



## TUI Guidance

### Phased re-opening of Post-Primary Schools

### Phase 2: Final Year Leaving Certificate Students

Following extensive negotiations involving the Department of Education, the teacher unions and the national management bodies and based upon the advice and information from the Public Health authorities, government has decided that school buildings will re-open for final year Leaving Certificate Students on 1<sup>st</sup> March – Leaving Certificate Established, LCVP and Leaving Certificate Applied.

The context for this decision is that the Public Health authorities have advised government and the education sector that a phased and cautious return to post-primary settings is now possible, provided that the proper and appropriate risk mitigation measures are fully implemented and adhered to in schools.

The measures in place in the first term – physical distancing, wearing of face coverings, hand sanitising, enhanced cleaning regimes etc. – according to Public health advice continue to prove effective in preventing spread of the virus (including the new variants) into and/or within schools.

The TUI, in response to concerns and issues identified by members, in the course of the negotiations sought and secured significant additional measures to protect members – and the broader school community – during this phased and limited re-opening. Those measures are set out below.

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## COVID-19 Case Numbers and Transmission Levels

In early January, the TUI publicly and clearly stated that members would not be available for the re-opening of school on 11<sup>th</sup> January as was being proposed by government. The primary reasons for the TUI insisting that school buildings must not re-open to students and staff on 11<sup>th</sup> January were the significantly higher COVID-19 case numbers at that time and the very high positivity rate.

Given the additional measures now in place for the safe re-opening of schools (set out later in this document) and taking full account of Public Health advice and projections that transmission will fall further in the coming weeks, it is now possible to have a phased and cautious return to school buildings.

## Testing of Close Contacts

It is important to note that the testing of close contacts in the community has now resumed and that the testing of close contacts in schools was always part of the plan for re-opening education.

The testing regime is also being improved. Anyone identified by a Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) as a close contact will now be tested at day 0 (or as soon as possible after identification) and again at day 10. If the second test results in no detection of the virus and the staff member/student has no symptoms, then s/he can return to school.

Currently serial testing is recommended only in settings where there is evidence of significant COVID-19 transmission and in healthcare settings.

In **all** instances where COVID-19 is positively confirmed in a school age student in community testing (i.e., when referred by a G.P.) or as part of close contact testing in the community, Public Health will be immediately notified and a Public Health Risk Assessment initiated with the student's school by local HSE public health Schools Teams. Public health risk assessment teams have been enhanced to deal with PHRA in school communities.

In **all** instances where COVID-19 is positively confirmed in an adult (including a student aged 18 or over) who works in (or attends) a school, either through symptomatic or close contact testing, Public Health will be immediately notified and a Public Health Risk Assessment initiated with the student's school by local HSE public health Schools Teams.

A principal may also notify the HSE Schools Teams directly if s/he is notified by a teacher or other staff member of a positive case. Although not strictly necessary, this additional measure is welcome in that it offers further assurance to the school community.

## Public Health Advice

This week (beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> February), the Public Health authorities have advised that a phased return to post-primary settings is possible provided that the proper and appropriate risk mitigation measures are implemented and strictly adhered to.

### Risk Mitigation

COVID-19 Response Plans in schools must be updated to reflect changes agreed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health, with guidance provided by the

Health and Safety Authority (HSA). The Framework document (available on the TUI website) contains a link to the updates that are required to the plan.

Public Health specialists have advised the TUI that **all** the risk mitigation measures that were in place prior to school buildings closing in December remain effective against the transmission of COVID-19 provided they are **all** strictly enforced and adhered to by all in the school community i.e., proper ventilation, the wearing of face coverings, maintaining social distancing measures at all times including during break times, and when arriving at/exiting the school.

Any instance where the management of a school does not enforce adherence to those measures, or where a member of the school community has not adhered to them, must be reported to the Lead Worker Representative (LWR) without delay and immediate corrective action must be taken.

TUI's procedure for dealing with health and safety concerns in workplaces owing to COVID-19 can be found at: <https://www.tui.ie/fileupload/Covid%20Procedure%20Poster%20final.pdf>

### **Infection Protection and Control (IPC)**

In advance of 1<sup>st</sup> March, schools will be provided with specific guidance on what infection protection and control measures must be in place. These measures will be in line with the guidance issued from the HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre). Funding will be provided to schools to comply with IPC guidance.

### **Weekly reports on school transmission of COVID-19**

The TUI will continue to receive from Public Health, on a weekly basis, updated data in relation to the results of all mass testing of close contacts carried out in school settings. We will monitor the trends in infection transfer closely and will engage with the DES, as and when deemed necessary.

### **Public Health Teams**

The DES has confirmed to the TUI that the enhanced Public Health teams will be available to support fully the phased re-opening of schools. The same number of teams as would normally be available when schools are open fully will also be available during the phased re-opening, thereby enhancing capacity to address issues that arise during that period.

## **Additional Protections for Teachers**

### **Improved PPE measures**

The TUI has secured the commitment that schools will provide all special education teachers and SNAs with medical grade masks. Any teacher who is required to work with students who require Aerosol Generating Procedures will be provided with additional PPE, also in line with HSE advice. Funding for this PPE will be provided to schools by the DES.

Teachers are advised that, in addition to the wearing of face coverings (which is mandatory), they may also wear visors. However, it is emphasised that a visor alone does not provide as high a level of protection as a face covering and face coverings must be worn as a minimum.

## **Vaccinations**

It has been agreed that those essential to education (i.e., teachers) are estimated at this time to be in the first one third of the population captured by the Vaccine Allocation Strategy.

## **Teachers over 60**

During this phased re-opening of schools, a teacher who is over 60 will be permitted to continue to work remotely and/or have more flexible working arrangements.

For the purposes of in-school teaching (of Leaving Certificate classes), a substitute can be appointed by the school to replace any such teachers and funding is available for this.

## **Teachers at Higher Risk from contracting COVID-19**

Until now, when schools were open, any teacher who was categorised by Medmark as being **high-risk** still had to attend for work in school. Under the measures now agreed with the TUI, a teacher deemed high-risk may continue, for the duration of the phased re-opening of schools, to work remotely or may be assigned a list of other duties as provided for in section 12 of CL49/2020.

For the purposes of in-school teaching (of Leaving Certificate classes) a substitute can be appointed by the school to replace any such teachers and funding is available for this.

## **Pregnant Teachers**

The TUI has secured a commitment that during this period of phased return to school, a pregnant teacher should consider herself to be in the high-risk category and the teacher should temporarily continue to work remotely.

For the purposes of in-school teaching (of Leaving Certificate classes) a substitute can be appointed by the school to replace any such teachers and funding is available for this.

## **Childcare and Changes to Parental Leave**

Teachers are now deemed “essential workers”. Childcare facilities remain open to provide childcare for children of essential workers. A household of an essential worker can also form a bubble with another household for the purposes of childcare.

The TUI has also secured agreement that greater flexibility will apply to the use of parental leave days, as follows:

- Where an application for leave is in process up to the date of re-opening, a teacher may be facilitated to continue to work remotely in the interim days
- However, from the date of phased re-opening, a teacher who would ordinarily be required by the school to be on-site to support students but cannot attend the workplace due to childcare considerations, can avail of parental leave measures
- The 6-week notification requirement to apply for parental leave will be waived during this period of phased re-opening

- Blocks of parental leave of less than one week can be approved

### **Changes to Unpaid Leave**

During this period of phased re-opening of schools, an employer can ease the requirement to provide 6 weeks' notice in advance of taking unpaid leave in order to provide a level of flexibility for teachers who cannot source childcare for school age children.

### **COVID-19 Leave**

Members should note that access to special leave with pay remains in place for those teachers who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or those who have been advised to self-isolate or restrict their movements.

The TUI is currently in talks with the DES to seek an increase in COVID-19 Leave from 14 days to 28 days for those teachers diagnosed with COVID-19.

To apply for special leave with pay, a teacher must complete Appendix A or B of CL49/2020 and return it to the school immediately. The completed form, which can be signed digitally, must be accompanied by appropriate HSE/medical certification (a text message from the HSE will suffice) to include the estimated date of fitness to return to work. The certification/test can be scanned and emailed to the school/ETB until the teacher is fit to return to work and is in a position to provide the original version.

### **School Transport**

School transport services will operate fully with the continued additional hygiene and other measures that were introduced on school transport services at the start of the school year. A 50% capacity on post-primary and SEN services with post-primary children has been implemented on the majority of routes operated by Bus Éireann.

### **Supervision and Substitution Scheme**

The S&S scheme will be suspended for the duration of the phased re-opening of schools. This means that teachers will not be called upon to do either supervision or substitution under the scheme. Hours not used as a result of this measure are not banked for later use.

### **Re-opening for Leaving Certificate Students– Practical Steps**

- All teachers who work with Leaving Certificate students will return to school (with the exceptions of teachers who are in the high-risk or very high-risk categories and/or avail of the leave measures set out above).
- If a final year Leaving Certificate class is mixed with another cohort, then both groups can return. Decision in this regard rests with the relevant teachers and school management and will be based on local circumstances. To clarify:
  - if LCA2 and LCA1 students are currently in the same class for a subject/s, both groups can return if circumstances allow - i.e., LCA2 and LCA1 students can attend in-school classes for those subjects and the LCA1 students can engage in remote learning for their other subjects (where they are not combined with LCA2).

- if 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years students are currently in the same class for some subjects, as may be the case in small rural schools, Island schools and/or for certain subjects with small numbers of students (such as Honours Physics), then all students in the class can attend in-school classes for those subjects and the 5<sup>th</sup> Year students can engage in remote learning for their other subjects (where they are not combined with 6<sup>th</sup> Years).
- Students and teachers will follow their normal timetable.
- Where a teacher of a Leaving Certificate class would normally, as part of her/his timetable, leave that class to deliver remote or online teaching to students who are still learning at home, the school should facilitate that teacher in delivering that teaching from the school premises or from home (where the teacher's current timetable is such that the travel from school to home is possible without encroachment on class contact time).
- It is for the individual teacher to decide what form her/his remote teaching should take in these circumstances. School management cannot require teachers to attend school buildings other than for face-to-face teaching of special classes and Leaving Certificate classes.
- Schools may use the entire school premises to increase social distancing measures providing the appropriate cleaning regimes are in place.
- Using the entire school premises will allow class groups to move rooms, at regular intervals and if required – this will assist in ensuring rooms are properly ventilated.

### **Return of other Post-Primary Cohorts**

The TUI is in intensive discussions with the Department with a view to providing for a phased and cautious return for other cohorts.

Subject to ongoing review, public health advice and confirmation by Government, it is intended that 5<sup>th</sup> Year students will return on 15<sup>th</sup> March and all other year groups on 12<sup>th</sup> April.