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To TUS

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Dear Sir/Madam,

LAUNCH OF THE “ENGAGE PROGRAMME” TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS THEY RETURN TO SCHOOL

I am writing to inform you of the launch of the “Engage” programme, which the Minister will announce today. Many of you have contributed to the development of the programme over the past few months and I am grateful for your ongoing support as we seek to help children and young people make a successful return to school.

The wellbeing of children and young people remains a primary concern and as routines within school are being established, taking into account the changing nature of the Covid-19 landscape, this important programme will provide an extra level of support to schools to manage pupil’s learning as they begin their educational journey again this autumn.

The Engage programme forms part of range of projects the Minister recommended to the NI Executive to support learning for key groups of children over the summer and as they start the new academic year. The projects include:

- Summer school support, providing financial support to any primary school which wished to voluntarily run a short summer school this year;
- Virtual classroom / distance learning, supported by funding access to commercially available resources to support numeracy and literacy for all Year 6 pupils entering Year 7 in 2020/21; and
- The “Engage” Programme which has been designed to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on educational standards by supporting pupils’ learning and engagement on their return to school

through provision of high quality one to one, small group or team teaching support in every school in Northern Ireland.

Progress to date

Summer activity programmes have gone well with 48 primary schools out of 50 who expressed an interest having taken up the offer of a Summer School during July / August. A formal review of the Summer Schools programme will be produced in the coming months. Approximately 210 primary schools having currently availed of the offer of virtual learning software in literacy and numeracy for pupils entering Year 7 in 2020/21 academic year. We would expect this number to grow as schools / pupils settle into the new academic year. An Irish Medium equivalent has been identified and will be made available to Irish Medium schools in the coming weeks.

The Engage Programme

The aim of the programme is “to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on educational standards by supporting pupils’ learning and engagement on their return to school through provision of high quality one to one, small group or team teaching support in every school in Northern Ireland”.

All primary and post primary schools in Northern Ireland will receive funding (to varying levels) through the Engage programme to provide additional teaching resources.

Through the Engage programme, qualified teachers will provide child centred one to one, small group or team teaching support within school to those pupils identified by schools as most benefiting from additional support following the Covid-19 period of lockdown. In some schools, the one-to-one, small group and team teaching could provide opportunities to further embed a whole school approach to nurture and provide pupils with a learning experience to develop social, emotional and behavioural skills and encourage success at school and with peers. It will also help develop pupils’ resilience and capacity to respond more confidently to challenges and support the positive promotion of the health and well-being of pupils.

Fundamentally, it is for schools to decide how to best utilise Engage programme funding within the aim and objectives of the programme in order to maximise positive outcomes for those children and young people with the greatest need, and to tailor associated provision accordingly.

Consequently, circa 400 schools with approximately average levels of Free School Meal entitlement (a minimum of 28% of pupils) or higher will, dependent on the number of pupils, be provided with funding to support either 0.2, 0.5, one or two additional teachers during the 2020/21 academic year providing over 300 additional teachers across the system.

Table 1 – Schools with free school meal entitlement of 28% or higher

Enrolment Band	Funding Allocation (2020/21 financial year)	Number of Primary Schools	Number of Post- Primary Schools
0-85	£5,090	47	1
86-200	£12,724	94	4
201-1000	£25,448	159	80
>1000	£50,896	0	12
Total		300	97

School closures and COVID-19 have affected the whole community. In recognition of this context, all other primary and post-primary schools, with Free School Meal Entitlement below 28%, will also receive funding to provide (depending on their size) 30, 45 or 60 substitute days during the 2020/21 school year in order to deliver a programme to support pupils to engage with learning.

Table 2 – Schools with free school meal entitlement below 28%

Enrolment Band	Funding Allocation (2020/21 financial year)	Number of days equivalent sub cover days (2020/21 financial year)	Number of Primary Schools	Number of Post- Primary Schools
0-200	£3,600	20	300	3
201-500	£5,400	30	160	9
>501	£8,100	45	32	84
Total			492	96

In this way, the Programme is both targeted at those schools with concentrations of disadvantage but also provides universal support across all primary and post-primary schools.

Financial Implications

The total cost of the Summer Schools, Virtual Learning projects and the Engage Programme will be £12m for the 2020/21 financial year. In due course, the Minister will seek the Executive's agreement to additional funding of £4.8 million in order to provide the Engage Programme throughout the 2020/21 academic year. Total cost for the programme is therefore, estimated to be £16.8m; and this is subject to the necessary approvals but we are hopeful that this will be secured.

Detailed guidance together with allocations for each school will be published on-line today. I hope you will join with me in making this investment a success and in welcoming our children and young people back to school to maximise every opportunity that awaits them.

Yours faithfully

A Chambers.

ALISON CHAMBERS