

## **NI FAQs**

Over the last week, INTO has responded to a number of COVID-19 related queries from our members. The FAQs in this document are based on information available to INTO as of today. Members should bear in mind that this is a fast-changing situation. We will update these FAQs as further information becomes available.

### **WORK and ATTENDANCE**

#### **My school is closed but do I still have to report to work?**

INTO have issued advice on the website which is constantly being updated as the Covid-19 information is disseminated. Teachers should not report for work on Monday 23rd March 2020 if they:

- Have underlying health conditions.
- Support/care for someone with underlying health conditions
- Are pregnant
- Live with someone who is pregnant
- Have children under school age with no available childcare
- Have children of school age up to Year 10 with no safe alternative childcare arrangement should be allowed by school to work from home.

Members should check the website for the latest INTO advice.

[https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/202003\\_22\\_INTO-Advice-and-guidance-to-all-members-on-attendance-at-school-during-the-COVID-NOD-draft-6.pdf](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/202003_22_INTO-Advice-and-guidance-to-all-members-on-attendance-at-school-during-the-COVID-NOD-draft-6.pdf)

#### **As a principal what should I do?**

The Department has recommended that principals survey their parents and staff so that they can estimate both pupil and staff numbers for Monday

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.

INTO advises principal members to complete the survey and return it to the Department of Education.

Members are advised to:

[i] make full use of the comments boxes to communicate the reasoning behind their responses to the Department;

[ii] make it clear they will in conjunction with their Boards of Governors keep matters under daily review;

[iii] not make commitments beyond tomorrow.

It is vital that the information the Department is seeking is provided as it will be essential in supporting the unions efforts to have the Department revisit their strategy of using schools and teachers to facilitate day care for essential workers.”

Parents should be reminded that there is no requirement for children of Key Workers to be minded at schools, and that this facility should only be used where all other options in relation to childcare have been exhausted. it is imperative that the number of staff and pupils presenting themselves to schools during this period is kept to a minimum.

Follow the link to get the latest information for members Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020.

[https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020\\_03\\_22\\_INTO\\_Advice.pdf](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020_03_22_INTO_Advice.pdf)

## **Can teachers be asked to work in different schools?**

Yes, this will be a distinct possibility if there are not sufficient numbers of staff available. If this is the case, then employing authorities will investigate the possibility of using staff from different schools.

## **If I have to go to school, can I bring my own children**

## **with me?**

Yes, you may bring your own children to school with you.

## **Will I be expected to teach as normal?**

No, teachers will not be expected to teach as normal. Pupils should simply be involved in meaningful educational activities.

## **How long will the day last?**

Schools will open for the normal school hours during these exceptional school opening days.

## **What is the maximum number of children I should teach?**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> March, the education minister, Peter Weir wrote to principals to advise that the maximum number of children should be limited to 33. INTO believes that this number is much too big if schools are going to practise social distancing and therefore advise principals to populate classes with numbers that ensures everyone's safety.

## **If the cleaning and caretaking staff are not at school, should the principal close the school?**

In circumstance where a school is unable to meet the normal cleanliness and hygiene standards of a school then INTO would expect the principal to close the school until such times as the normal cleanliness and hygiene standards are met.

## **My principal insists that I should be coming to work even though I have explained that I am unwell. What should I do?**

If you are unwell you should not be going to work. You should let your school know by following the normal procedure. If you have symptoms associated with COVID-19 you should follow the Public Health Agency advice and self-isolate.

## **If I have to go to school, can I bring my own children with me?**

Yes, you may bring your own children to school with you but you would need to inform the Principal. A principal may request the teacher does not come to school with their children if it increases the numbers and risks in their school.

## **My child/children are under school age and would generally be minded by their grandparents, who can no longer look after them as they are identified in the vulnerable adult category, do I have to bring them to work?**

Members must assess their personal risk and inform their principal where they believe they should not present to school in the interest of their own health and their families and in the interest of the public good.

To this end INTO has already published guidance to members regarding their attendance in school during this unprecedented period, [https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/202003\\_22\\_INTO-Advice-and-guidance-to-all-members-on-attendance-at-school-during-the-COVID-NOD-draft-6.pdf](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/202003_22_INTO-Advice-and-guidance-to-all-members-on-attendance-at-school-during-the-COVID-NOD-draft-6.pdf)

## **What is the maximum number of children I should teach?**

INTO believes that schools should follow the PHA advice on social distancing and therefore advise principals to populate classes with MINIMUM numbers that ensures everyone's safety.

## **SICK LEAVE**

### **I was on sick leave when the schools closed. What should I do now?**

If you are still unfit for work, you should continue to provide sick lines to your school.

Paid sick leave will continue in line with the provisions already in place.

If you recover, you should indicate to your school/ principal that you are now fit for work, and you should follow the current Covid-19 advice for attending school. If you have been absent for a short-term illness, on a medical certificate ending during the current closure, the school/ principal will follow the dates of the certificate and can end the sick leave during the closure.

If you have been absent for a longer period – 4 weeks or more – you need to give a week's notice to your principal of your intention to return to work. If you have been referred to Occupational Health, an appointment should be arranged by telephone. The procedures for return to work on the back of the OH report will apply as previously although again a return to work meeting should be facilitated by telephone.

In summary, sick leave should be treated as if the school was in operation.

## **A member of my staff is on sick leave – what should I do as principal?**

Schools/ principals should continue to record and amend absences during the current closure, and the administrative aspect of sick leave will be managed as it would be if schools were open.

Sick leave should continue to be recorded, and substitute teachers who have been employed to cover the absences will remain in receipt of salary, for the duration of the medical certificate provided by a teacher.

Where a teacher is absent for a short-term illness, on a medical certificate ending during the current closure, you should follow the dates of the certificate and end the sick leave during the closure.

If a teacher has been absent for a longer period – more than 4 weeks – they must give a week's notice of their intention to return to work. If the teacher has been referred to Occupational Health, the principal/Board of Governors must consider the OH recommendations in facilitating the teacher's return to work provided they have been certified as fit to work in order for the school/principal to end the period of sick leave. Any meetings should be arranged taking cognisance of the current Covid-19 advice.

In summary, sick leave should be treated as if the school was in operation.

## **LEAVE**

### **I am on unpaid leave at present Can I change my leave to be paid during the closure?**

You can only change your unpaid leave if you are either, fit to return to work or if your period of unpaid leave was granted by the Board of Governors. An early return from unpaid leave would have to be agreed by them in the same way as if the school was open.

Where a substitute was scheduled to work in the period of the school

closure, then the school should continue to engage that substitute for the absence. The substitute will be paid for that scheduled absence.

### **I have applied for unpaid leave starting after Easter. Can I withdraw my application for leave?**

Any changes to unpaid leave will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors. Board of Governors should take into account whether or not they have engaged a substitute teacher to cover a leave absence, in considering such requests.

Boards of Governors may take into account that teacher's personal circumstances may have changed since the application for leave was made and may wish to accommodate requests on that basis.

### **I am meant to be returning from maternity leave during Covid-19 crisis. What should I do?**

It is assumed that a teacher will return to work on the date specified on TR160, as confirmed by the Department of Education, and no further notification of return to work is required.

However, a teacher who wishes to return to work before or after the specified date, whether from ordinary or additional maternity leave, must give 28 days' notice of the date on which she wishes to return to work.

## **SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS**

### **I am a substitute teacher who was scheduled to work during the closure. What should I do?**

Even though schools will be closed to pupils, they will remain open for staff so that they can access resource materials and make arrangements

for remote learning as appropriate, to facilitate provision for vulnerable children and those of key workers, and be available to carry out other duties that principals may require of them.

All employees will receive normal pay across the range of circumstances that we are facing whether they remain in the workplace, are working from home or are unable to carry on working due to circumstances beyond their control. Substitute teachers will also receive their normal pay for the period of time that they have been engaged to work.

This includes any engagements currently registered on the NISTR system AND any engagements which have been verbally agreed between the school and the substitute teacher.

## **I am a substitute teacher who was not scheduled to work during the closure. What should I do?**

Substitute teachers will also receive their normal pay for the period of time that they have been engaged to work. As schools are remaining open for staff to facilitate the childcare provision for key workers, substitute teachers may still be employed by schools.

The Northern Ireland Teachers Council (NITC) has sent a letter on behalf of substitute teachers to Education Minister Peter Weir to request the establishment of a hardship fund for the substitute teaching workforce who no longer have access to secure work.

[https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020\\_03\\_19\\_NITCLetterReSubs.pdf](https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020_03_19_NITCLetterReSubs.pdf)