



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Guidance on the 2021 Summer Programme

For Mainstream Primary and Special Schools

May 2021

Introduction

This guidance from the Department of Education provides a framework for a summer programme in mainstream primary schools and special schools to support children with special educational needs (SEN) and those most at risk of educational disadvantage. The 2021 Summer Programme is provided in the context of school closures associated with COVID-19 and it is an expanded provision compared to the 2020 Summer Programme and the July Provision programme which had been offered in previous years.

Teaching and learning were disrupted for all children over the course of two school years in 2020 and 2021. To address some of these issues, the Department is offering the following expanded school-based summer programmes for a range of children in mainstream primary schools, special classes and special schools:

- A school-based summer programme available to all mainstream primary schools for children and young people with complex needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage
- A school-based summer programme for special schools and for pupils attending special classes in mainstream primary schools.

This guidance note provides school staff delivering the school-based summer programme as outlined above, with a general instructional framework to help them to design a programme suitable to the children's needs.¹ It affords school staff the autonomy and flexibility to modify the programme to suit the particular school context. Where the school-based summer programme is not available locally, parents may access a home-based programme instead for their children.

The enhanced summer programme for 2021 is designed to address the needs of the children who are most likely to have experienced discontinuity in their education due to the periods of remote teaching and learning. While almost all of these children will have been fully back at school for the final term of the 2020/21 school year, the summer programme will provide them with an opportunity to experience school life in a very supportive way due to the deliberate emphasis on positive learning experiences.

The desired outcomes of the summer programme for the learners are that they will maintain or experience an enhanced sense of connection with the school, a better sense of their own wellbeing and increased confidence to continue with their education.

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- ¹ DEIS primary schools may also offer literacy and numeracy camps. Separate guidance is available for this programme and this is available [here](#)

Key Themes of the Guidance Document

- Programme content
- Use of technology to support engagement
- Learning to learn
- The role of principals, teachers and SNAs
- Pupil voice

Rationale for Providing a Summer Programme

Children and young people with complex needs and those most at risk of educational disadvantage have experienced the impact of school closures and the cessation of education supports in a very significant way. This impact is likely to be further compounded by the learning loss that typically occurs for them during the school summer holiday, and which is a cause of concern for parents and families. The two periods of remote teaching and learning presented a particular challenge for children and young people with complex needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage for the following reasons:

- The distance learning model is difficult to adapt to take account of individual needs
- Many with complex needs have limited capacity to engage effectively with learning in a remote teaching environment
- The loss of school routines and relationships with peers, teachers and SNAs is experienced acutely by some
- The availability of equipment, resources and quality of internet connectivity present challenges for home learning
- Families and parents have experienced challenges and uncertainty regarding continuity of education, transitions into new educational settings and reconnection to school.

Aims of the Summer Programme

The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance document are intended to assist teachers in providing a school-based programme to support children and young people to:

- Consolidate relationships with their schools, their teachers and their peers
- Build upon their existing learning, their readiness for learning and, to the extent that is possible, reduce regression in learning
- Develop resilience and experience of wellbeing by promoting a sense of safety, calm, connectedness, self-efficacy, and hope

- Develop skills and routines to ensure they successfully transition into the next stage of their schooling.

Who Should Be Invited to Take Part in the School-based Programme?

All children and young people attending special schools or special classes are eligible to participate in their school's summer programme, where this is running. In these settings, the summer programme will run for between **two and four** weeks during July or August. Where the school decides not to operate the programme, these children and young people may avail of the home-based programme instead.

In mainstream schools without special classes, the school-based programme will operate over **two weeks** during July or August with pupils being supported in groups of up to twelve children. In deciding eligibility for the programme, first priority should be given to pupils with complex special educational needs in mainstream classes with remaining places on the programme being offered to those at most risk of educational disadvantage.

Teachers should consider the needs of the following groups and prioritise places for those with the greatest needs. The following table may be useful to schools in establishing priorities:

Area of concern	Level of concern				
	Low		High		
	1	2	3	4	5
Children with complex special educational needs					
Children most at risk of educational disadvantage					

These areas of concern can be further broken down using the selection criteria identified in the operational guidance document. These criteria are available [here](#).

Programme Content

In line with the aims of the programme, the following guidance is provided to help teachers prioritise key learning needs while supporting wellbeing as children and young people start their journey toward re-engagement with learning and with school.

Promoting a sense of SAFETY

Some children and young people may have been worried about re-engaging with learning activities and returning to school after two periods of remote learning. Promoting a sense of safety helps them believe that their needs will be met now and in the future and that they are protected from harm.

The following can help promote a sense of safety:

- 'Slow down to catch up' – It is important not to rush too quickly into a focus on academic learning and 'catching up' before first re-establishing safety and calmness, thus ensuring readiness to learn
- It is recommended beginning with low level learning activities and revision before progressively introducing new materials
- There should be a focus on consolidating familiar routines in relation to school attendance and engaging in learning activities to facilitate a sense of safety for the child or young person. It will be important to explicitly practise routines via clear and reassuring instruction
- Teaching, modelling and consolidating the guidelines and norms which apply in the school context based on current COVID-19 related public health advice (e.g. hand washing, coughing / sneezing etiquette etc.) will continue to be important.

Promoting a sense of CALM

Some children and young people may have experienced a heightened sense of anxiety about re-engaging with school. Acknowledging and addressing this anxiety will help support them to re-engage with learning and to experience continuity in their education.

The following can help promote a sense of calm:

- Children and young people should be given opportunities to communicate or share their understanding and experience of school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic in a safe and supportive way. These opportunities can be provided individually, in circle time or in small-group sessions. Activities like art may also support them in sharing their experiences and telling their stories.
- Children and young people's responses to school closures and other stressful events are unique and varied. Some may verbalise their concerns, others may withdraw or present with challenging behaviours. It is important to recognise and acknowledge that a wide variety of reactions can be expected and these are normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Consider ways to create a calm environment in the classroom using, for example, lighting, music, objects such as blankets, cushions, sensory toys etc.
- Create safe spaces in and outside of the classroom to help children regulate, for example, calm corners, tents, relaxation spaces, sensory rooms etc.
- The opportunity to engage in quiet rhythmic activities like walking, or yoga can be calming for some children and young people.

Promoting a sense of SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Promoting social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships

with teachers and peers provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.

The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:

- Teachers and SNAs should take the time to re-engage and build good relationships with children and young people by warmly welcoming them to school for the programme, listening to them and letting them know they are there to support them.
- Creating opportunities for children and young people to engage with creative, fun, high preference activities along with teachers and SNAs and other children and young people will be an essential aspect of the 2021 summer programme. Important social and life skills can be targeted as part of same.

Promoting a sense of EFFICACY in SELF and COMMUNITY

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that the school community you belong to can do what it needs to do to thrive and take care of its members.

The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

- Learning activities should be tailored to needs, linked to interests, underpinned by teaching strategies that take account of learning styles and individual needs and allow children and young people to experience success. Positive feedback, encouragement and affirmation will enhance their sense of self efficacy. This supports wellbeing, and enhances connectedness with learning and the school.
- Building on children's strengths, providing choice and including their preferences when planning activities.
- Teaching strategies to regulate emotions and manage anxiety will help children and young people to cope with any worries and anxieties that they may feel about the return to school. The emphasis here will be dependent on individual needs and based on experiences during absences from school. Work to support children and young people in regulating emotion and managing with anxiety should build on and complement previous work to support them as detailed in their school support plan².
- Developing a sense of community by enabling children and young people to take an active role in the class by including them in planning and delivering enjoyable group activities (e.g. Art, Drama, PE).

² [NEPS advice and resources for keeping children and young people well during Covid-19](#)

Promoting a sense of HOPE

A sense of hope is related to fostering resilience and the expectation that things will work out for children and young people in the school community. The following can help promote a sense of hope:

- Teachers should reassure children and young people with calming, hopeful messages about what the school, teachers and others are doing to make the school community a safe and happy place.
- Positive reflection on things that children and young people participated in and enjoyed during school closures, their return to school and enjoyable activities during the summer programme itself should be encouraged. Talking about these examples of resilience can be healing and reassuring.
- Children and young people's participation in the summer programme will involve structured, predictable separation from parents/carers and will help to prepare them for their transitions in September. Supportive engagement with routines with an emphasis on fun, high-preference learning activities can help shift the focus away from any feelings of distress and allow children and young people to enjoy the present moment and look forward with optimism.

Teachers should adopt a flexible and child-centred approach when planning a programme for participating children and young people. Therefore, it is paramount that the programme planning builds on the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each participating child by collaborating with parents and enabling the voice of the child.

Where children and young people are transitioning to a new educational setting, support for the transition should be a specific focus within the summer programme support plan.

Use of technology to support engagement

Some children and young people with complex needs may use assistive technologies and devices such as alternate keyboards, voice recognition software, monitor magnification software and text to speech options, to maintain, or assist them with learning, communicating and interacting. When engaging with children and young people around the summer programme, assistive technologies and devices may assist children and young people with SEN by:

- Supporting learning (e.g. using a laptop to research, use spellcheck, text reading or speech recognition software, provide practice and consolidation opportunities)
- Supporting transitions to post-primary settings (e.g. calendars, schedules, alarms, organisational apps)
- Supporting communication (e.g. various software, messaging apps)
- Increasing social opportunities (e.g. social media apps)
- Reducing stress (e.g. music players, calming apps)

- Supporting recreational interests (e.g. researching areas of individual interest)

Learning to Learn

In order to support children and young people who may have experienced interruptions to the continuity of their learning due to the periods of remote teaching and learning, it will be very important for teachers to focus on skills associated with learning to learn.

Suggestions for supporting children and young people with additional needs or those most at risk of educational disadvantage during the Summer Programme include:

- Working to consolidate school routines that help children and young people to succeed in daily school life and practise the hygiene and safety routines that exist in schools as a result of COVID-19
- Building upon social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context.
- Focusing on developing effective task and organisational skills
- Reinforcing communication skills and approaches to ensure that children and young people can indicate choices and give their opinions
- Reflecting on past successes (particularly those documented in the student support files) and how these were achieved to help children and young people to become more aware of their existing good strategies
- Modelling the use of metacognitive strategies by providing children with opportunities to talk about how they are learning, what helps them learn best and give them opportunities to present learning in a variety of ways.

Teacher professional learning and resources for the Summer Programme will be provided by the NCSE. Details of this will be published at www.ncse.ie

Assessment of Children's Needs

A pre-programme survey should be issued to children and their parents/guardians to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported. In some cases, children or young people with significant additional needs may need other ways of expressing their interests, strengths and learning needs. This should enable teachers to individualise support by devising a summer programme Support Plan. Consideration should be given to including key aspects of literacy and numeracy into the plan together with supports for social development and enjoyable activities across various other areas of the curriculum. The challenge and pitch of the plan should be realistically achievable within the short timeframe of the programme.

At the end of the programme parents/guardians should be provided with an overview of their child's progress and a record of their learning. The school should also retain this record of learning and ensure that it is used to inform approaches for the child or young person in September 2021. Where a child or young person is transferring to a different

school, this information should be retained by the parents/guardians and provided to their class teacher/year head when the transfer occurs. This will help inform future educational planning for the 2021/22 academic year.

Teaching Approaches

When devising the programme, effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting children and young people to achieve and to experience success.

Guidelines for effective teaching approaches:

- Use visual structured teaching approaches, including schedules to help understanding of the structure and sequence of the day
- Focus on play and activity based learning
- Clearly identify of the needs of the children or young people
- Provide clear learning intentions and time for reflection on learning
- Scaffold the development of knowledge and skills
- Let children and young people know that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake but it is a fundamental step in the process of effective learning
- Ask open questions
- Provide wait time for thinking and answering questions
- Use graphic organisers and mind maps
- Use technology wherever possible and appropriate
- Provide opportunities for the child or young person to work collaboratively with peers in the digital setting
- Promote opportunities to engage in autonomous learning
- Provide regular feedback to encourage the child or young person
- Use quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and make learning fun
- Provide opportunities to consolidate and reflect on learning

The Role of the Overseer

Where the summer programme is provided in the school, the role of the overseer in ensuring successful outcomes for participants is paramount. The overseer must be a principal, deputy principal or permanent qualified teacher, employed in and by the participating school. Only one person should be employed to fill this position for the duration of the programme. At the end of the programme, the overseer should ensure that summary information on the child's progress is retained in the school to help with the continuity of learning in September. In addition, the principal of the school should

ensure that optimal use is made of available supports to enhance children's learning and that key learning priorities are established for each child or young person

The Role of the Teachers

Ideally, schools offering the summer programme will be assisted by the voluntary participation of teachers who are familiar with the needs of the children or young people attending. Where teachers have this familiarity it will be easier for them to establish learning priorities aligned to existing support plans and to design a programme of support designed to maintain connection to the school. Where other teachers are employed, teachers should seek access to the most recent support plan for the child or young person to help with establishing learning priorities. Teachers should maintain a record of content and skills taught during the summer programme and provide a summary of this to the school or the parents, as appropriate.

The Role of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

Where possible, schools offering the summer programme should seek to secure the participation of SNAs who are familiar with the children attending the school-based programme. The roles and duties of the SNAs during the summer programme should continue to be in line with roles outlined in the school's SEN policy and reflect existing care plans for the children or young people. There should be a particular emphasis on attending to health and care needs and fostering independence.

The Voice of the Child or Young Person

Involving children or young people in setting learning targets and in monitoring their progress, can be empowering and motivating for them. Some may have language and communication difficulties, therefore it is important to use appropriate means to enable them to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. use of visual supports, choice boards, assistive technology). Adopting a child-centred approach which places the individual at the centre of educational planning helps to ensure that their specific learning and wellbeing needs are addressed. This process enables the child or young person's voice to be included in the planning and decision-making process in relation to their path through education.

When engaging with children and young people around the summer programme, schools should listen to input regarding:

- The activities in which they engage
- The nature and level of adult support
- The use of technology to support learning
- The social aspects of their education (managing their emotional state, managing transition or change).

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is critical in enhancing outcomes for children and young people and for achieving the aims of the summer programme. An effective means of communication which encourages and enables parents to share their views and concerns regarding their child's transition into the education setting for the next school year supports parents to contribute to their child's education.

When engaging with parents around the summer programme, schools should:

- Involve parents in the identification of their child's unique strengths, interests and needs, and in setting learning objectives
- Engage with parents in planning for transitions, including transitions into/out of school and across settings
- Seek and encourage the views of children and young people as well as parents when selecting activities and teaching approaches, as appropriate
- Work in partnership with parents to maximise positive outcomes of the summer programme for children and young people
- Provide reassurance to parents that every effort will be made to support their children to successfully reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year
- Provide reassurance to parents that their children will be encouraged and supported in their learning where there is a risk of regression in learning
- Engage with parents in supporting their children to maintain a regular school routine.

Conclusion

The content of this guidance document is addressed to a range of settings including special schools, special classes and mainstream schools. The general approaches outlined in the document are intended to guide the provision of enjoyable learning experiences and realistic learning outcomes for children and young people over the relatively short duration of the programme.

The flexibility and autonomy being afforded to schools to design learning programmes appropriate to children's needs and their particular educational setting is very significant. It will be particularly important for schools to engage with parents/carers so that expectations about the nature of the child's programme are agreed in advance and that good communication is maintained throughout the programme. To support continuity in the child's learning, the outcomes of the programme for each should also be shared effectively in written form with the school and the parents in a timely manner.

Through the delivery of Summer Programme 2021, principals and teachers should strive to support the targeted children or young people to consolidate their engagement in learning and social activities in preparation for a smooth transition to their new classes in September 2021.