

Coronavirus **COVID-19**



Preparations for Summer Term

April 2020

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INTRODUCTION

We hope that you were able to have some rest and relaxation over the holiday period. We are conscious that your thoughts will again be focussing on leading your school community during the summer term. IPPN has been working closely with CSL over the past week to put together some practical options and ideas to support your leadership role at this time.

IPPN continues to acknowledge the incredible work being achieved by school leaders all over the country in these extraordinary times. Never before has so much been asked of you. You are expected to be the calm and reassuring person at the helm, while you navigate the challenges of keeping the well-being of your school community in focus. At the same time, you are expected to maintain communication with families and teachers to ensure that learning continues for your pupils. Alongside these challenges are your worries for your own families and friends and the uncertainty which faces everyone, as we try to work away through these very strange times. In order to sustain your own well-being, consider all the supports available to you in the system. If you have not yet accessed the CSL coaching service, it can be accessed remotely. Simply go to the coaching section of the CSL website at www.csfireland.ie and contact one of the coaching companies in your area. This support, in particular, will help you to put things in perspective, remind you of your strong leadership skills and offer you the opportunity to reflect on the strengths of your school community as you help navigate it through the current challenges.

Now is the time to speak regularly with your leadership team and your teachers. You may consider arranging an online staff meeting or WhatsApp chat to look at the priorities for your pupils before honing in on the details. Have a general conversation about the most important things you need to consider going forward, keeping well-being and sustainability at the top of your list, along with ensuring that weekends are free of school work.

Now, more than ever, you need to consider your people and their strengths. Call on their experience and expertise to assist you in the weeks ahead. Be guided by their knowledge of the children with whom they have been working on a daily basis. Listen to what they have to say about their online experience and their expertise in technology. Ask them to share this with those who are unfamiliar with this kind of learning and to share learning ideas and suitable online resources. Develop a timetable that suits the needs of the pupils in your school and amend it to different age groups. Remember that the home is a very different environment from the school. A couple of hours' school work a day is really enough to expect most primary school students to achieve. This is a time for you to be led by the experience of your staff, take a step back and facilitate them to achieve this. Place trust in their professionalism, their knowledge and their expertise. Be careful not to put too much pressure on those who may not seem to be using cutting edge technology, but are still managing to communicate effectively with their pupils. If positive feedback is being provided by parents, less technology orientated means of communication should be allowed.

When conversations take place about providing learning and teaching opportunities, be mindful of the following:

- Generally, your pupils will have the same way of working as they did before this crisis. Some will see a list of options as something they must tackle from the beginning and work through completely until they reach the end. Others won't have the inclination or the ability to do so.
- Some will be guided by parents who will manage well their worries, queries and approaches to work. Other parents will not have the opportunity to do this due to work, illness, family responsibilities and personal issues

- Online and social media commentary is not helpful when discussing your school. Your own context is just that. It is unique to your teachers, support staff, parents, pupils, the wider school community and yourself. Do not allow the progress or lack thereof of neighbouring schools to influence your plan for yours. However, speaking to other school leaders online to gain more insight and ideas, and to express your own professional worries and concerns is always a good idea. Encouraging your teachers to share and speak with other teachers in a positive online environment is also helpful
- Be mindful of the fact that some families have little or no access to technology, that broadband can be a serious issue and that families with a number of children have to rely on the sharing of devices. This is particularly challenging when parents are working from home or if there are state exams or third level students in the house

Covid 19 is still with us and will likely impact on our personal and professional lives for some time to come. Now, as we head into our summer term, it is time to assess how your school community is doing and whether changes need to be made to the plans you have already put in place. It remains unknown as to when schools can expect to get back to normality. Therefore, it would be wise, taking into account the above guidance, to plan for the short and medium term.

SHORT TERM:

Week beginning Monday 20th April:

1. Concentrate on progressing the learning with pupils starting with an online **staff meeting**. **Appendix 1** below outlines a menu for you that may help your staff during the meeting in assessing:
 - (a) Where you are as a staff and a school in terms of supporting your pupils
 - (b) Where you want to go in terms of natural progression
 - (c) How to get there, especially in keeping regular contact with pupils and families
 - (d) Who will be responsible for the different actions agreed

Depending on your school, you might want to have a middle-management team (if you have one) meeting prior to, or after, the proposed online staff meeting. For smaller schools, you might want to discuss the plans with your deputy in advance of the meeting.

You and your staff will likely agree a weekly or fortnightly plan for progressing work with your pupils through whatever mechanism works best for your school.

2. If restrictions are relaxed and you are allowed to go into school, then follow up on planning forms, etc. that you may not have had a chance to complete before Easter
3. Review School Meals Programme (if applicable)

Week beginning Monday 27th April:

1. Review previous week's interaction with pupils and parents, possibly through online call with staff and/or management team
2. Ensure, in consultation with your chairperson, that your Draft Admissions Policy is submitted to your Patron. Please note that the **30th April** is set in legislation which means that the DES has very little option but to abide by the legislation. However, it is also clear that it is a draft that has to be submitted, which will leave room for you and your staff to amend at some time in the future if necessary. You may find a webinar delivered by Mason Hayes & Curran on the Admissions policy helpful. You can register for the webinar by [clicking on this link](#).
3. The Panel is likely to be released this week should your school need to engage with it. Guidelines regarding recruitment will also be published at this time.

Once we get the first month of the summer term organised, we will concentrate on the medium term plan which will largely depend on how Covid-19 is still impacting. IPPN and CSL will continue to collaborate on providing supports to school leaders over the coming weeks.

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST STAFF MEETING

Some questions that may be useful to consider at the first staff meeting after Easter

General

- Which medium/media are we going to use to connect with parents and students?
- For schools already decided on a medium to connect with students, how well are the students engaging? For those not engaging on any level how can we further support them?
- Right now, what is our school in a position to provide?
- What capabilities do each of us (staff) have to work from home?
- What training do you require to be more comfortable with distance teaching?
- What can management do to support you further?
- How are notices to the staff from the principal communicated so that every staff member gets the information at the same time?

Student Learning

- What do we hope to achieve with our classes in the next 2 weeks?
- How will we teach new concepts to our students?
- How will we correct the work being done?
- How will we give feedback to our students?
- What mechanism will we use to allow students to connect in with us for clarifications?
- When will that connect in time be?
- How much work will we give our students?
- What work are we sending out to pupils?
- Who is sending out the work? Teacher or coming through principal from teacher?
- When are we sending out the work?
- How are we sending out the work?
- Is there collaboration between teachers in the same class groupings to ensure consistency? Avoid solo runs!
- Is there a natural progression in the amount of work given throughout the school from Junior Infants to 6th class?
- What efforts are we making to differentiate the work being sent out?
- What supports do we have in place for our SEN pupils and how is the SET supporting the class teacher in a distance learning capacity?

Connecting with Students

- How often will we connect in?
- Will we post work by the week or daily?
- How will we record what is being done?
- What is our expectation of them – is this work that must be completed or a menu of work?
- What measures have we in place to look after students' wellbeing?
- What do I do if I'm concerned about a pupil that I feel may be at risk?

Staff Connecting

- How often will we connect with each other?
- When will that be?
- How often will we connect in with the parents?
- Will this be from school management or at individual class level?
- How will we do this?
- Could we form a committee or a group of teachers who are very proficient in IT to support our colleagues who are less proficient in this area? (So as to avoid all problems coming through the principal!!)
- How do we facilitate the teachers who are minding very young children/elderly parents at home when it comes to online meetings etc?
- What happens if a staff member gets sick? What arrangements are we going to put in place for his/her students?

Parents

- How will we communicate our expectations of our pupils to their parents?
- Where should they find their children's list of school work?
- On what day of the week should parents expect to get this work from school?
- Will it be daily/weekly/fortnightly?
- How can I directly communicate with my child's teacher if I have a problem?
- How can we further support the parents who do not have the infrastructure in their homes to facilitate distance learning?
- How can we support the parents and students in homes where the "atmosphere" is not conducive to learning?
- How are we going to offer reassurance to parents as time goes on that their children's learning is not negatively affected by distance learning?

SIMPLE & PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON COMMUNICATION DURING COVID19

IPPN is aware that there are many reasons you may have been unable to communicate with your school community since the schools closed on March 12th. We understand from feedback we have received that you and your school may fall into some of the following categories:

- A poor IT infrastructure
- A lack of administrative support
- Poor broadband
- Care of young children
- Care of second and third level students, and stress due to uncertainty around exam timetables and arrangements, work placements etc.
- Care and support of elderly relatives and neighbours
- Working from home and needing quiet time to do so
- Living with frontline family members
- Experiencing covid-19 illness or isolation in your home
- Sudden unemployment of family members
- General anxiety and stress around the current unprecedented situation

We hope the following suggestions might be of some assistance to you. If you do not have access to a school website, the following resources can be communicated to parents through a texting service such as TextaParent or simply on a sheet posted to the pupils' homes particularly if you have a small number of pupils in your school.

All communication to parents and the school community should:

- Wish them well
- Emphasise the importance of well-being during this crisis and the challenges you understand are involved for them all (use the list above)
- State that any work coming from the school is a menu to choose from rather than a list from which they must start at the beginning and work through
- State that there are no deadlines for the work and that pupils can work through it at their own pace or amend this to suit what you have decided with your staff
- Emphasise the importance of a daily timetable which includes time for work, play, outside exercise and leisure along with meals and household chores. We understand that children may get up much earlier, and go to bed much later than is suggested below! This is simply an example:

9-00am-10-00am	Out of bed, play and get dressed
10-00am-11-00am	Breakfast, tidy up and household jobs
11-00am-1-00pm	School work
1-00pm-2-00pm	Lunch and play time
2-00pm-3-00pm	Outdoor exercise time
3-00pm-4-00pm	Creative time-reading, art, dance, music, drama, baking or more school work for older children
4-00pm-5-00pm	Free play time or limited TV
5-00pm-6-00pm	Project time: a time to work on a specific project like writing a book, painting, a specific project in an area of interest etc.
6-00pm-7-00pm	Help prepare dinner and tidy up
7-00pm-8-00pm	Family activity time-board games, limited TV etc.

- Include a note to the children about how important it is to help at home
- If you can, provide an email address for questions and queries
- Assure them you will be in touch again in a week's time, but do try to maintain regular communication

Practical Arrangements for Schools who are not in touch with staff online

1. Set up a WhatsApp Group to discuss the organisation of resources for pupils or simply work over the phone
2. Zoom or Skype are other options for communicating with teachers to begin organising work
3. Be mindful of the diversity of situations in which your teachers find themselves and acknowledge this
4. Decide on some general activities e.g. for PE as below
5. Get teachers to make a short list of the work they would like their students to do. For Infants, this should be simple instructions for parents to work with the children e.g. counting and telling stories and a list of websites they can visit
6. Keep it short and remind pupils that they can choose their work from this menu rather than having to complete it all
7. This can be emailed to the principal to be accessed by the pupils:
 - a. On the school website
 - b. Links or information can be sent through Text-a-Parent
 - c. Some schools are using Class Dojo, Seesaw and Aladdin to achieve this

Note: some teachers will really appreciate more regular contact with their pupils through these online fora and this could be accommodated by the school.

Simple Ideas for Older Children

1. Keep an illustrated diary
2. Create a comic book story
3. Write a Book (especially for children with experience of this project)
4. Write your own history or your family history

Resources for Inclusion in your Resource Lists for Pupils

1. Put up a link to RTE School on your website or simply a reminder about the time it takes place each day (11-00am-12-00).
2. Cuirfidh TG4 tús ar an 20 Aibreán le clár “scoil ag baile” do pháistí Gaeltachta agus gaelscoileanna. Craolfar Cúla4 ar Scoil gach maidin ag a 10am do dhaltáí bunscoile atá ag baile. Clár leathuaire a bheidh ann á chraolfar ó 10am go 10.30am.

Over the course of the summer term, we will continue to develop resources and support your planning needs. These needs will be identified through the direct communications with the Support Office and by member survey.