



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Continuity of Schooling

Guidance for parents/guardians of  
primary school pupils

13 May 2020

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

We are writing to support you and provide you with information that you may find helpful during this period of school closure. Without doubt, this is an unusual and anxious time for many parents and their children as they adapt to new ways of working and living during the current crisis. For schools and teachers, it is also a challenging time as they strive to keep things in some way normal for their pupils while supporting their learning in ways that are quite different from the normal classroom experience. With the support of parents, schools and teachers are playing a key role in helping pupils stay connected with others, keep up their interest in their school work and progress their learning.

This guidance is intended to support you while your child is at home. It outlines how the school and teachers will help your child at this time and give you some practical advice on how you can support your child's learning and keep your child safe. It also advises you of the supports that are available from the school and elsewhere to you as a parent or guardian at this time. If your child is attending a special school, you should also find the advice in this guidance helpful.

### **What can I expect from my child's school?**

By now, schools will have made parents aware of their approach to communicating and to supporting their pupils' learning from home. You can expect that the school and teachers will support you and your child by:

**Encouraging** *working to help your child stay motivated and make progress in their learning at this challenging time*

**Keeping in touch** *letting you know how they will keep in touch with you and your child during this time and also how you can make contact with the school, if and when you need to*

**Assigning work** *assigning work and activities to your child in line with their ability, progress and class level*

**Feeding back** *providing helpful and timely feedback on the work that your child has completed and returned to their teacher*

**Consulting** *seeking feedback from you to ensure that the amount of work they have given is manageable but sufficiently challenging for your child*

**Checking access** *working with you to find ways to support your child's learning where broadband coverage is poor or you don't have access to digital devices*

## **How often should I expect to hear from my child's teacher/school?**

The Department of Education and Skills has advised primary schools that where possible, class teachers should engage with their pupils on a daily basis or at least a number of times each week.

If your child has special education needs, you can expect regular and in some instances, daily contact by the special education teacher and/or class teacher. Where your child has been receiving support from a visiting teacher for deaf/ hard of hearing or for blind/visual impairment, you can expect regular contact by that visiting teacher.

The support by the school for your child's learning at home will be different to that provided in the normal school day. How often the school and teachers engage with you and your child, and how they do so, whether by messaging, video calls or platform interactions involving assignment of work or direct teaching, will depend on a number of things.

In particular, the engagement will depend on the type of communication that is possible for you, the school and the teachers and on the approach that best supports your child's learning while they are at home. Such communication will vary in accordance with the technology and broadband resources available in school and at home and with the opportunities the school has to share learning materials in hardcopy with pupils. It will also vary in accordance with the programme of work that the teacher has planned for their class taking account of the pupils' learning needs, the resources available and the particular demands of remote learning.

## **How will the school communicate with me and/or my child?**

You can expect that communication between teachers and you or your child will generally be about their learning and helping you to support that. It may vary between the work that the teacher will ask your child to do independently and direct teaching by the teacher. The school will also support your child to keep motivated, active and feeling well. Their learning activities may include a balance of:

- assigned tasks such as written, practical activities and project work and
- where suitable facilities are available, online learning such as virtual classes, videos of lessons, presentations or use of online learning resources recommended by the teacher.

You and your child should receive learning activities from the school and teachers by one or more means such as by post, e-mails, communication apps or the school website. Where technology permits, your child may have regular engagement with their teacher/s on platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Office 365 and Edmodo or participate in live meetings through the use of tools such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Webex.

Schools have been asked to be conscious of pupils who may not have access to online facilities and to adapt approaches so that these pupils continue to have the opportunity to participate in learning. Should you have difficulty with internet access or with devices and printers, you should let the school or class teacher know so that they can see what alternative arrangements may be put in place for your child.

You may also receive phone calls from the school or the teacher to check in on your child, to support you in helping with your child's learning and to address any concerns. Such regular one-to-one contact will be particularly helpful if your child has special educational needs or finds it difficult to keep up with the tasks assigned. This regular contact with the teacher will also be helpful if you are finding it difficult to motivate your child or support your child's learning at home. If the school has a Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator, you could also contact them regarding any concerns you may have.

Further information from the Department on how schools and teachers can support pupils' learning is contained in *Guidance on Continuity of Schooling for Primary and Post-primary Schools*. This and other guidance documents that relate to support for learners with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage are available on the [Covid-19 page](#) of the Department's website.

### **Who do I contact if I have a query or concern about my child's learning?**

By now, the school should have advised how to make contact and who to contact, should you or your child require advice or have any query or concern about your child's learning. If you are unsure about who to contact, the school website may provide the information that you require.

The class teacher and/or special education teacher will be an important point of contact and/or support for you. The principal or deputy principal of the school should also be able to assist with any queries.

If your child is attending a DEIS school, the school will also have a Home School Community Liaison coordinator (HSCL) and/or a School Completion Programme (SCP) coordinator. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator is there to offer advice, provide information and a link between home and school. The HSCL also supports parents by linking them with other services such as community supports and other services. The school completion programme (SCP) supports pupils who are at risk of early school leaving or pupils who may have stopped attending school for various reasons. You should check with your child's class teacher or principal and they will be able to tell you if the school has either of these supports available and help you to get in contact with them.

If the school has put in place support from the National Educational Psychological Service or for other supports such as speech and language therapy for your child, you should check with the school on what arrangements can be made for the delivery of the support at this time.

### **What if I am concerned about the level of contact between the school and me and/or my child?**

If you feel that your school or child's teacher is not keeping in touch with you and/or your child, you should phone, text or email the school or school contact person in the first instance. The contact person may be the class teacher, the special education teacher, the HSCL co-ordinator or the principal of the school.

If you are concerned that you are not receiving a reply from the school, within a few days, you may follow the school's complaint procedures. This includes referring your concern to the principal of the school and then to the chairperson of the board of management where necessary. Information on how to make a complaint is available in the [Parents' section](#) of the Department's website. In the case of Educational and Training Board (ETB) schools, you may contact the local Education and Training Board; contact details are available in the [ETBI directory](#).

However, if you are having difficulty contacting the school to access the school's complaint procedures during this emergency school closure, you can contact the Department at [schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie).

### **How can I support my child?**

You are not expected to be your child's teacher during this time. The teachers will continue to work with all their pupils but there are practical things that you can do as a parent to support your child as they learn from home.

#### **Establish a daily routine**

*This involves seeing that your child gets up and goes to bed at the usual time, building in mealtimes, play and leisure times, family activities, household chores, exercise and schoolwork.*

*It is useful to draw up the routine with your child so that they feel they have had some choice in how their day goes. They are more likely to stick to a routine they have helped to develop.*

*When establishing the daily routine, you should take account of the availability of and use of devices by others in the home. You may find the advice from the Department's [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\) webpage](#) helpful for creating new routines for your child.*

*The TV programmes developed especially for children in Ireland during this time can help when developing a daily learning routine that is engaging for your child.*

**Home School Hub**  
RTÉ2: 11.00am-12.00pm  
Monday to Friday

Click the link below:



**Cúla 4 ar scoil**  
TG4: 10:00am-10:30am  
Monday to Friday

Click the link below:



**Be ready for learning**

*It can be helpful for your child's learning routine if you can help them find a place where they can work away from distractions as much as possible. Your child should also be ready for any remote lessons or activities scheduled with their teachers if the school is using this form of communication and you/your child have the appropriate devices and technology available to you.*

**Talk to your child and praise their efforts**

*Talking to your child about the work they have to do, deadlines for returning the completed work to their teacher and the schedule of any online lessons can help them stay focussed and on track. It will also let them know that you value the work that they are doing. Praise for their efforts is also important and will help them stay motivated and feel a sense of achievement as activities are completed.*

**Check for communications**

*You should regularly check the methods of communication that the school has told you they will be using to stay in contact regarding your child's learning. If you have any difficulties with the communication methods being used, you should let the school know as soon as you can so you can agree a way of keeping in touch that works best for both home and school.*

**Stay positive**

*It is very important to stay positive at this time and to keep a balanced approach to the amount of news footage to which your child is exposed. You may find the following link helpful when talking to your child about Covid-19: [Talking to children and young people about Covid-19](#)  
It is also important to avoid tensions about school work. If issues arise, you should have a conversation with your child at a time when both of you are ready to talk. You can also contact the class teacher or school for advice.*

## How can I support a child who is finding it difficult to do school work at home?

Firstly, it is important for you to know that you and your child are not alone. Many children and parents are finding it difficult to adjust to working and learning from home.

### Find out why

*The first step is to try to find out why your child is finding it difficult to do school work at home. Your child may be finding it difficult to get used to the new home school routine, be anxious about the current situation or fearful about the future. They may also be uncertain about what is expected of them in their learning, have difficulties with learning or with a particular curriculum area, or perhaps have medical issues. Your expectations or that of the teacher may be unrealistic.*

### Explore what's going on

*Find a quiet time to explore what's going on for your child over a cup of tea or on a walk etc. Help your child to understand that many of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours are normal responses to the current situation and then explore ways of managing or addressing these.*

### Agree a new routine

*You may need to rethink or agree a new routine to ensure it is realistic and achievable and includes sufficient and well-spaced breaks and time for enjoyable activities.*

### Explore their interests

*It may help to encourage your child to identify and explore their interests. Sometimes a break from the routine to tackle a project together may help to ease tension and anxiety and help your child to refocus.*

### Ask for help

*Don't be afraid to ask for help from the school and teachers who know their pupils well. They understand that everyone is finding the current situation very challenging and will be happy to support you and your child. If there are issues impacting your child's ability to complete work at home, or if you feel that it is not feasible for your child to complete the amount of work assigned, please let the school know.*

## How can I help my child stay safe while learning remotely?

It is important that your child stays safe when working or accessing material online or remotely. It is also important that your child acts responsibly while engaged in online learning. The school and teachers will already have taken steps but there are also a number of things that you can do to help. These include:

- reminding your child to follow the rules set out by the teacher for online activity
- agreeing the arrangements for online classes with your child's teacher
- monitoring your child's online activity
- installing child-friendly web-browsers and internet filters with support from the school
- encouraging correct posture for your child while working online

The school's Acceptable Use Policy for pupils' use of the internet at school specifies the rights, responsibilities and sanctions connected with computer use for school work. You should read this document and make sure that you understand the requirements for appropriate behaviour.

Further advice for parents and children on how to work safely online is available at [webwise.ie/parents/](https://www.webwise.ie/parents/) or the [Be Safe Online](#) webpage.

Tusla social workers also continue to provide family support and child protection related services. You can get further information on the [Covid-19 page](#) and the [Parenting 24 seven page](#) of the Tusla website.

## What support is there if my child is moving to post-primary school in September?

If your 6<sup>th</sup> class child has a confirmed place in a post-primary school for September 2020, you should talk to your principal and class teacher about their moving on to post-primary school and any information that you need from the school for the new school. The post-primary school may also be in contact in relation to the arrangements for first year students.

Should your child who is in 6<sup>th</sup> class not have a confirmed place in a post-primary school for September 2020, you should talk to your principal and class teacher and seek their assistance. Your principal will, if necessary, provide you with the contact details for the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO). Alternatively, you can email [tessinfo@tusla.ie](mailto:tessinfo@tusla.ie) making sure to leave contact details and the name of the school your child currently attends and an EWO will make contact with you.

## What other supports are there for me as a parent or guardian?

**From the Department of Education and Skills:** The Department provides up to date information on the Covid-19 crisis and access to resources provided by different agencies on the [Covid-19 page](#) of the Department website.

**From other parents:** Keeping contact with other parents to talk and share experiences will be a valuable support to you at this time. The Parent Council or Parent Association in the school may be an important source of information and way of keeping in contact with the school and other parents. You may also find it useful to contact the National Parents Council (Primary) through their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#).

**From other websites:** Parents Centre at [gov.ie/parents](http://gov.ie/parents) provides information and advice for parents and their families at this time on a range of topics including learning, parenting and parent supports.

### Websites with educational resources

- The [Scoilnet](#) website identifies resources for distance learning and provides links to the Department of Education and Skills support services.
- The Professional Development Services for Teachers provides support and resources for parents and their children at the following links:
  - [PDST- Irish Independent Articles](#) provides articles for parents written by the PDST and published weekly in the Irish Independent
  - [PDST- Online Tools Tutorials](#) gives access to short tutorials regarding the digital tools that your child may be using to engage in distance learning at home
  - [PDST- Digital Libraries](#) gives access to a variety of online libraries to support their child's literacy learning at home
  - [PDST- Sources of Information](#) gives access to Worldbook Online and other reliable sources of information that can be used at home when students are engaged in project work.
- The Ark provides a full range of resources to support primary school children's engagement with the arts at [ark.ie/](http://ark.ie/).

### Websites supporting wellbeing

- The [National Educational Psychological Service \(NEPS\)](#) provides valuable advice and resources to schools and families for keeping children and young people well during Covid-19.

- The [In this Together campaign](#) website provides lots of advice and tips on how you can look after your mental wellbeing, stay active and stay connected during Covid-19. It includes advice on coping at home at this time.
- The Professional Development Service for Teachers provides a range of wellbeing resources and activities for parents and children at the following links:
  - [PDST - distance learning](#)
  - [PDST - relaxation and self-regulation tools](#)

#### ***Websites supporting children with special educational needs***

- The [National Council for Special Education](#) has helpful resources for parents of children with special educational needs at [ncse.ie/parent-resources](https://www.ncse.ie/parent-resources).
- [AsIAM's website](#) contains explanations on the Covid-19 situation for children and young people with ASD through the [use of social stories](#). It also provides [resources for learning at home](#).
- The Middletown Centre for Autism is issuing tips via social media on helping children and young people manage during the Covid-19 crisis. Resources for parents and children can be accessed at [middletownautism.com](https://www.middletownautism.com).