



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Returning to school

Curriculum guidance for primary school leaders and teachers

July 2020

Version 1.0

Note to school principals: Please provide copies of this guidance document to all teachers, relevant staff and members of the board of management. It is available on www.gov.ie/backtoschool

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Full re-opening of schools

The objective of the Department of Education is to open schools in accordance with the normal start of the new school year to the fullest extent possible, while minimising the risks from a public health perspective. In so doing, the plans and actions of schools to support pupils must be sustainable in a context in which Covid-19 is still present in the country while also being sufficiently agile and responsive to any changes in health advice that may occur over the coming school year.

1.1.2 Supporting learning during the 2019/20 school closure

By the time of the commencement of the new school year, primary pupils will have had a loss of direct class contact time from mid-March until the end of June 2020. During that period of school closure, school leaders and teachers continued to connect with parents and pupils to provide for the continuity of pupils' learning in a remote learning environment. Many parents/guardians and families were actively involved in effectively supporting their child's learning and wellbeing at that time.

The Department provided a series of *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents to advise schools, principals, teachers and parents on how continuity in pupils' learning could be supported. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) developed a range of resources for teachers and schools to support teaching, learning and assessment at that time. The Department's Inspectorate engaged with over 2,100 primary schools through phone calls to school principals to advise on how pupils' learning could be supported during the school closure period and to mediate the key messages of the Department's *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents.

In addition, teachers and school leaders demonstrated great commitment to professional development and upskilling in new technologies and distance learning approaches to support pupils' learning at this time.

1.1.3 Curriculum considerations for 2020/21

As evident from information gathered from schools by various organisations including the Department's Inspectorate, the work of schools and pupils during the period of school closure varied in terms of frequency of teacher-pupil contact, curriculum focus, degree of parental/guardian involvement, and the nature and format of pupil engagement in learning.

Curriculum considerations for 2020/21 must therefore take account of the variable learning experiences of pupils during the period of school closure and the practical contexts in which teaching and learning will be taking place in the new school year. It is likely that pupils with special educational needs, pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and pupils experiencing homelessness or living in direct provision have been the most adversely affected by the lack of classroom contact time. The school community and relevant organisations and agencies need to ensure that those pupils receive the necessary supports in their learning in the 2020/21 school year.

In addition, explicit provision must be made for contingency curriculum planning for a situation in which there might be an unexpected period of school closure.

1.1.4 Purpose of this guidance

The Department has worked closely with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in developing this guidance document. This guidance is designed to support school leaders and teachers in preparing for learning to recommence on the re-opening of primary schools in September. It builds on the *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents provided by the Department to primary schools during the Covid-19 crisis.

There are, no doubt, challenges facing us all in September. These include ensuring that pupils can settle happily back into school, that all in the school community (pupils, teachers, special needs assistants, ancillary school staff, parents and members of the board of management) stay safe and well and that the pupils can pick up and progress in their learning, experiencing as full and as enjoyable a curriculum as possible.

This guidance is designed to identify some of those challenges and to suggest ways in which they might be addressed. It is also designed to assist schools in planning for a contingency situation where there may be a need to ensure that learning can continue for pupils who cannot attend school for health reasons related to Covid-19, or a situation where a school may be faced with closure for a period during which the teaching and learning will need to be delivered remotely.

1.2 Structure

The context and practicalities of curriculum provision in the 2020/21 school year are outlined in this guidance document under the following headings:

- Preparing for the return to school
- Key curriculum considerations for supporting teaching, learning and assessment in 2020/21

- Further advice and support for schools and teachers (including planning for the contingency situations noted above)
- Pausing curriculum reforms.

1.3 Principles

Considerations under each of the above headings are underpinned by the following principles:

- Adherence to relevant health and safety requirements
- Supporting the wellbeing of learners and school staff
- Ensuring equity and consistency in curriculum provision and in pupils' learning experiences
- Supporting pupils where they are at in their learning and providing them with what they need in order to flourish and be successful
- Establishing curriculum and instructional priorities and planning accordingly
- Developing and supporting collaboration with parents and agencies, in order to maximise outcomes for all pupils in a fair and equitable way.

2. Preparing for the return to school

2.1 Introduction

School leaders and teachers will already be preparing for the return of pupils for the new academic year. At a practical preparatory level, decisions on matters such as the allocation of teachers to class groups, booklists, and book rental arrangements are being finalised. Helping all pupils to make the transition back to school, to reconnect with their teachers and friends and to establish new school routines that support their health and safety will be a priority at the start of the new school year.

2.2 Initial priorities

This will be a somewhat unusual start to the school year. School leaders, the in-school leadership team and teachers will have a particular role to play in establishing secure and safe learning environments, in supporting the wellbeing of all, and in preparing collaboratively for teaching and learning in a way that enables all pupils to progress and flourish in the 2020/21 school year. While the specific focus of preparation will vary from school to school in light of the individual school context, there are themes and areas that all schools will need to consider:

- Implementation of all health requirements that help to prevent Covid-19 from coming into the school or spreading among pupils and staff, including requirements regarding physical distancing
- Supporting all pupils in settling back to school, ensuring that pupils starting school, pupils with SEN, and pupils at risk of educational disadvantage are well supported
- Preparing for how the curriculum can be mediated in a context that acknowledges that children have had different experiences while learning from home
- Progressing the school's priorities regarding wellbeing, teaching, learning and assessment
- Building on the experience of using digital technology during the school closure period to support contingency arrangements in the event that some pupils need to continue their learning in a distance learning environment for a period during the 2020/21 school year

- Updating school policies to support effective digital and blended learning; these should include the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), Child Protection procedures, and Data Protection and Critical Incident policies.

2.3 Managing transitions

As most primary pupils will not have been in their school building for a period of over five months, the start of this school year may be regarded as a transition for all – a transition from home to school, a reconnecting with friends, a learning about the routines and procedures, geography and layout of the school that will be somewhat different from before in light of public health requirements. Some pupils and parents may be anxious. However, the physical return to school offers a welcome opportunity for children to revive social connections, to re-bond with their friends, make new friends, and to spend time with adults who are significant to them. For these reasons it will be important to:

- Communicate in advance with parents and pupils about the practicalities of the start of the new school year, welcoming them and re-assuring them that the school is following the public health guidance to ensure the health and wellbeing of all pupils
- Allow pupils and parents to become familiar with the operation and layout of the school and the new health and safety measures and routines – for example, through a virtual tour of the school or an advance open day where safety measures and new arrangements can be explained and illustrated
- Ensure that, at the start of the year, pupils have space, time and planned activities to re-connect with their classmates and re-form relationships with staff
- Allow time to enable pupils to develop those relationships and connections so that they will be available and ready to participate in a meaningful way with their learning; '*Slow down to catch up*' will be a key message from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to schools in the initial weeks of the new school year
- Include routines that create a safe space where pupils can openly communicate their needs, thoughts and emotions, as well as their learning at the start of the school year and throughout the terms that follow. This could include the use of circle time, partner conversations or listening triads. Further information on these and other useful strategies is available from PDST at <https://pdst.ie/node/5897>
- Ensure that necessary supports are put in place to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all pupils.

2.3.1 Supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN)

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) will require particular support at the time of transition back to school. As they return to school, the quality of the social and emotional aspects of the curriculum will be critical to their successful re-engagement in school life and their learning across the curriculum. Particular attention will need to be given to supporting their wellbeing, reducing potential anxiety and planning learning experiences that take account of the effect of the school closure period on their progress and their engagement in learning. A useful strategy in supporting the re-engagement of pupils with SEN as the new school year commences is to assign special education teachers to them for morning meet and greets, daily check-ins and communications with home.

Approximately 15,000 pupils with SEN will have availed of the Department’s Summer Provision programme for children with SEN. All teachers delivering either the school-based or the home-based strands of the Summer Provision programme were required to complete a record of progress for each individual child and to make this available to the child’s school. The record of progress has been forwarded to each participating school. It will be important for schools to consider this record when planning for the learning needs of pupils with SEN in the new term.

For many pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), the impact of the school closure period will have been very significant. Accordingly, schools will need to plan carefully for the learning experiences, routines and sensory needs of children with ASD. It will be important to:

- Create a calm space for the children/pupils before they return to school. If it is not feasible to use sensory or quiet rooms, teachers may need to create an area of their classroom where individual children can take a comfort break. In addition, individual packs could be created with appropriate sensory or movement materials. The website of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) contains a comprehensive suite of resources designed to assist teachers to create such packs and materials
- Place an initial focus on transition and change to support the pupils as they adjust to new social rules and learning routines at school and at home. This can be achieved through, for example, the use of social stories that are developed with the pupils, either on a one-to-one basis or in a whole class environment. More information about the use of social stories in a Covid-19 context can be found at: <https://ncse.ie/supporting-transition-from-home-back-to-school>
- Establish a routine in supporting pupils to regulate their feelings and behaviour through, for example, schedules that highlight key transitions within their day and ‘exit strategies’ ranging from ‘first/then’ to a full-day visual or written schedule. This can be either paper based or added to pupils’ devices where these exist.

2.3.2 Welcoming junior infants – supporting their transition

Starting primary school in 2020 is likely to generate even greater anticipation, anxiety and excitement than normal for children and their parents/guardians. The impact of experiences during the pandemic may require schools to provide support for children in relation to separation anxiety, independence and language development. Given the well-recognised benefits of play and its role in connecting pre-school and primary school learning experiences, schools are encouraged to provide children in infants and junior classes with opportunities for play. NCCA resources on such provision can be found at: https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/3ac44a69-57f9-49ea-80db-ebec76831111/PLC-Support-Materials_All-Strands-Final.pdf

To ensure children starting in primary school are supported as fully as possible, a wide range of resources and support materials have been prepared and published by both the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration (DCDEI). They include:

- *Let's Get Ready*, a resource to provide guidance for parents, teachers and Early Learning and Care (ELC) practitioners in supporting children's transition from ELC settings to primary school, available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a8d8f-ready-for-school/>
- The Let's Play Ireland website: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/lets-play-ireland/>
- Guidance developed by NEPS on how the transition from pre-school to primary school can be supported, available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/guidance-transitioning-pre-school-to-primary-school.pdf>
- A series of short webinars, entitled *Insights*, developed by the Department of Education's Inspectorate, that address a range of topics relevant to teachers of infant classes in primary schools and include a focus on transitions, available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>; <https://www.gov.ie/ga/foilsuichan/leargas/>
- 70,000 transitions packs are being made available to parents to support children starting school. Each pack includes the *Mo Scéal* template developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), available at <https://ncca.ie/en/early-childhood/mo-sc%C3%A9al> and a postcard for children transitioning from ELC settings to share with their primary school teacher.

2.3.3 Transition from senior infants to first class

The transition from senior infants to first class (the shorter school day to the longer school day) can be challenging for some children. As this challenge may have been greater for some children having been out of school since mid-March, it will be

necessary for schools to take account of this in the types of activities and experiences planned for the pupils, especially in the initial weeks of September.

2.4 Communication with parents/guardians

The interaction between the school and the home has never been more vital in supporting children's learning. Establishing and maintaining two way channels of communication will be critical throughout the coming period. Parents/guardians will need clear communication to ensure they understand how they can contribute to their children's learning at this time, in particular with regard to:

- Reassuring parents that teachers understand that children will have had different learning experiences during the school closure period
- Reassuring parents who are anxious about their child returning to school; communication in this regard should be factual, clear and based on the latest evidence and guidance
- Managing parents' and guardians' expectations so that they understand what learning will look like and why
- How parents/guardians can support their child's learning in a distance learning environment, in the event that this arises at any stage in the 2020/21 school year.

2.5 Pupil voice

Schools need to enable pupils to communicate their own needs, and to acknowledge and respond to those needs. This will be particularly important as the new school year begins. Exploration of the views of pupils about their experience of school closure, their feelings about returning to school, and what they need to help them in the coming year, should be a central part of teachers' preparation for the year ahead. This can be done through, for example, activities in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) lessons, through art, through imaginative play in infant classes, and/or through conversations. This is covered in more detail in Section 3.

3. Key curriculum considerations for supporting teaching, learning and assessment in 2020/21

3.1 Introduction

One of the priorities for all schools in the coming school year will be to provide rich and progressive teaching and learning experiences for all pupils and, in so doing, to ensure that those learners most impacted by the school closure period are enabled to reconnect with and progress in their learning. Teachers should focus on enabling pupils to learn, on developing their learning readiness, and on promoting pupil confidence in and motivation for learning.

3.2 Identifying the starting points of learning

Getting to know each child - where they are in their learning across the curriculum, their strengths and needs, their likes and dislikes, their interests and their experiences during the school closure– will be especially important in identifying appropriate starting points for teaching and learning in the 2020/21 school year. To do this, teachers are advised to

- Liaise with parents/guardians, special education teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs).
- Draw on conversations, observations, questions posed by children, and tasks and activities in order to build up a clear picture of children’s knowledge, understanding, skills development, attitudes and values in the different curriculum areas
- Review the monthly progress records that record work that was completed up to March 2020 and work that teachers engaged in with pupils during the period of school closures
- Discuss the strengths and needs of the pupils with the previous class teacher where possible.

Accordingly, teachers will be alert to where their pupils are at; they will need to take time to assess pupils’ needs, and to re-teach, revise, and consolidate previous learning before introducing new learning. Key to this is an approach which builds on pupils’ strengths. In that regard, some important questions for schools are:

- What supports do our pupils need so that they are ready to learn?

- Are there key experiences that are essential to enable the pupils to make progress in the coming year that should be prioritised?
- Are there opportunities for learning in the Covid-19 situation that can be used as a gateway for wider learning? For example, pupils' understanding about protection from infection can be explored in wellbeing lessons; the characteristics of viruses and actions to reduce transmission could be addressed in Science.

Particular approaches that may be useful in assessing pupils' learning at this time include:

- **Teacher questioning** to help pupils and teachers 'take stock' of their experience and begin to move forward in their learning: the use of open-ended questions in particular will encourage children to think deeply, to develop their understanding and to express their views, opinions and ideas
- Use of **visual supports**, for example, photographs and images to support young children and children with special educational needs (SEN) to explore what they enjoyed and what they learned while schools were closed
- **Sharing the focus of learning** with children, while introducing a series of new lessons or topics using strategies such as WALT (We are learning to...) and WILF (What I'm looking for) to help support children's understanding of the desired learning
- **Self-assessment strategies**, such as traffic lights, rubrics or 3, 2, 1 reflection, to support children to make judgements about their own learning.
- **Teacher observation** through listening, watching and responding to pupils' thinking and actions is particularly important as school re-open in September. By focusing on particular pupils, for instance pupils with SEN or pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, teachers can combine a series of observations to give a picture of the child's unique development, identify their strengths/needs and support their progression in learning.

As standardised tests for 2020 did not proceed in May 2020, it is not envisaged that standardised tests of reading and Mathematics will be administered on the return to school. The Department grant for standardised tests will issue in April 2021 for tests to be administered in May 2021 as usual.

3.3 Preparation for teaching and learning

Building on their assessment of pupils' learning as outlined above, teachers will make key decisions about what pupils learn, the sequence in which they learn, the pace at which they learn, and the activities and experiences through which they learn.

The following questions may support teachers to reflect on their preparation for teaching and learning:

- Are the preparatory activities I undertake useful, purposeful and do they provide practical support for teaching and learning?
- How have the teaching approaches I use been chosen or adapted to meet the needs, interests and abilities of all pupils in this particular school year?
- How does my preparation allow me to respond flexibly to unexpected and emerging learning opportunities and contexts which may arise?
- Does my recorded preparation identify the specific learning taking place, the learning experiences supporting the learning, and how all pupils in my class will demonstrate this learning? ¹

3.4 Learning approaches

It is essential that, right from the start of the school year, teachers continue to provide a broad range of active learning experiences for all pupils. These include play-based learning, inquiry-based learning, talk and discussion, use of digital technologies, and learning in the environment. Care should be taken to avoid the over use of teacher-directed and didactic approaches to teaching and learning in an effort to ‘catch up’ or ‘cover lost ground.’ Instead, it will be important that teachers take time to tune into where pupils are at in their learning and that they collaboratively discuss and deliberate on how pupils’ learning needs can best be met in the new school year.

Language underpins everything a child does, including their interactions with others, their thinking and how they make sense of what they are seeing, hearing and experiencing. Talk and discussion will be key in supporting learning across curriculum areas and in helping children to re-establish relationships with each other and with school staff. During the initial weeks of the new school year, opportunities for talk and discussion will be especially important for children so that they can articulate their experiences of the pandemic—positive and negative—as they attempt to normalise this experience.

The **outdoor environment** provides particular potential for learning as the new school year begins. Planning for more frequent use of this outdoor space across the curriculum will help children to adhere to social distancing, engage in physical activity and build their sense of wellness and contentment.

¹ These questions are adapted from Guidance around Preparation for Teaching and Learning which will issue later in early November support teachers in implementing both the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) and the Primary Curriculum (1999)

Play provides schools and teachers with a proven context for supporting wellbeing and positive dispositions such as resilience and is also a critical contributor to teaching and learning in junior classes. NCCA’s support materials on teaching and learning through play, published in the PLC/CTB Toolkit, are particularly suitable in the context of ‘pods’ as they are based on the provision of play opportunities for small groups of children: https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/3ac44a69-57f9-49ea-80db-ebec76831111/PLC-Support-Materials_All-Strands-Final.pdf (Organising for Play; Resources, pg18, Organising for Play; Time and Resources, pg31, Socio-Dramatic Play to support Oral Language and Early Literacy, pg44)

Even while seeking to maintain social distancing, every effort should be made to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to play and socialise both through structured and unstructured breaks. To support this, break times may be staggered, play activities may be mostly outdoors, or groups may be kept very small.

In addition, **working collaboratively** provides particular advantages for pupils. While collaborative work has traditionally involved working in close physical proximity, the fundamental principle of collaborative learning is that pupils are stimulated to engage with the ideas, perceptions and opinions of others. Therefore, collaboration can happen successfully in the classroom, even within the constraints of social distancing.

The use of **integrated approaches** will be particularly important in the 2020/21 school year in the context of building efficiencies into how the curriculum is delivered following the loss of school contact time in the previous school year. Integration can support the consolidation and application of knowledge and skills across curricular areas in a way that also gives pupils a more coherent learning experience.

Well-planned **thematic approaches**, particularly in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and between SESE and other curricular areas will be particularly useful for practising literacy and numeracy skills and for the development of aesthetic awareness and creative expression. Through participating in project work on a specific topic, pupils get opportunities to apply their existing knowledge and skills and to develop their research and collaborative skills.

3.5 Revisiting and revising

The initial settling back period will be especially significant for revisiting and consolidating and, in some cases, relearning curriculum content previously worked on either prior to the school closure period or as part of distance learning. It will be important to reinforce and consolidate pupils’ learning from their previous class. Teachers might find it useful to work with the curriculum content, objectives and learning outcomes for the previous class level for at least the month of September in order to ensure that pupils are ready to commence new learning.

The NCCA curriculum wall chart² provides schools with an at-a-glance overview of the full primary curriculum across all four class levels and shows where new concepts and skills are introduced and where and when these are revisited. This wall-chart might be a helpful starting point for schools in identifying strands and strand units across subjects that were taught during the 2019/20 school year and those that require specific attention at the start of the new term and during 2020/21.

3.6 Curriculum priorities

It will be necessary for schools to prioritise certain aspects of the curriculum when the new term begins. Schools will need to re-orientate their work with the curriculum especially during the initial weeks of the first term as they give greater time and attention to areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Physical Education (PE), Language and Mathematics. Gradually, as schools build comprehensive pictures of where pupils are in their learning, they will work towards more ‘typical’ curriculum plans.

SPHE and PE will be important in supporting pupils’ wellbeing while language and Mathematics will be central in supporting pupils’ overall learning. Mandatory aspects of SPHE such as *Stay Safe* and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be taught early in the year. Pupils should also continue to have experiences in Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and the Arts; the use of cross curricular or thematic approaches may be particularly useful in this regard.

3.6.1 SPHE and Wellbeing

Each pupil will start or return to school with his/her own experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. The wider physical, mental, emotional and relationship implications of social distancing, lockdown and possibly bereavement may be significant for some pupils. There should therefore be a focus on wellbeing as a foundation for learning. Teachers will play an important role in supporting positive interactions and routines for the children and in encouraging healthy behaviours as the pupils make sense of their new realities and come to feel safe and secure in their school surroundings.

SPHE is particularly important in responding to how Covid-19 has impacted on children in terms of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Learning experiences that support children to focus on their strengths, positive attributes and qualities to enable reconnection with the school community will assist in easing the transition back to

² https://ncca.ie/media/1842/curriculum_overview_wall-chart.pdf

school. SPHE curriculum content will also be useful in providing general and specific support to pupils who are finding the transition back to school difficult. While teachers will be best placed to consider what aspects of their SPHE programme should be prioritised or revisited in light of the particular context of their class or pupils, it may be pertinent to focus on some of the following Strand Units:

- Self-identity
- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection
- My friends and my family
- Developing citizenship

Particular attention should be given to:

- The importance of **personal hygiene** and how to wash hands thoroughly, coughing/sneezing according to the medical guidance, and how and when to wear face coverings/masks
- Supporting pupils in **managing their feelings, resolving conflicts** and coping with uncertainty, as well as new situations brought about by Covid-19 such as loss of a loved one
- Revisiting the **Stay Safe Programme** or **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**
- Allowing pupils adequate time to re-connect with one another and to (re)establish relationships with peers. **Co-operative games** and the incorporation of drama activities such as **role play** and **improvisation** can support this process.
- Providing children with opportunities to talk about and make sense of their experiences.

Key messages for the teaching and learning of SPHE in 2020/21
Use records of learning and other sources of information to identify what areas of learning were not taught during the school closure period and prioritise those for term one in 2020/21. Ensure mandatory aspects such as <i>Stay Safe</i> and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are taught early in the year.
Examine methodologies used for teaching SPHE in a typical school year and adapt those to suit social distancing measures
In order to promote wellbeing and allow children to share their thoughts and opinions, make lots of time for talk and discussion in SPHE lessons and exploit opportunities to promote SPHE in other subjects (where appropriate), for example, in oral language, arts education and PE.

The following supports may be of assistance to schools and teachers in relation to SPHE and wellbeing.

A Primary Wellbeing Portal developed by the PDST Primary Health and Wellbeing Team is available <https://www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing/distancelearning>

Further PDST support for teachers' understanding of the Primary SPHE curriculum including a **new E Learning Programme for Teachers** is available at <https://www.pdst.ie/SPHE>

Teachers can also avail of the online support materials that are available on *Scoilnet* at <https://www.scoilnet.ie/primary/theme-pages/sphe/>

NCCA SPHE Curriculum and Teacher Guidelines are available at: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social-Personal-and-Health-Education-Curriculum/>

The HSE's Busy Bodies resource is available freely to all online. Teachers could make parents aware of this and, in so doing, would be supported in delivering this aspect of the RSE curriculum to pupils. See: https://www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy_bodies

The PDST have produced further supports for Busy Bodies here https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/PDST%20Busy%20Bodies%20Workbook_Final.pdf

3.6.2 Physical Education (PE)

Physical Education supports the development of skills and attributes such as physical movement and development, communication, self-esteem and confidence, all of which are particularly important as pupils return to school. Pupils will have had varying opportunities for movement and physical activity over the past months. As the new school year gets underway, movement and activity through timetabled PE lessons, along with activity throughout the day, will contribute positively to pupils' wellbeing.

The use of 'pods', the need for physical distancing, the cleaning and organisation of equipment, and the individual school environment will shape the PE learning experiences in the new school year.

Key messages for the teaching and learning of PE in 2020/21
Pupils' physical education is a central part of their wellbeing: it should form a significant component of timetabled programmes upon returning to school.
Emphasise strands such as Athletics or outdoor and adventure activities with particular focus on the strand units of running, jumping, throwing and orienteeing . 'Games' may also provide suitable learning experiences.
Choose learning experiences where pupils can work individually or in small groups (for example, in their pods) with minimal equipment
Promote physical activity and movement of a non-contact nature. Opportunities for both indoor and outdoor activity should be exploited during break-times, transitions, play, PE lessons, and across curricular areas.
During PE lessons, continue to ensure all pupils engage in aerobic activities as well as skill development, with an emphasis on fundamental movement skills.
Many aspects of the six strands can be taught, reinforced and assessed by using online resources such as <u>Move Well Move Often (PDST)</u> and the <u>Active School Flag resources</u> . The PDST <i>Beyond the Classroom</i> materials build on the <i>Move Well, Move Often</i> physical literacy resources. New materials were released each week during the school closure period in both Irish and English. The <i>Beyond the Classroom</i> programme includes 92 video clips (46 in each language) and 30 Activity Packs (15 in each language), which are all available to access. <u>https://www.scoilnet.ie/pdst/physlit/beyond/</u>
Actively encourage pupils to be creative, to cooperate with others, to create and modify games, to solve problems, make decisions, engage in peer and self-assessment, and to reflect as part of the planned physical education programme.

3.6.3 Language

Language is key to enabling pupils to interact and engage with others, to express their thoughts and feelings, and to share their experiences. A focus on language will therefore be particularly relevant as pupils return to school.

Mainstream class teachers and special education teachers (SETs) should continue to collaboratively plan for the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and pupils with special educational needs (SEN). These pupils may require an even higher level of support than in previous years as they are helped to settle back into school and make progress in their learning.

Pupils in *Gaelscoileanna* and *Gaeltacht* schools will benefit from being back in their immersion settings, as some children may not have had opportunities to experience the Irish language frequently since the schools closed. The *Guide for Gaeltacht Primary Schools: Indicators of Good Practice for Immersion Education* will be useful in this regard; this is available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/indicators-of-good-practice-in-immersion-education-draft-guide-for-gaeltacht-post-primary-schools.pdf>

All class teachers should gather information through conversations and other oral-based activities to assess pupils' current knowledge and understanding of the Irish language in preparation for supporting pupils' language learning in the 2020/21 school year.

Key messages for implementing the PLC in 2020/21 - English

Learning experiences that are playful, interactive and constructive will be very beneficial in supporting the development of oral language skills for all pupils. Open-ended materials can be used creatively to support these experiences.

Rich conversations between pupils, their peers and their teacher should be carefully planned and facilitated to promote the use of high-quality language. For the purpose of integration, the topic for conversations to promote the use of high-quality language can be drawn from other areas or subjects such as SPHE, History or Geography. This would help to encourage connections across the curriculum.

Exploiting multiple opportunities to use language fluently, creatively and expressively by frequently reciting from memory a wide range of high-quality poems, rhymes and descriptive passages and by singing songs will be beneficial for reviving and supporting fluency and creativity in language, and can also support integration with other curricular areas.

Increased focus on explicit language teaching across all curricular areas is advised over the coming school year.

Access to ample reading materials (real books, magazines, comics, journals, online and digital materials) in a range of genres (fictional and non-fictional) which are well matched to pupils' reading ability will support their enjoyment of reading. It will be important that pupils can choose and engage with texts of interest to them in both languages.

Early writing skills, handwriting skills and functional and creative writing skills should continue to be taught in a balanced way over the new school year. Writing presents a

range of opportunities for integration across a wide range of curricular areas, and pupils can engage in a variety of tasks such as project work (researching and presenting), recording observations over time, maintaining a diary, emailing, script writing and surveys on family topics.

Moltaí maidir le cur i bhfeidhm Curaclaim Teanga na Bunscoile - Gaeilge

Moltar deiseanna a chruthú do dhaltáí an Ghaeilge a chloisteáil chomh minic agus is féidir, taobh amuigh den cheacht Ghaeilge chomh maith. Moltar do mhúinteoirí teicneolaíocht a úsáid chun deiseanna éisteachta a chruthú; tá neart cláracha do pháistí ag gach aois leibhéal ar TG4 agus Cúla 4.

Opportunities should be created for pupils to hear Irish as frequently as possible, including outside of the Irish lesson. Teachers are also advised to use technology to create listening opportunities; there is a wealth of programming for pupils of all ages on TG4 and on Cúla 4.

Beidh an Ghaeilge ó bhéal an-tábhachtach agus ba chóir go leor deiseanna a chruthú do dhaltáí chun í a úsáid agus a chleachtadh go spráúil agus go taitneamhach. Is féidir réimse leathan de rannta, dánta agus amhráin a mhúineadh agus a aithris/ a chanadh go rialta i ngach rang. Cabróidh sé seo le foclóir a fhorbairt agus líofacht a chothú sa teanga. Is féidir na rannta, dánta agus na hamhráin a chleachtadh mar ghníomhaíochtaí aistrithe i rith an lae, roimh na sosanna agus roimh am dul abhaile. Tá smaointe eile agus acmhainní oiriúnacha ar fáil ar www.pdst.ie agus ar www.cogq.ie

Oral Irish will be very important and lots of opportunities should be created for pupils to use and practice Irish playfully and enjoyably. A wide range of rhymes, poems and songs should be taught and recited/sung regularly in every class. This will help to revise and develop vocabulary and fluency in the language. The rhymes, poems and songs can also be used as transition activities during the day, before breaks and before home time. Other ideas and appropriate resources are available from www.pdst.ie and www.cogq.ie.

Moltar deiseanna a chruthú le haghaidh úsáid neamhfhoirmiúl na Gaeilge chun frásaí agus an teanga a úsáid chomh minic agus is féidir i rith an lá scoile. Is féidir iad a mhúineadh agus a chleachtadh sa seomra ranga ar dtús. D'fheadfaí iad a chur ar taispeánt in áiteanna ar leith sa seomra ranga nó timpeall na scoile mar thaca do dhaltáí agus múinteoirí agus chun iad a chur i gcuimhne do na daltaí agus foireann na scoile.

Craolfar **Cúla4 ar Scoil** ar TG4 ag 10 a.m. ó Luan go Déardaoin, ag tosú ar 31 Lúnasa 2020 agus ag leanúint go mí na Nollag 2020. Beidh téama ar leith ag sníomh tríd an tseachtain agus foilseofar téama na seachtaine ar leathanach Facebook Cúla4 coicís chun cinn. Féachfar le spriocanna oideachasúla a chuir i gcrích ar bhealach siamsúil agus comhtháite le linn gach clár. Féachfar freisin le saibhreas nádúrtha ó chanúintí éagsúla a bheith fite fuaite tríd an gclár. D’fheadfá é seo a úsáid chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do dhaltaí a bheidh ag foghlaim sa bhaile nó mar áis luachmhar sa seomra ranga.

Mar chuid den chlár, beidh na hábhair lárnacha Curraclaim á múineadh idir Ghaeilge, Matamatic, Stair agus Tíreolaíocht, ach beidh béim freisin ar an gcruthaitheacht, ábhair STEAM, na healaíona, an timpeallacht, agus ar chúrsaí sláinte agus folláine.

Beidh an clár ar fáil mar ‘Catch Up’ ar Seinnteoir TG4 tar éis an chraolta. Beidh físeáin de na ceachtanna aonarach aonarach ar fáil freisin ar leathanach YouTube Cúla4, mar áis do mhúinteoirí chun leas a bhaint astu le saibhriú a dhéanamh ar ábhar an cheachta laistigh den rang <https://www.youtube.com/c/Cula4/playlists>

Language and literacy resources

The *Primary Language Toolkit* provides practical support in preparing for rich language learning experiences for children. The toolkit includes: Examples of Children’s Language Learning, Progression Continua and Support Materials for Teachers. You can access the toolkit at:

<https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/Primary-Language-Toolkit/?lang=en-ie>

Soláthraíonn na hUirlisí Úsáide Teanga tacaíocht phraiticiúil chun eispéiris shaibhir foghlama teanga a ullmhú do pháistí. Cuimsíonn na huirilís úsáide: Samplaí d’Fhoghlaim Teanga na bPáistí, Contanaim Dul chun Cinn agus Ábhar Tacaíochta do Mhúinteoirí. Is féidir é a rochtain ag: https://curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c81ff35c-04d4-4b61-8c1e-e2ce28629577/PLC-Support-Materials_All-Strands-GAE-Final.pdf?ext=.pdf

The PDST has produced a broad range of supports designed to continue language and literacy development at home; these are available at:

<https://www.pdst.ie/primary/literacy/literacyathome>

3.6.4 Mathematics

Given the length of time pupils have been out of school and the impact this may have had on their mathematical learning, an emphasis on talk and discussion will be important in enabling pupils to describe their learning, to express their understanding of particular concepts and to demonstrate an absence of understanding. The use of a range of assessment approaches is advised in order to accurately establish individual pupils' level of understanding of key mathematical concepts and skills. A teacher's planning for mathematics teaching and learning should reflect the wide variation in where pupils are likely to be at in their mathematics learning and mathematics programmes should be designed to ensure that all pupils progress at an appropriate pace. It will be important that topics and concepts taught in a distance learning environment during the school closure period are revised and that pupils' mathematics learning from their precious class is reinforced and consolidated. Topics not taught in the last school year will need to be prioritised.

Key messages for the teaching and learning of Mathematics in 2020/21

Talk and discussion should continue to be used in a way that enables pupils to describe their learning, express their understanding of mathematical concepts and topics

While the use of physical manipulatives may be more restricted owing to health and safety and hygiene requirements, alternative versions of resources including notation boards, hundred-squares, Dienes cut-outs and virtual manipulatives could be utilised in supporting children's mathematical understanding in the 2020/21 school year.

While Number connects all primary curriculum strands and number knowledge supports achievement across the strands, a suitable balance across all strands is advised. Pupils may need support in the revision of key areas of number and other strand areas.

Schools can access the PDST website for ideas on progression of learning in Mathematics (mathematical manuals, number sense, problem-solving etc.) The NCCA website also provides useful guidance on skills development in Mathematics.
<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Mathematics/>

All revision and new learning in Mathematics could be linked to both real life in the home and in the child's immediate environment.

The PDST has developed a number of Maths /STEM related resources suitable for learning in the home; these are available at: <https://pdst.ie/PrimarySTEM>

3.6.5 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) [History, Geography, Science]

In order to manage time in a meaningful manner, teachers can use a thematic, integrated and cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning that allows priority learning areas to be addressed while still maintaining the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum. Preparing for teaching and learning through **local studies** is supported by selecting a main subject from either **History**, **Geography** or **Science** and then rotating this theme-based approach among the three SESE subjects for breadth and depth. This integrated approach supports a variety of learning experiences and links the curriculum content objectives across the strands and strands units within SESE. Children could, for example, participate in **local investigations** through the use of trails, a combination of activities such as discussions, project work, artwork, and the use of digital technologies.

3.6.6 Arts education [Visual Arts, Music, Drama]

As schools re-open in September, the use of integrated learning experiences which incorporate Arts Education should be considered. The Arts can offer great opportunities for exploring areas of wellbeing. Within this approach, it will also be important to identify opportunities for the development of children's particular knowledge, understanding and skills specific to Music, Visual Arts and Drama.'

In music, as pupils progress in their learning composing and recording compositions individually or as a collective, for example, within 'pods', can support their response to their experiences during COVID-19.'

Drawing lends itself to both in-school and at-home opportunities to integrate with learning in other curriculum areas. In addition, the looking and responding strand unit provides opportunities to explore the work of artists in the classroom.

In drama, children within their 'pod' can participate in co-operating and communicating in making drama, enhancing interaction in small groups as well as providing opportunities for spontaneity. When considering the integration of drama, the strands of Oral Language/*Teanga ó Bhéal* in the Primary Language Curriculum/*Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* offer opportunities to explore the relationship between story, theme and life experience, and exploring and making drama.

Artistic responses to texts presented in language lessons can also provide a strong basis for expression, communication and exploration of topics.

4. Further advice and support for schools and teachers

4.1 Introduction

While it is expected that there will be a full re-opening of schools by September, schools will need to be ready for a situation where there may be a need to provide for pupils who cannot attend school for health reasons related to Covid-19, or a situation where a school may be faced with closure (in whole or in part) for a period during which the curriculum will need to be delivered remotely.

4.2 Supporting pupils at “very high risk” to COVID-19

There may be some pupils for whom return to school at the end of August/ early September may not be appropriate because the relevant public health guidelines indicate they are at “very high risk”. Overall responsibility for ensuring that such pupils receive appropriate support to engage adequately with learning remains with the school in which they are enrolled. Regular and ongoing communication between school and home will be essential to support the pupil’s engagement with their learning and their continuous connection with their classmates and school community.

Additional supports will be provided for these pupils from within the staffing resources of the school. It may also be possible to utilise support from teachers who are assessed as ‘very high risk’ and who are available to work from home. Schools will have discretion to manage and redistribute their support resources in order to best meet the learning needs of their pupils, including pupils at ‘very high risk’ to COVID-19.

Under the direction of the school principal the relevant support teacher should:

- Liaise with the relevant class teacher and Special Education Teacher (SET) where relevant regarding curricular content and classwork
- Access relevant learning resources including those produced by the class teacher as well as other externally produced resources such as those on *Scoilnet*
- Provide the pupil with individualised support for his/her learning; this may include devising of an individual support plan for the pupil in cooperation with the class teacher and, where relevant, the SET
- Increase the pupil’s autonomy, motivation and agency and wellbeing
- Improve the pupil’s capacity to become a self-directed learner
- Support the development of the pupil’s digital competence where necessary

- Avail of the communication / learning platform used by the pupil’s school to ensure ongoing contact between the pupil and his/her school and to facilitate some engagement with his/her class teacher and classmates.

4.3 Supporting teaching and learning in the home where there is localised full school closure

During the period of school closures the Department provided schools in the primary and special school sector and at post-primary level with a series of “[Continuity of Schooling Guidance](#)” documents to help education professionals and parents to support children learning in a remote environment. Those documents are listed below and are available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html>

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling for Primary and Post-primary Schools 02 April 2020

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting Pupils at Risk of Educational Disadvantage - for Primary Schools 22 April 2020

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Support Pupils with Special Educational Needs- for Primary Schools 22 April 2020

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling for Primary Schools 28 May 2020

The events surrounding COVID-19 and the public health restrictions which resulted in the emergency closure of schools to learners have highlighted the absolute necessity for schools to be agile in how they can provide for continuity of teaching and learning in the future. The continuity of teaching and learning during the emergency period was achieved with significant additional effort from all school staff working remotely to ensure pupils were supported during this time. Most schools put in place arrangements to communicate with pupils and parents, demonstrating innovation and resilience by providing flexible local responses.

As a contingency for any such reoccurrence of closures, whether localised or on a bigger scale, to ensure compliance with any public health restrictions, it is vital that schools are prepared. The Department is updating its *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents to support schools in responding in an agile way in the event of localised school closure. Specifically, schools will be provided with guidance and support to put in place arrangements to facilitate communication with and between staff, between staff and learners and to facilitate development of online approaches to remote and blended learning in the event that such is required.

In circumstances where there is clear public health advice from HSE Public Health that a school should close, schools will be supported to:

- Make best use of guidance materials which were already provided to all schools during the period of school closures and will be further updated to reflect learning during the emergency period
- Alert parents/guardians to where pupils are at in their learning
- Develop lesson activities to be carried out at home
- Contact parents regularly to offer support and feedback,
- Have a system in place to engage with pupils regularly
- Make best use of digital technologies to allow continued engagement with pupils and their learning.

4.4 Continuing professional development (CPD) and the Teacher Education Support Services

During the period of school closure, the Teacher Education Support Services continued to support schools, adapting their work programmes and introducing new supports required for teaching in a distance learning environment. The principles underpinning effective CPD provision will continue to inform the design and delivery of all elements of the support services' professional learning events over the new school year. Professional learning events will reflect the pedagogical environments in which teachers will be working from September, the restrictions that may need to be applied, for health reasons, regarding attendance at CPD events, and the need to minimise, insofar as possible, any disruption to class contact time over the coming school year.

The **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)** provides support to teachers and school leaders by offering professional learning opportunities in a range of pedagogical, curricular and leadership areas and in response to national priorities as determined by Government.

The **Centre for School Leadership (CSL)**, a partnership arrangement between the Department, the Irish Primary Principals Network and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, provides a continuum of professional development for school leaders with an initial focus on coaching, mentoring and the provision of a post-graduate programme for aspiring school leaders.

The **National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT)** supports the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), both primary and post-primary, into the teaching profession in Ireland.

There are 21 full-time **Education Centres** and 9 part-time Education Centres situated across the country. The network of education centres are essential partners in the provision of CPD and facilitate the delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development at a local level. The centres also play a significant role in responding to the local needs of schools and school staff.

4.4.1 Principles underpinning how TES Support Services will continue to support schools

- The need to **protect pupil teacher contact time** and to minimise disruption to school time
- The need to **reflect public health guidelines** and advice in any consideration of face-to-face CPD provision
- The need to provide **clear and consistent messages to the school system** across DE funded and other support services and agencies in order to avoid confusion and duplication of effort and to ensure that supports are provided in an efficient and effective way
- Continued **engagement with schools, principals, teachers and the education partners** to ensure that the Support Services are able to respond quickly to any emerging demands for support throughout 2020/21
- CPD to support SEN teaching and learning will continue to be designed and delivered in collaboration with the **NCSE support service**.

4.4.2 CPD for digital approaches to support the curriculum

PDST, CSL and NIPT continued to provide a range of supports to schools and school leaders during the school closure period. In preparation for the reopening of schools in September, the PDST Digital Technologies team has developed a suite of supports for teachers to support teaching, learning and assessment.

This builds on the CPD supports provided by the PDST and the other support services during the school closure period which include:

- A Distance Learning page for teachers and school leaders comprising a broad range of resources, courses, platform tutorials and good practice videos to support teaching, learning and assessment; available at: www.pdst.ie/distancelearning
- Direct CPD provision through live online programmes, webinars and individual school support
- Specific Support for school leaders including the most recently appointed principals through PDST leadership programmes Misneach , Forbairt and through facilitated Meitheal support groups Meitheal and Lónraí, and CSL programmes

- Resource bundles to support school leaders during closures, available at: <https://www.pdst.ie/primary/leadership/leadingcontinuity>
<https://www.pdst.ie/postprimary/leadership>
- Learning Paths for all primary subjects to facilitate teachers in planning and preparing lessons and remote instruction, available at: www.Scoilnet.ie
- Webwise supports for safe and ethical use of technologies were further developed and expanded in line with the changing environment
- PDST in conjunction with the Teaching Council broadcasted weekly live webinars as part of the *Learning4All Series* addressing a range of leadership, teaching, learning and assessment areas. See <https://pdst.ie/learningforallwebinars>
- A comprehensive list of materials for teaching through the medium of Irish is available on the COGG website at www.cogg.ie

Blended learning is an important component to enhance learning for pupils, integrating classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. This will only apply if the whole class of pupils is not at school all of the time. A blended learning approach requires careful planning and pedagogical consideration to ensure that both the face-to-face and online learning environments complement each other and optimise learning. Curriculum delivery through this pedagogical approach will facilitate supporting all learners even if in the context of remote learning. The PDST has developed resources on blended learning available at: <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning/DigTech/BlendedLearning>

4.4.3 Prioritising other CPD provision for 2020/21

Planned support programmes will be restructured on the basis of DE decisions which will alter the existing timeframe for planned curricular and other reforms.

While a significant portion of CPD provision is connected to curricular and other reforms, there continues to be a requirement for CPD on a range of issues on a recurring basis annually in schools. It is envisaged that schools will continue to need support in priority areas such as:

- Health and Wellbeing including Child Protection
- Leadership
- DEIS/Disadvantage
- Digital Technologies
 - Teacher technical competence
 - Using Digital Technologies in enhancing teaching, learning and assessment

- Leading teaching and learning in schools (for Principals and school leaders).

The Support Services will continue to liaise with other lead agencies and partners in these priority areas to ensure that support is made available in a targeted, efficient and responsive way. Support will be offered remotely through live online courses, webinars or through school visits in line with public health advice.

The Teacher Education Support Services, including PDST, will make contact with schools regarding its application system for individual school support services in the coming year.

4.5 The Inspectorate

The Inspectorate will also support schools and the education system as the return to school takes place. The specific activities included in the Inspectorate's work will be kept under review and will evolve in line with public health advice and the prevailing health circumstances.

The main focus of the Inspectorate's work in the first term of the 2020/2021 school year will be on its advisory work in schools. Through this work, inspectors will support school leaders, teachers, boards of management and school communities to provide effectively for the learning and progression of all children and young people – with a strong focus on the needs of vulnerable learners.

The Inspectorate will also engage in research work through which it will seek to identify and disseminate examples of effective practice where schools have been successful in addressing the needs of pupils whose schooling has been disrupted and the curricular and other challenges posed by the return to schooling. The research will seek to collect and use the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, parents and pupils to inform good practice throughout the school system.

The Inspectorate's advisory and research work will be conducted through school visits or remotely in line with public health advice.

Schools will also be offered the opportunity to participate in advisory sessions with inspectors. While the specific focus of each session will be determined by the school principal and senior management in line with the particular context of each school, possible themes for discussion could include areas such as ensuring that the wellbeing of the school community is supported; identifying the strengths in teaching and learning; or assessing and providing for the current needs of learners.

5. Pausing curricular development and reform

5.1 Introduction

Taking account of the loss of in-class time at the end of the 2019/2020 school year, the potential challenges facing schools at the outset of the new school year, and the workload of principals at this time, it is acknowledged that this is not a suitable time for significant curriculum change, particularly at the start of the new school year. In order to support schools in the practicalities of re-engaging with pupils and providing a curriculum suited to their needs at this time, it is planned to pause implementation of curricular reforms and provision of related continuing professional development (CPD).

5.2 Primary Curriculum Framework

A new **Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF)** is being developed and is currently subject to public consultation. The consultation period on the draft Primary Curriculum Framework was due to end in October 2020. Engagement with teachers, school leaders, parents and stakeholders is at the heart of this consultation. Due to the impact of COVID-related measures and the closure of schools the consultation on the draft Framework has been extended to December 2020 to facilitate further engagement. Following consultation, the Framework will be refined, finalised and approved for publication in summer 2021.

The individual specifications/curricula, with the exception of the Primary Maths Curriculum, will then be developed and are expected to be completed by 2025. In the meantime, the Department and its support services are considering the programme of CPD that will be required over the next few years to support implementation of the new Primary Curriculum. Further information on the draft Primary Curriculum Framework is available at: <https://ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/consultation-on-the-draft-primary-curriculum-framework>

5.3 Primary Mathematics Curriculum

Work continues on the development of the *Primary Maths Curriculum* and, while it is well advanced, in view of the impact of Covid-19, it is expected that public consultation will be deferred to the autumn of 2021. It is expected that the draft curriculum will be ready for publication by mid-2022 and that professional development to support its implementation may begin thereafter.

5.4 Primary Languages Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile

The *Primary Languages Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile* (PLC/CTB) for junior infants to sixth class was published in 2019. It is the first fully developed curriculum to be introduced since the Primary School Curriculum in 1999. A challenge that teachers are responding to is preparing to teach using two different styles of curriculum, a content objectives-based Primary School Curriculum (1999) and a learning outcomes-based PLC/CTB (2019). It is also worth noting that all future primary curriculum developments will feature learning outcomes. Guidance intended to support teachers and school leaders in **all school contexts**, by describing a renewed understanding of ‘preparation for teaching and learning’ for both the Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the PLC/CTB (2019) will issue early November 2020.

A comprehensive programme of support for the implementation of the PLC/CTB began in the 2019/20 school year, including a whole-staff seminar for all schools and two webinars which took place in January 2020 (PLC webinar 1) and May 2020 (PLC webinar 2) respectively. Sustained support for the **first cohort** of schools began but could not be continued once schools closed. In addition, many schools did not have the opportunity to engage in webinar 2.

In view of the school closures and the work that will be involved in re-engaging pupils, there will be no school closures in Term 1 of the 2020/21 school year. The programme of support that schools may avail of to embed the new style of curriculum will be as follows:

2020/21 school year

- A maximum of three half-day school closures for the **first cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model over Term 2 and 3, i.e., the three-year period of sustained support will restart in January 2021 for the first cohort of schools
- A half-day closure per webinar for **all** schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with webinar 2 in Term 2 and webinar 3 in Term 3, i.e., one half-day closure per webinar (led by schools themselves). Note: Webinars 1 and 2 are, and will remain available on the PDST website.

2021/22 school year

- A maximum of three half-day school closures for the **second cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model over the school year
- A half-day school closure per webinar for **all** schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with **each** webinar (up to a maximum of three webinars) as it becomes available; with webinars led by schools themselves.

2022/23 school year

- A maximum of three half-day school closures for the **final cohort** of schools involved in the sustained in-school support model over the school year.
- A half-day school closure per webinar for **all** schools to facilitate whole-staff engagement with **each** webinar (up to a maximum of three webinars) as it becomes available; with webinars led by schools themselves.

Schools will have the autonomy to plan their school closures as best suits their needs and context. For example, schools may decide to combine a half-day webinar closure (led by the schools themselves) with a half-day sustained support closure, resulting in one full-day's closure. However, it is not possible to combine two webinars in one full-day closure as the release of webinars will be staggered in response to emerging professional development needs.

5.5. Other Policies/Strategies

The NCCA is, at the Department's request, currently undertaking development work that will, in time, lead to the introduction of new curriculum components across both primary and post-primary levels. This development work will continue within the NCCA. This includes work on **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)** and on **Traveller history and culture**.

The **Education for Sustainable Development Strategy** expires at end 2020. It is planned to develop a new strategy to 2030 aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Climate Action Plan. The consultation process on the strategy will be deferred until Term 2 of the 2020/21 school year in view of COVID.

The **Literacy and Numeracy Strategy** expires at end 2020. Consultation on a new strategy will not begin before Term 3 of the 2020/21 school year.

The **STEM Education Implementation Plan** expired at end 2019. It is planned to defer consultation on a new plan until Term 2 of the 2020/21 school year.

2020/21 is the second last year of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme outlined in **The Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022**. Participating primary schools will continue to work towards gaining recognition as a Gaeltacht school.

END

