



NORTHERN IRELAND TEACHERS' COUNCIL

NITC PAPER ON COVID MITIGATIONS REQUIRED NOW

JANUARY 2022

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Decisions around partial and full school closures

On occasions, particularly inclement weather or other health and safety issues can prompt a school leader to conclude the safest course of action for the school community is that the premises should close or partially close.

A principal feels empowered to make such a decision having consulted with their Board of Governors and having sought advice from the employing authority. The C2K system accommodates such decisions.

DE and the employing authorities need to more explicitly state what they consider to be appropriate circumstances in which a closure or partial closure is acceptable in the present Covid-19 pandemic. It is also essential this information is communicated to the system as a whole and society more widely to promote an agreed understanding as to why a school leader and Governors will conclude it has no alternative but to take such a course of action.

Cover

DE and the employing authorities need to re-state and confirm that cover arrangements can only be accommodated withing existing agreements including the Workload Agreement and Time Budget arrangements as agreed by DE, employing bodies and trade unions.

It is also important with regard to support staff it be re-statemented the circumstances that support staff can be used to supervise which are *in extremis*.

Contact Tracing

The PHA change to contact tracing in schools has not lessened or stabilised the incidence of positive cases amongst pupils or staff.

DE and the employers need to confirm that school staff are not to be subject to any waivers in respect to public health advice.

DE immediately lobby the PHA and Department of Health:

- to reinstate close contact isolation for those with positive cases at home.
- to implement the PHA close contact definition in the school/classroom i.e.
 - anyone who lives in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19
 - anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 with a PCR test:
 - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within one metre
 - skin-to-skin physical contact for any length of time
 - been within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
 - been within two metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)
 - travelled in the same vehicle

PRSD

An immediate moratorium on PRSD, if for no reason other than the cover it requires to carry out the process when we are already in dire need of sub cover. For e.g. in post primary school this would be 6 periods of cover X 50 teachers! This is simply not doable.

Also, a move by DE and the employing authorities in this area would go some way to addressing mounting unrest across the profession.

Air monitoring and quality

CO2 Monitors: clear guidance is required on actions to follow where a CO2 reading exceeds an acceptable level.

Temperature: Immediate guidance should issue (reissue) in regard to acceptable temperatures in schools, dependant on the advice re CO2 Monitors.

Air Filters: Confirmation from DE that the 7000 units alluded to by the Minister of Education in her Good Morning Ulster interview on Tuesday 4th January 2022 ("My officials have been working with the Department of Education on the mainland and they are moving forward with a delivery of 7,000 units,") have been purchased, and an undertaking that further units will be purchased where necessary. The use of HEPA air filters across the system be provided for by DE now. A recent Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study showed concrete evidence that HEPA air purifiers reduce COVID-19 spread in schools. The study showed HEPA air purifiers reduced COVID-19 spread in the classroom by 41%. Clear Guidance in relation to the number of HEPA filters required per area to be made available to schools. HEPA filters should be provided to all schools as a COVID cost in the first instance.

Air Filtration budget: Going forward, a budget should be created for Capital, minor works or equipment to facilitate widespread use of air filtration system throughout all schools. There should be a requirement for air filtration systems to be installed in all new school buildings.

Engage programme

This programme has shown to be a valuable tool within the recovery programmes for schools across all sectors.

The current staffing crisis has put pressures on teachers engaged in this programme needing to be utilised in other ways for short term periods.

NITC asks that DE:

- Provide a clear signal to schools that staff engaged for this work can be redirected across the school beyond the engage programme as required without prejudice.
- Give schools an indication now that this scheme will be extended beyond the current timeframe the next academic year to allow for any disruptions in the programme.

Masks

DE/ the public health authorities make available now, to school staff teaching and non teaching, medical grade masks to all workers employed in education [FFP2].

- Centrally supplied from EA
- Additional supplies for schools to be included within COVID costs

The issue of wearing face coverings at all stages in education be investigated in light of practice elsewhere and scientific evidence to support this.

- Who should wear masks? (specify the age groups),
- Where are they to be worn? (i.e. classrooms, corridors, inside etc)
- Provide appropriate Risk Assessment documents to support this at school level.

Public Health Primacy

DE and the employers confirm that school staff are not to continue to find themselves being asked to work beyond their contracts.

- Clear guidance to schools on the procedures to follow regarding staff testing and isolation.
- Updating individual risk assessments

More appropriate timings of information coming to School Principals (not late evening/weekend).

Finance

Reassure principals and BOGs, again, that finance to cover the [massive] additional costs that schools are incurring will be met by DE with no penalty for the school.

Encouraging sub-teachers

Actively encourage teachers [who remain registered by the General Teaching Council] currently seconded or employed in any area of the educational bureaucracy to make themselves available via NISTR.

There needs to be a greater effort made on the part of DE to encourage recently retired teachers to offer their services to the system. A second letter explaining to the original 800 contacted, addressing their pension concerns should be sent.

Data transparency

DE need to again ask schools for the daily data on pupil and staff absence and it would be important that this data is shared with NITC and the other education trade unions.

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