

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



To all Engage II programme settings

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Dear School Principal / Setting Leader

10 January 2022

INCREASED FLEXIBILITY WITHIN THE ENGAGE II PROGRAMME IN LIGHT OF ON-GOING STAFFING PRESSURES

Following on from my letter of 6 September 2021 regarding the Engage II Programme, I am keen to support schools / settings to manage the current staffing shortages across the system.

My priority and the priority of the NI Executive remains keeping our children and young people in school in a safe environment. I will therefore continue to work with all concerned to keep our schools open and safe.

With that in mind, I have listened very carefully to the views of school leaders and representatives of the education sector regarding the impact that Covid-19 continues to have on children's learning. The impact on education professionals is also significant and I am keen to support you in any way I can.

The Engage II programme is supporting children and young people's learning in the current academic year. I greatly value the work of settings in delivering the programme, which is helping to limit any long-term impact of the disruption caused by Covid-19 on educational standards by supporting pupils' learning and engagement, along with their social, emotional health and wellbeing.

It is clear that further flexibility for settings in utilising the staff they have available would be helpful. For that reason, I am inviting schools / settings to consider in consultation with your Boards of Governors whether substitute teacher(s) / staff employed through Engage for one-to-one or small group support, could be more effectively used to offset the impact of teacher/staff absences in the short term.

Schools / settings can choose to redeploy staff delivering the Engage II programme to sustain normal classroom teaching (where necessary) if you are unable to source teachers in any other way. Additionally, the cost of the substitute teacher / staff can

continue to be met from the setting's Engage II programme funding. Schools / settings **are asked to retain a record of these decisions for audit purposes and should use Section 3b of the Engage II Planner app to capture these details/costs.**

All schools / settings should by now have completed the online Engage II Planner app to capture information regarding how you will deliver the programme this year. **If you have not already done so, please complete Section 1 to 3 of the Engage Planner as soon as possible.**

The contingency part of the Engage Planner (Section 3b) has been updated to allow you to capture any changes in objectives / targets as a result of using substitute teachers in a different way than originally planned.

For queries on the process of completing / amending the Engage II Planner please see [The Engage II Programme 2021/22 | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#) or you can contact DE's Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team at: attendance@education-ni.gov.uk

Regards,

Michelle McIlveen

**MICHELLE MCILVEEN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**