

INTO Advice and guidance to all members on attendance at school during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to a large volume of communications from members relating to concerns around safe attendance at work and their own childcare arrangements during this unprecedented period INTO offers the following guidance and advice.

INTO believes that, for schools to be able to effectively and safely support the full list of key workers in schools and for social distancing to be effective in minimizing the risks of the spread of COVID-19 in these settings, it is imperative that the **minimum number of staff and pupils present themselves to schools during this period**. Everyone in the vulnerable category should be social distancing and avoiding gatherings. This would apply to the majority of the vulnerable children identified by the Minister. It has been a huge error of judgement for him to expand this category due to the increased risk to the health of the child. Therefore, school leaders should keep this in mind at all times when making arrangements to facilitate the safe running of schools at this time.

Circumstances are changing on an almost hourly basis. INTO will endeavour to update members as regularly and as accurately as possible throughout.

In relation to the request for all teachers, along with non-teaching colleagues, to present for work on Monday the 23rd March 2020 and subsequently provide 'supervised learning' for children of key workers, INTO advises the following:

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.

In the first instance members are advised to refer to the updated government guidelines on social distancing:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Further to this INTO advises members that they should inform their Principal (or, if you are a Principal member, your Board of Governors) that they cannot present to school in the following instances:

- A teacher who has underlying health conditions should work from home (in line with Government guidance this includes but is not exclusive to anyone who is invited by their surgery to have a flu vaccine or any adult over the age of 70) Members should phone their GP or 111 if they are unsure and follow the advice given.
- Teachers who are pregnant should work from home.
- Teachers who live with someone who is pregnant should work from home.
- Teachers who support/care for someone with an underlying health conditions should work from home.

- Teachers who have children who have not yet reached school age and have no available childcare must not bring those children to school with them and should work from home.
- Teachers who have children of school age up to the end of Year 10 and who cannot arrange safe alternative childcare arrangements should, contrary to the advice from the Department, advise their Principal (or Chair of Governors in the case of a Principal members) that, unless their presence is absolutely essential to the safe operation of the 'supervised learning' in their place of work, that their school should allow them to work from home.
- Other than the exceptions laid out in the 'Guidance on Absence Relating to Coronavirus' https://www.into.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/2020_03_11_GUIDANCE-ON-ABSENCE-RELATING-TO-CORONAVIRUS-FINAL-VERSION.pdf issued by DENI, the agreed attendance procedures for teachers still apply <https://www.into.ie/ni/help-advice/procedures-policies/teacher-attendance-procedure/>. Therefore, once you have advised your school that you are available to work in school or work from home, or that you are unable to work due to COVID-19 or another reason related to ill health, you have no further need to update the school unless your circumstances change in any way. If you are off sick you should continue to report extensions to your sickness absence to the Principal, or if you are a Principal, to the Board of Governors, by supplying a sick line from your GP, where and when available. Principals, in their response to the daily Department of Education Survey, should assume the status of staff remains unchanged unless it has been indicated otherwise since the previous days survey response.

Members who identify with any of these needs must follow scientific and medical advice to minimise social contact and work from home. These members will enjoy the full support of the INTO. There may be other circumstances, not yet identified in this guidance or elsewhere that may result in a teacher feeling unable to report for work and members should contact INTO for further advice in these situations by email to info@into.ie

In the event of a confirmed case within the school community, INTO advises that the Principal contact the employing authority to seek instruction. INTO advises that where this is the case, schools close immediately while the instructions are awaited.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of social distancing and reduce risk to staff and pupils in schools, INTO offers the following advice:

- Contrary to departmental advice, a pupil showing symptoms of illness and awaiting collection, should not be left unattended.
- Contrary to the Ministers advice INTO envisages the utilisation of care provision in schools only where children with BOTH parents working as key workers, are working at the same time and have no alternative safe childcare arrangements in place. It is noted Departmental guidance states: *'the most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 is clear. If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading. That is why the Executive has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.'*

- In single parent families, the main carer must be a key worker if they wish their child to attend school. This is to try and limit the number of children and adults together in a small space in line with recent social distancing guidance.
- Alternative childcare arrangements should be sought before deciding to send a child to school, for example, with other family members, friends etc.
- Schools will largely be performing childcare duties as many teachers are currently working from home to provide remote learning opportunities for larger numbers of pupils.