

# into



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**Irish National Teachers' Organisation**  
**Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann**

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## BULLETIN 7

### RETURN TO SCHOOL

4<sup>th</sup> January 2021

DE Education Restart Guidance for School and Educational Settings in NI (December 2020) has seen a further tightening, not relaxing, of safety procedures. Schools must fully comply with the guidance as issued. Thorough risk assessing remains key to ensuring a safe working environment and any changes to current school day procedures/practices must be fully risk assessed and mitigations in place.

School Management must have completed whole school risk assessments. Given the emergence of a new variant Covid-19 strain, schools should revisit these risk assessments to ensure that they are fit for purpose and amend accordingly in light of the ever-changing advice from DE – these updated risk assessments should be shared with staff and school specific guidance provided.

At 07:30 on 31 December 2020, the Department of Education published the Minister of Education's revised plans for schools reopening after the Christmas Break.

In relation to this guidance:

INTO would advise that 'the first day of the normal school term' is the day that pupils would have been returning to school. This should include all school settings.

In response to the increased pressure on Special Schools and Nursery Schools to return at a time of increased transmission INTO highlight the DE statement "The first day of the normal school term can be used to prepare for the rest of the week." INTO advises this time should be used to ensure practical & enforceable safety measures are the priority to keep everyone safe: revisit risk assessments & implementation of mitigating steps this includes resourcing of staff & PPE, contact EA to ensure delivery of PPE and advice about risk assessments. INTO reminds members to raise concerns about H&S through the channels available to all: teachers to H&S rep & Principal, Principal to Link Officer/employing bodies.

In line with the updated EA guidance issued 01/01/21 the decision on staffing levels required remains with individual school principals, and such decisions should reflect that where work can reasonably be done at home, principals should direct staff accordingly as a significant mitigation of risk and in line with current Executive restrictions.

Where teachers are tasked with engaging in face-to-face teaching of vulnerable children or key workers' children, there should be no expectation for these teachers to provide simultaneous, online teaching to pupils at home.

Teachers may provide learning resources for pupils who are working remotely, where specific time is provided to prepare, upload and distribute work to pupils.

Exams that are due to take place in January refers to statutory examinations, rather than non-statutory, unregulated tests. INTO advises members that any attempt to bring Year 7 pupils into schools for preparation for unregulated academic selection tests would be at variance to the announcement from the Education Minister, and members should resist any attempt to bring in Year 7 class groups other than vulnerable children or children of key workers.

Further extension of mitigating steps are expected and include the extended wearing of face coverings by all in post-primary schools including in the classroom.

INTO will, where members feel unsafe in their workplace, support members in challenging management to ensure the mitigations in place, in individual schools is sufficient to best ensure safety for staff, pupils and parents.

**INTO will continue to update advice when available.**

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