



25 March 2020

Dear Principal and Teachers

I refer to my letter to you all of the 13 March, following the decision to close schools to students announced by the Taoiseach on 12 March. In my letter I asked you all, as school staff, to work to put in place arrangements to continue the delivery of education to our students in these extraordinary times. As teachers and principals you play an important role in young people's lives and ongoing support from you during the current public health crisis is vital.

I want to acknowledge and thank you for the huge work that you have undertaken since then to provide continuity of learning for students through online platforms, email and other resources, particularly where access to digital resources is more limited. I also want to acknowledge the work undertaken by other staff to support this effort through, for example, making school buildings available to teachers to access material and IT resources. This work is critical to supporting students and their ongoing learning and is very much appreciated.

As you will have heard there has been a further announcement by the Taoiseach that, in line with public health advice, schools will remain closed until 19 April.

In addition to maintaining ongoing engagement with students, one really important message you can assist with, is to convey to students, the absolute need to practice social and physical distancing, and to minimise physical contact with each other, to help avoid the spread of Covid-19. This should include advice to avoid meeting up and in all circumstances to adhere to HSE guidelines. As part of your school community, parents and guardians should also be urged to support their children to maintain the restrictions on congregating for the safety of all in their community.

In order to support you in getting this important public health message across to your school communities information notices (in 17 different languages) are available here: www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-translated-resources/

The Department is working to put in place more guidance and support for teaching and learning in the context of the current school closures. It is important to ensure that all students are supported in a planned and consistent way to continue their learning. However we appreciate that you are best placed to know your own students and to use the suite of resources available to you, both digital and any other means, to actively engage with your own students in a tailored manner.



A collaborative effort, involving the Department, management bodies and other partners is underway to develop further support and advice and this will be made available on an ongoing basis.

This is an evolving situation and it is vital that as the education system continues to be in a position to respond to the latest public health advice as it emerges. Education continuity is critical, in this crisis, for students at all levels of the education sector. In that respect, all schools are expected to proactively ensure that all of their staff contribute to the continuation of educational provision for their students during this period. In this regard although schools are closed to students, teachers who need access to their classrooms, ICT equipment or other teaching resources can attend the school building, once HSE advice is correctly observed.

As outlined previously Scoilnet has a number of home usage supports for teachers and students to benefit from and Scoilnet will be updating the material available on its website regularly.

In addition the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Digital Technology team has developed a new dedicated webpage of curated content to support schools and teachers engaged in distance learning in order to provide continuity to pupils/students. The page can be accessed at: www.pdst.ie/distancelearning.

This is a very challenging time for schools, teachers, students and parents. It is critical that during these challenging times we continue to work together and that the focus of all is on the best possible outcomes for our students. The support of everyone across the sector is vital, as we all strive to ensure that this public health threat is dealt with as effectively as possible. The guidance provided by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) of this Department for parents, for young people and for teachers is also being updated on an ongoing basis, and is available at www.education.ie/covid19

The Department of Education and Skills, its agencies and support services, will remain available providing advice and supports to the education sector at this time.

Yours sincerely

Seán Ó Foghlú
Secretary General