

# TEACHERS' SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE COMMITTEE (SCHOOLS) MANAGEMENT SIDE

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SENT VIA EMAIL – [G.Murphy@into.ie](mailto:G.Murphy@into.ie)

Mr Gerry Murphy  
Northern Secretary  
INTO  
Vere Foster House  
23-24 College Gardens  
Belfast  
BT9 6BS

1<sup>st</sup> October 2020

Dear Gerry

Thank you for your letter dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020. Given the range of issues raised in your letter, it has taken some time to provide this response which I apologise for but trust that our dialogue with Trade Unions has been and continues to be ongoing as we continue to work together to respond to the current challenges arising from the pandemic.

In the first instance, I acknowledge the incredible challenges faced by our school leaders, teachers and the wider education workforce who have worked tirelessly and selflessly to ensure the reopening of schools in recent weeks in addition to providing continuity of learning for our all children and young people from the time of the initial lockdown restrictions.

The complexities that have arisen as a result of the pandemic for the education sector are, and will continue to be manifold. The health and wellbeing and safety of both staff and pupils is always absolutely paramount and, following the reopening of schools, it is incumbent on us, the employers, working with our Departmental colleagues, to ensure that there is appropriate, tangible and accessible support available to our school principals as together we navigate our way through the weeks and months ahead.

You have raised a number of key issues in your correspondence I will address the points below:

1. We have received feedback from school leaders and are aware of the issues relating to email communications. We have listened to that feedback and are committed to working to improve communications processes for schools. Our immediate priority is to ensure that clear, accurate, and timely communications are issued to school leaders and we continue to work

towards implementing new communications processes that will better support our school leaders.

2. On the issues of staff resourcing, we will continue to work with school leaders and trade union colleagues to better understand the staffing pressures presently faced by schools as a result of the impact of Covid-19 and actively seek ways to address the same. The weekly school attendance survey continues to provide valuable data to assist in this process. You will be aware of the significant work that has been carried out over the summer months to establish a “live pool” of almost 9000 substitute teachers for schools to access via NISTR. Almost 2000 inactive accounts have now been removed and new registrations added including 500 NQTs.

We are continually looking at ways to ensure that staffing levels can be maintained as far as possible and to that end, there has been a recruitment drive for relief staff for key support roles. I note your suggestion for a “bank” system to be established for Classroom Assistants and I can confirm work is commencing to examine the need and feasibility of this proposal and consideration of alternative options also.

3. As a response to the increasingly challenging circumstances principals have been leading in, the EA has developed a bespoke package of support for school leaders to support their well-being and their capacity to manage the wellbeing needs of their school community. The package of support includes:
  - The extension of the pilot coaching programme for principals. All principals now have an opportunity to benefit from this 12-18 month programme of specialist coaching support;
  - A series of ‘Flourishing Schools’ trauma informed practice webinars which have been provided in partnership with SBNI for Early Years, Special and Primary School principals. Post-primary schools have been invited to engage in the Flourishing Schools webinars at the end of September;
  - Supporting Resilient Leaders webinars which have been delivered to school principals, facilitated by leading psychologist Shane Martin;
  - A CYPS Multi-disciplinary Wellbeing Helpline which has been operational from 1 September 2020;
  - An EA Wellbeing Portal which has been live from 17 August 2020; and
  - A successful Covid-19 bid for funding to support wellbeing and nurturing approaches which will be allocated directly to schools

Also, the EA’s Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2019-22 was formally launched in January 2020 and is dedicated to demonstrating the commitment to the overall Health and Wellbeing of all, including school leaders, managers and staff. The Strategy focuses on physical health; mental, social, psychological and emotional health.

In addition and as part of the Restart, a HealthWell programme of events has been produced to support staff Health & Wellbeing during the first three months of Education Restart. This wide ranging programme includes a number of webinars to support school leaders in their role.

4. You have raised the need for urgency regarding outstanding repairs on schools and I can confirm that since the easing of the original lockdown period

and the associated re-opening of the construction sector, the EA has carried out significant programmes of both minor capital works and maintenance works in preparation for education restart. These programmes have invested multi-millions of pounds in infrastructure improvement projects, including targeting the maintenance backlog; providing adaptations for pupil-specific needs; increasing capacity in response to temporary variations and development proposals; and tackling health, safety and welfare issues that have arisen due to Covid-19. Furthermore, the EA will continue to invest in both minor capital works and maintenance works throughout the financial year, with a significant programmes already being in place.

5. On the matters raised regarding continuation of development for online learning to support blended learning and possible school closures, I would like to assure you that Standards and Learning has been a key focus within Education Restart. The pandemic has impacted on normal education patterns in many ways. Advice and support is being provided to schools in this area on a daily basis. A range of guidance materials have been developed to support schools. This includes real-life case studies to share with schools how others have managed in the current environment and opportunities for professional learning opportunities e.g. through webinars. A one stop shop of all materials will go live this week available to schools via C2K.

Whilst 'Education Restart' is underway the impact of COVID-19 on schools, youth services and educational settings for staff, children and young people is increasing. We need to further review and modify our approach, in order to continue to provide support and deliver essential services at this time. Pupils' safe return to school, and supporting schools to remain open is the number one priority. It is therefore imperative that we move ahead at pace to identify and overcome barriers to ensuring we prioritise this work.

I trust the above goes some way to demonstrate our commitment to supporting our school leaders at this most unprecedented and challenging time. This will be a year like no other and as you have previously suggested perhaps even more difficult than the challenges of the academic year just past. Delivering learning in the safest way possible must be the priority for all of us.

Yours sincerely,



**Sara Long**  
Chair, TNC Management Side

**cc Gerry Campbell**  
**cc Mark Bailey**