envisaged that subs will be tested? Will this be a requirement before being offered a position in a school? If a sub is moving between schools will this be a potential source of infection? How is this to be monitored? Should there be sub panels in place for each school?

Teachers in shared positions with other schools, what is the situation with this?

Can teachers refuse to attend work if they have any underlying condition?

6. Staggered activities

In general, leaders are confused about the practicalities of staggering class times, activities, pupils, teachers. In particular they would like guidance on the following:

- Who decides on the staggered days?

- How should the new pupil groups be arranged?

- How will the curriculum alter as a result of staggering pupils' attendance?

6.1 Comments

What does phased basis mean?

Worst-case scenario what is the likely vision for returning to school in September? Will it be 50% of each class for 2/2½ hours each day with the other 50% coming in later? Will it be 50% for a full day – every second day? Or 50% attending a split week: eg Monday, Tuesday & alternate Wednesdays? Knowing this sort of information would help with allocating teachers to classes. It would also give us an opportunity to plan the management for these types of scenarios.

Staggered days – morning and afternoon classes – implications for travel or even having staggered arrival and departure times? Implications for escorts and contracts of employment, implications for parents and schools regarding regulations on time in school?

If children are to return in small groups how will the groups be decided - proximity to school, age, standardised tests?

Delivering a uniform curriculum to children receiving a staggered education every week is going to be very challenging and teachers will require support and understanding in relation to this.

If staggering days of attendance how will they be organised? by class levels, families SEN needs?

7. PPE

Leaders had the following queries in relation to PPE:

- Face covering inside school building – they wondered if teachers and/or pupils will be required to wear PPE. If so, they were concerned about the availability of PPE for their teachers and more importantly, the impact of mask-wearing on children, who would be surrounded by mask-covered faces.

- Face covering on buses – should all children on school buses be required to wear PPE?

7.1 Comments

Will both the teachers and children have to wear PPE - face masks and gloves? This is not very conducive to teaching and learning. Will it create an even bigger sense of fear and worry among such young children to see school life changed so dramatically? It may also be a very stressful experience for the children and could be detrimental to their well-being and mental health.

PPE on buses – for escorts and pupils and practicality of same plus who provides it and who replaces it.. Our pupils can tear ordinary items of clothing belonging to a person if they get agitated. PPE will not last if this behaviour arises especially in confined spaces.

Will there be procurement of PPE for school staff?

Will schools be prioritised for PPE?

8. Sharing

Many leaders were concerned about students sharing:

- Equipment – lego blocks, crayons, materials for maths, art, music, drama and other classes depend heavily on sharing equipment. Leaders were concerned that the restrictions will have impact on pupils' development.
- Books – many schools have a "rental book" service and they wondered how this service would work with the current restrictions.
- Teachers checking homework – some leaders raised concerns about their teachers being exposed to a potential virus, as they will mark students' projects, class tests, homework.

8.1 Comments

What safety measures can be put in place around use of school books, copies and correction of children's work?

Sharing of school equipment: In infant classes does sharing of toys cease? In older classes what about IT equipment maths equipment etc

Book Rental Books: Currently the pupils have the schoolbooks at home. Normally schoolbooks are gathered in June. An audit is done, replacements ordered, books are covered and stamped ready for September. Can we organise for the books to be dropped back to the school in June so that process can be started? Could this be done with individual appointments to avoid gatherings? What advice is there on cleaning the books?

pupils often share resources (whether concrete materials for maths/science), toys for Aistear, and digital devices for ICT learning, even pencils/rubbers/paint brushes; how can this feasibly be done in a world of 2m separation?

Is it safe to operate a book rental scheme in the current climate (books collected from one family and distributed to another?? These would normally be collected in June and distributed in Sept…but this year due to the closures it will all probably happen in Sept???? How safe is this in the context of COVID -19????)

9. SEN pupils

Many leaders were very concerned about SEN pupils and teachers.

- SEN pupils needs not met
- SEN teachers unable to maintain social distance

9.1 Comments

Children with additional needs, how to support them, especially with social distancing? Is there a possibility of offering July provision at schools to pupils with ASD this Summer? These children and their families are suffering so much in the lock down. They need some break. This could be done very safely as it is on a one to one basis.

How will teachers/ sna`s and other school staff who are already feeling stressed be supported?

He has an SNA who is required to provide close contact as he has no fine or gross motor skills. Therefore, she has to feed him, hoist him in and out of his wheelchair for toilet breaks, in and out of his stander, put on/take off his coat/hat/scarf etc. act as his scribe as he is physically unable to do any of the above.

Safety measures for SNA with very close contact with the children ie changing, feeding etc.

I would really like to know what our position will be in respect of a student we have that is physically disabled with cerebral palsy and non-verbal.

10. Teaching and learning

Some leaders mentioned they are concerned about teaching and learning. The three main themes emerging were:

- Distance learning – leaders wondered if this will continue, and if so, what support DES will offer to their pupils and teachers who don't have broadband and or access to computing devices. Also, they wondered what support can be offered to teachers to prepare them for online delivery.

- Changes to curriculum – leaders wondered if full curriculum needs to be provided or whether it should be modified given the circumstances. Also, they wondered about the future of the children who have fallen behind due to the COVID-19 school closure.

- Challenging classes – a couple of leaders wondered how to modify PE and other classes that are more difficult to adapt.

10.1 Comments

Managing online learning at the same time as classroom learning - teachers will need dedicated planning time.

Our curriculum is set up for group work, interaction, Aistear etc etc will all of this be banned?

Not all pupils will have kept up-to-date on the internet, whether through lack of broadband or otherwise. What will happen to those who have fallen behind?

It's likely that some children will have to be taught online while others are in school; staff will have to be split up in order to continue both routes, some in school, some online.

Can there be some guidelines on what schools must do, should do and could do regarding distance learning?

It seems certain the new educational landscape will be an amalgam between physical teaching in the classroom and distance learning from home for much of the school year 2020 2021. Schools and children will have to have access to adequate broadband and competent devices to ensure that all children can engage with their learning on every school day. Will schools and or families have access to the financial resources to provide these services to the children in their care?

11. Funding

Leaders were concerned about school finance. They reported that additional funding would be required for schools to facilitate:

- Physical changes to the building – such as fitting in screens, signs, anti-viral air filtering system etc.

- Cleaning products and PPE – more cleaning products and PPE are required and some schools cannot afford to buy them.

- Extra administrative time for principals – with all the changes introduced to schools, leaders will require extra administrative time to oversee the changes.

11.1 Comments

We are worried as always about finances in our school year. No fund-raising projects can go ahead and future fund-raising will be seriously curtailed when financially businesses struggle to reopen. The reality a carefully curated fund raising programme keeps our doors open!

(We need) anti viral door handles fitted in all schools, anti viral air filtering systems, perspex screens fitted on desks, Will there be funding available from department for making necessary physical alterations to the school. Who will fit this equipment? Could some of the construction sector be deployed into schools to fit the necessary equipment over the summer? Lots of companies are emailing schools at the moment offering very expensive screens etc that could be fitted in schools and offices e.g ine desk shield is €130 +VAT. How can schools be expected to pay for a hundreds of these shields? If the school cannot afford to put the necessary safety measures in place will they have to remain closed? We cannot have a situation where some schools who can put social distancing in place or can afford specialist PPE are open and other schools aren't. It must be all or no one.

Will each classroom need their own toilet facilities to prevent children from congregating while waiting for the toilet. We cannot facilitate this in our school.

We that we need to look at physical layout of the school to protect teachers and pupils.

Extra resources/finances must be made available to schools in order to provide a safe environment for children/staff - face masks, hand washing facilities in classrooms, hand sanitiser, social distancing labels for floors in classrooms, corridors, halls, etc. These must be provided well in advance of any school opening.

Will there be a grant/ agreed rates with companies to provide signage/ advice etc on social distancing?

Will DES equip schools with health and safety materials eg. PPE / hand sanitisers, hand sanitiser equipment, and will increased funding be made available for purchase of same?

12. Guidelines

Leaders were asking for guidelines on the following:

- For reopening schools, including recommended layouts of classes

- Practical measures to ensure school community's safety

- Sourcing PPE – leaders are requesting a list of suppliers

- COVID-19 hygiene training for staff

- Guidelines for parents

- Circumstances in which schools should be closed, e.g. clusters of COVID-19 in schools

13. Extra-curricular activities and gatherings

Leaders were concerned about

- An inability to engage in religious practice. Specifically, they are asking for guidance on the sacramental preparation and rehearsal, carol service, Christmas concert. Since

the First Holy Communion and Confirmation was postponed and needs to be reorganised, they wondered how they should go about it.

- Extracurricular activities – leaders wondered whether they should take place or not. And if so, they asked for guidelines on them.

- Outings with pupils – leaders wondered whether they should take place or not. And if so, they asked for guidelines on them.

13.1 Comments

6th class: Would it be possible to organise an outdoor gathering for 6th class pupils preserving social distancing to help give closure to their final year in Primary School?

Will there be a ban on whole school assemblies, school masses or gatherings of more than one class together?

Guidance on swimming lessons.

I am presuming that school football matches, swimming etc will not take place.

14. Other

Other concerns leaders mentioned were in relation to their teachers' wellbeing. They were concerned about the safety of their teams and their mental health, given the additional stress everyone will be possibly experiencing in the new year. Some leaders also mentioned the negative impact of all the changes on pupils, especially on junior infants.

A few leaders were concerned about the insurance liability, in case a child, or a teacher contracts COVID-19 while in school, or a legal action from staff for lack of protective equipment available to them. Finally, some leaders acknowledged the importance of parental support and cooperation to ensure children's safety and the continuity of learning.

14.1 Comments

When do you anticipate Junior Infants starting school, when schools reopen or once the other classes have settled in? It is a lot for young children to contend with.

How are the Junior Infants to be inducted? We have 5 classes of new Junior Infants due to start this September.

When considering the mental health of our children, how to support them best, with all of the changes?

What help will teachers be given to deal with high anxiety levels among children? This will be a huge issue! Will there be a specific S.P.H.E Programme put in place?

Concern about legal action from staff towards employers if they felt they weren't adequately protected or god forbid believed that they contracted covid 19 at work.

Should parents be made sign a form indemnifying the school?

Will there be insurance liability if a child/teacher contracts COVID19 while in school?

How do we ensure that parents cooperate and do not send children who have symptoms or are sick to school (especially if the child only attends certain days as it is)

Will parents be happy to send their children to school?

Schools After the Covid-19 Closure

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Roinn na Rannóg Oideachais **Ollscoil Mhá Nuad**
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