



**Irish National Teachers' Organisation**  
**Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann**

3 December 2020

An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D.  
Department of the Taoiseach,  
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A Thaoisigh,

As we approach the close of the current school term, I wish to remind you of your recent acknowledgement that school workers are "on the frontline" of the crisis stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In light of media reports concerning the imminent distribution of a Covid-19 vaccine to priority groups and that you have settled on a view of 'priority' groups, the INTO reassert our view that it is imperative that all frontline workers – including teachers and fellow education staff – are included among the essential workers prioritised for a vaccine.

The INTO unequivocally recognises that vulnerable people, the elderly and healthcare workers should be first in line for a Covid-19 vaccine. However, considering the Government and NPHET have expressed their view upon the move to Level 5 that schools should remain open as an essential service, it is only right that education staff are recognised as essential workers going forward.

At this stage, I do not feel it is necessary to further highlight the tireless work undertaken by INTO members in their effort to keep schools open safely and the inevitable challenges they will face in the coming months to ensure schools do not close in the new year following the move to Level 3 for the festive season.

Throughout a time of national crisis, the teachers of Ireland have responded to unprecedented challenges and uncertainty with determination and diligence. In your own words, "the fact that we have been able to open our schools and keep them open is because of the extraordinary efforts of our administrators, principals, teachers, Special Needs Assistants, parents, childcare providers, cleaners, caretakers, and entire school communities." Some other members of your cabinet expressed similar sentiments.

All workers in education, principals in particular, have gone above and beyond in their efforts to ensure that school gates were opened last August/September and that schools have remained open in a safe manner, however, we need the Government's support if this successful effort is to be maintained after the Christmas break. Education staff will be under even more pressure in the new year, if the move to Level 3 leads to an increase in Covid-19 case numbers.

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If we are to ensure that "we will not allow our children and young people's futures to be another victim of this disease", as is your stated ambition, it is necessary to recognise and prioritise school workers in order to keep schools open and maintain students' education.

Access to a Covid-19 vaccine would provide great reassurance to INTO members and all school workers that they can work safely without the stressful burden of uncertainty casting a shadow over their health. The provision of the vaccine to school staff would also give greater confidence to pupils and parents while they continue to support and benefit from the continuation of learning in our classrooms.

The INTO's call on Government to provide a free flu vaccine to all school workers was ignored. We sincerely hope that you do not ignore our justifiable demand that when the Covid-19 vaccine becomes available that all those who work in our schools be included among the frontline workers to be prioritised, taking account of the prior demands of certain other cohorts as specified above, for this vaccine. It is important that teachers hear their profession named when you talk about frontline workers and priority access to the Covid-19 vaccine.

While expressions of gratitude in recognition of teachers' status as being "on the frontline in this crisis" are appreciated, tangible medical support in the form of priority access to a Covid-19 vaccine is an absolute necessity.

Is mise, le meas,



John Boyle  
INTO General Secretary

cc

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar T.D.

Minister Eamon Ryan T.D.

Minister Paschal Donohoe T.D.

Minister Michael McGrath T.D.

Minister Catherine Martin T.D.

Minister Darragh O'Brien T.D.

Minister Simon Coveney T.D.

Minister Norma Foley T.D.

Minister Heather Humphreys T.D.

Minister Roderic O'Gorman T.D.

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Minister Stephen Donnelly T.D.

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Professor Brian MacCraith, High-Level taskforce on COVID-19 vaccination Chair