

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



CONTINUATION OF REMOTE LEARNING – JANUARY 2021

From: Education Restart Programme

To: All Schools

Date: 29 January 2021

Dear Principal

Continuation of Remote Learning

Education Minister Peter Weir MLA has announced that in light of the current crisis in public health, the Northern Ireland Executive has agreed that schools will continue to provide remote learning until at least 5 March. This will extend the previously announced reopening date by two weeks after the February half-term break.

Therefore, all mainstream education providers, including pre-school education settings, primary and post primary schools are required to provide remote learning at home to their pupils rather than face to face teaching in school, until at least 5 March. Special schools and EOTAS centres will continue to remain open for staff and pupils.

The Minister has repeatedly stated that no matter how good the quality of remote learning being provided, the removal of face to face learning will have a negative impact on children's educational experience, with a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged groups and vulnerable children. Therefore, it is his priority to return to full time face-to-face teaching for everyone as soon as possible. The aim would be to start face to face teaching in early March, subject to the prevailing public health and scientific advice.

It is important to prioritise those year groups engaged in learning for key qualifications in plans for schools returning. It is essential that they have the maximum opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding required for progression to the next stage of education, employment or training.

As a result of the disruption to children's education, educational recovery is critical to their future. Therefore, the Minister will be seeking resources to enable investment in catch up resources to allow children to make up for the loss of face to face teaching over these two academic years.



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The Minister recognises that core loss to the foundations of education, if missed now, could have a longer detrimental impact on children.

In relation to school transport and Free School Meals the processes currently in place will continue:

- Where children can use alternative means of travelling to school they should do so and the wearing of face coverings for post primary pupils on school transport will continue to be mandatory; and
- For children entitled to free school meals, payments in lieu of free school meals will continue to apply to any child entitled to free school meals who is learning remotely and cannot attend school as a result of the restrictions.

Remote learning and the removal of face to face teaching should be temporary and last no longer than necessary, and therefore will remain under review by the Executive.

The Department's Continuity Direction to schools requires all schools to have due regard to the DE Coronavirus Guidance in delivering education.

Regards

Education Restart Programme

