

# Return to School – January 2022

## Frequently Asked Questions



Several teachers are not available to attend school. Therefore, school management has advised a Year group (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> years) to remain at home.

At period four, I am timetabled to teach a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Science class who are at home. However, a colleague who has a 6<sup>th</sup> year Maths class for period 4, is absent on COVID-19 leave. What happens? I am not a qualified teacher of Maths. Can I be asked to teach the 6<sup>th</sup> Year class?

Firstly, using the existing paid substitution scheme, the Principal should source a paid substitute who is qualified in the subject area. Wherever possible, the class/hours should be assigned to a colleague of yours within the school who is on part-time hours (i.e., fewer than 22 hours).

If no part-time teacher within the school is qualified in the subject, the existing paid substitution scheme should be used to source/engage a teacher who is qualified.

If no qualified substitute is available under the existing paid substitution scheme, school management can assign the class/hours according to the following sequence:

1. To a teacher within the school who is qualified in the subject and who has volunteered to participate in the COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements as set out in Information Note 26/2021. It should be noted that once such a teacher reaches the 22-hour weekly threshold (by virtue of undertaking substitution under the existing paid substitution scheme), s/he can then work additional hours under the COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements (up to a maximum of 35 hours over the period to 28<sup>th</sup> February), as can her/his full-time colleagues.

2. To a teacher within the school who is not qualified in the subject and who has volunteered to participate in the COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements as set out in Information Note 26/2021.
3. Use of the dividend created by curtailing attendance and use of the S&S Scheme.
4. If no substitute is readily available under either the existing paid substitution scheme or the Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements, then the Principal (notwithstanding the fact that you are not qualified in the subject) may ask you to teach the 6<sup>th</sup> Year class as exam classes have been prioritised. In such circumstances any obligation to your 2nd-year class in regard to that class period is set aside.

You cannot be assigned or assume concurrent responsibility for the two class groups. Alternatively the Principal, under the S&S scheme, and in accordance with the S&S roster that is in place, may ask you to substitute, to the best of your ability (notwithstanding the fact that you may not be qualified in the subject) for your absent colleague and teach the 6<sup>th</sup> Year class. Obviously, if you are assigned the 6<sup>th</sup> year class group under the S&S scheme, it will, by definition, be for a class period for which you are not otherwise timetabled.

Some flexibility on providing cover will be allowed - i.e., the priority of school management must be to seek a suitable qualified teacher to provide cover for the class/es in question. Qualifications to teach the class/es will take precedence over other considerations.

**Several teachers are not available to attend school. Therefore, school management has advised a Year group (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> years) to remain at home.**

**At period four, I am timetabled to teach a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Science class who are at home and I have not been asked to teach any of the classes who are physically at school. What am I required to do?**

You are required to engage with your 2<sup>nd</sup> year class group remotely in the same manner as pertained under previous emergency remote delivery.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Year students are not attending school, owing to a decision of management to prioritise the attendance of exam classes. I am a teacher of French. A colleague French teacher is absent due to COVID-19 leave and the Principal has asked me to take the absent teacher's 6<sup>th</sup> Year (Leaving Certificate) class from 11.00 to 11.40?**

**I am not timetabled for the 11.00 to 11.40 class period. Can I be asked to take the 6<sup>th</sup> year class and, if so, am I required to take it?**

Yes, even though you are not timetabled for the class period, you can be asked to take the class:

- Under the existing paid substitution scheme if you are part-time (i.e. on fewer than 22 hours)

- Under the COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements (if you have volunteered to participate in these arrangements)
- Under the S&S scheme if the class period is one of the class period on your roster

However, if you have not volunteered for the Temporary Emergency Substitution Arrangements and are not on the S&S roster for that class period, there is no obligation under any of the agreed steps and you cannot be required to take the class.

**I am timetabled for 2<sup>nd</sup> Year English from 11.40 to 12.20. The Principal has asked me to teach my colleague's 6<sup>th</sup> Year Leaving Certificate English class at that time and concurrently to conduct class online for my own 2<sup>nd</sup> Year class. Is that in order and in line with the agreed national arrangements?**

No. You can only be asked to attend to one class or the other, not both. If the school has prioritised exam year classes, logic would suggest that the 6<sup>th</sup> year class should have your attention. However, that is a decision to be made by the Principal. If s/he wants you to take the 2<sup>nd</sup> year class, remotely, in accordance with the previously agreed arrangements for emergency remote teaching, that is the only class you take.

**The Principal has asked me to "supervise" or "stand in with" the 6<sup>th</sup> Year Leaving Certificate English class, and to conduct (i.e. teach) my own 2<sup>nd</sup> year English class online, from the 6<sup>th</sup> year classroom. The Principal said that I need do no more than set some independent work/reading for the 6<sup>th</sup> years and take a record of their attendance. Is that in order and in line with the agreed national arrangements?**

No. You can only be asked to attend to one class or the other, not both. Schools have been provided with additional staffing and funding for additional supervision and substitution requirements arising from COVID-19. Colleagues who can be paid for the work should be asked to undertake it. If you undertake it, those colleagues will be denied that additional payment.

**The Principal has asked me to "supervise" a 6<sup>th</sup> Year Leaving Certificate class, and to conduct (i.e. teach) my own class online, from the 6<sup>th</sup> year classroom. S/he said that the 6<sup>th</sup> years will "work away on their own" and that all I need to do is take a record of their attendance. S/he said that there is no breach of the class-size directive in this arrangement as I will merely be supervising (not teaching) the 6<sup>th</sup> years and that the directive applies only to the class I am teaching - the 2<sup>nd</sup> years.**

**Is that in order and in line with the agreed national arrangements?**

No. You can only be asked to attend to one class or the other, not both. If you are teaching your 2<sup>nd</sup> years and concurrently "supervising" the 6<sup>th</sup> Years you are taking simultaneous responsibility for both groups and the TUI directive applies to protect you against this.

**My Principal has just told me that, following advice from the Inspectorate, students are being sent home from school. Why is the Inspectorate giving advice to schools?**

The Department of Education issued Information Note SD 0002/2022 on 5<sup>th</sup> January. The note contained the following advice: "Schools should continue to make every effort to obtain a substitute for all teacher absences. Where a school has done so and continues to experience difficulties in sourcing sufficient substitute cover, schools are advised to contact the Department of Education in these circumstances by email covid19\_alert@education.gov.ie or telephone 057 9324461 and an Inspector will provide further support." Therefore, schools have been advised to contact the Inspectorate.

Where a school does so, the Lead Worker Representative should ask the Principal what advice, support or instruction has been provided by the Inspectorate and should report this to the staff.

The TUI Workplace Committee should let the TUI Branch Officers know what advice, support or instruction was given.

**I am a teacher of Irish and my first year class group has been told to stay home due to staff shortages. I have not been asked to supervise any class when I am timetabled for First Years. Am I effectively free at this time?**

No, you are not free. You must follow your timetable and engage with your first years in line with the previously agreed arrangements for emergency remote teaching (unless you have been asked to teach a prioritised exam class who are physically in attendance at school).

The TUI is advising all members to use the agreed platforms and methods available to them - Teams, Google Meets etc. - and to follow the normal school timetable, where possible.

**I am an asymptomatic close contact and have been asked to live stream my classes from home. Is this correct?**

If you are an asymptomatic close contact, you must maintain regular engagement with your classes and follow your normal timetable. You are not required to live stream all of your classes.

You must follow the previously agreed arrangements for emergency remote teaching and what has been previously agreed and practised in the school - nothing more. You should be available for students and provide direct teaching as far as possible.

**Although my school has prioritised attendance in school by Leaving Certificate students, a significant number of my Leaving Cert students are absent or have decided to stay at home. Am I to live stream my classes to students at home?**

No.

The Department of Education has prioritised in-person tuition and therefore you are obliged to teach only those Leaving Certificate students who are in attendance at school. Work and assignments can be shared with others through the school's preferred platform, Google meets, Teams etc. but only at a time that suits the teacher. In this context, it is important that teachers consider carefully the workload implications of arrangements they enter into and make sure not to take on unrealistic or unsustainable burdens.

### **My classroom is very cold. What can I do?**

The TUI Directive on heating states, "In the event of the minimum temperature of 17.2°C not being reached at the commencement of classes members are directed to report the matter to the School Representative who should inform the Principal of the situation. If the heating is not brought up to the standard, or reasonable attempts are not made to remedy any defects in the heating system, members are instructed not to work in rooms where the minimum temperature level is not achieved or achievable."

Public health advice sets out the importance of ventilation to mitigate against COVID-19, however, TUI's Directive still stands.

Clearly, in the current circumstances, schools may need some latitude while they are putting in place remedial measures. However, students and staff must not be put at risk both of contracting COVID-19 and another illness because of unacceptably low temperatures. That being the case, some classrooms/spaces will have to be deemed as not fit for use during particularly cold weather. If it has not already been done, such classrooms/spaces should immediately be identified through a risk assessment process to which the LWR must have an input and alternative arrangements should be agreed in respect of classes affected.

### **Due to teacher absences, I have been asked to combine various class groups that are physical in attendance at school. Is this allowed?**

The TUI has clear, long-standing class size directives. These directives are designed to protect teachers. If you take on responsibility for two classes running concurrently (e.g. one face-to-face, the other online), you will potentially – indeed probably – find yourself in breach of the relevant class size directive. If anything goes wrong, if there is an incident or accident that leads to a complaint or allegation against you, the protection you can be offered is severely diminished if you have been in breach of the directive.

Furthermore, the social distancing measures must be strictly adhered to i.e. one metre shoulder to shoulder from one student to another. It may be possible to take 30 students in a room and adhere to the TUI Directive, however, to comply with the COVID-19 mitigation measures, only 24 students may be permitted – the size of the room and social distancing requirements are a key factor.