

**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary Schools  
And the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards of Community  
National Schools**

**COVID-19: Full Re-Opening of Primary Schools  
Arrangements for Teachers employed in recognised Primary Schools**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The full re-opening of primary schools will take place on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.
- 1.2 During the partial re-opening period, temporary leave arrangements were made available to teachers, so as to provide flexibility in relation to childcare, specifically. These arrangements related to temporary changes to specific terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and the Unpaid Leave Scheme.
- 1.3 From 15<sup>th</sup> March, these temporary leave arrangements will no longer be available to teachers. Therefore, the terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and Unpaid Leave Scheme will apply, as normal.
- 1.4 This Information Note supersedes Information Note TC 0005/2021 with effect from 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.

**2. Teachers at 'High Risk' and 'Very High Risk' of COVID-19**

- 2.1 During the partial re-opening period, a teacher categorised as High Risk (including a teacher over 60 years of age) by the Occupational Health Service (Medmark) was facilitated on a temporary basis, with more flexible working arrangements. This included re-assignment of a teacher to other duties within the school or at home or the re-assignment of teacher roles within the complement of teachers available to the school.
- 2.2 From 15<sup>th</sup> March, these temporary arrangements will no longer be available and therefore a teacher in the High Risk group who is medically fit for work must return to the workplace.
- 2.3 The latest HSE guidance on the 'very high risk' group is at:  
<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>.
- 2.4 The 'very high risk' group is currently advised to cocoon.
- 2.5 In accordance with DPER guidance, where a teacher has been categorised as Very High Risk by Medmark and is medically fit for work, the employer should prioritise alternative working arrangements to the maximum extent possible e.g. working from home.
- 2.6 Such teachers may carry out on a temporary basis, tasks appropriate to the list of duties incorporated at paragraph 12 of [Circular 0049/2020](#) in this respect. This may include supporting pupils who have not returned to school because of medical vulnerability as well as supporting other school staff, including other teachers, SNAs or administrative staff. These duties include:

- Liaising closely with and supporting the work of the substitute teacher(s) who becomes responsible for the teaching duties of the teacher on special leave with pay.
- Supporting and engaging, using online technology, the work and progress of very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend school.
- Participating in staff meetings, team/subject planning meetings and all other normal meetings using online technology.
- Participating in relevant professional development through online media.
- Developing aspects of the school's teaching resources or teaching plans.
- Undertaking administrative or other tasks associated with a post of responsibility (provided they hold the post in line with relevant DES publications) to the greatest extent possible using online technology.

2.7 Where a teacher has been categorised by Medmark as Very High Risk and is not attending the workplace, the employer may appoint a substitute, paid by the Department/ETB. A contract awarded to a substitute to cover for a Very High Risk teacher, should make clear reference to the fact that the appointment may have to be terminated in the event of the teacher returning to the workplace earlier than expected.

2.8 A teacher categorised by Medmark as being in the 'Very High Risk' group and who is medically fit to work from home, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system.

2.9 Please refer to paragraph 10 of [Circular 0049/2020](#) in relation to the full working arrangements for the Very High Risk group.

### **3. Pregnant Teachers at higher risk of COVID-19**

3.1 The HSE has recently published guidance for the education sector in respect of pregnant employees.

3.2 A pregnant teacher is categorised in the High Risk category in the HSE guidance. The Department is currently seeking clarifications from the HSE on this guidance.

3.3 In the interim and pending such clarification, a pregnant teacher should continue to work remotely on a temporary basis.

3.4 In this regard, a pregnant teacher who is facilitated to work remotely, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system. The employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace the pregnant teacher in the classroom.

### **4. Employee Assistance Service**

4.1 The [Employee Assistance Service](#) is available as a supportive resource for employees. The free phone confidential helpline is 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**5. Circulation of Information Note**

- 5.1 Please ensure that copies of this Information Note are provided to all members of the Board of Management/Education and Training Boards and its contents are brought to the attention of all teachers in your employment including those on leave of absence.
- 5.2 All queries should initially be brought to the attention of the employer who may wish to consult with their representative organisation. Any further queries may be directed to the Department at the following e-mail address: [teachersna@education.gov.ie](mailto:teachersna@education.gov.ie)

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