**INTO Advice and Guidance to all Members on Attendance at School
During the COVID-19 Pandemic
(Updated January 2021)**

In response to a large volume of communications from members relating to concerns around safe attendance at work and their own childcare arrangements during this unprecedented period INTO offers the following guidance and advice.

INTO believes that, for schools to be able to effectively and safely support the full list of key workers in schools and for social distancing to be effective in minimizing the risks of the spread of COVID-19 in these settings, it is imperative that the **minimum number of staff and pupils present themselves to schools during this period**. Everyone in the vulnerable category should be social distancing and avoiding gatherings. This would apply to the majority of the vulnerable children identified by the Minister. It has been a huge error of judgement for him to expand this category due to the increased risk to the health of the child. Therefore, school leaders should keep this in mind at all times when making arrangements to facilitate the safe running of schools at this time.

Circumstances are changing on an almost hourly basis. INTO will endeavour to update members as regularly and as accurately as possible throughout.

In relation to the request for teachers, along with non-teaching colleagues, to present for work and subsequently provide ‘supervised learning’ for children of key workers, INTO advises the following:

* **Social Distancing**
The 2m rule between pupil/pupil and pupil/staff has been reinstated. Bubbles and social distancing remain key mitigating actions. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Guidance%20Update%20Letter%20-%20January%202021.pdf> “While the number of pupils within settings are reduced schools should continue to reduce interaction and contact. New bubbles may be formed in line with PHA advice, but these should not exceed normal class size. With smaller numbers of pupils, it is acceptable to use a single room, provided that the 2m social distancing rule can be maintained between pupils, and staff can maintain this when supervising the class.”
DE Covid Response Team advise that a 2m rule would enable max 8-10 pupils in a classroom.
* **Supervised Learning/Remote Learning**It is expected that teaching and/or non-teaching staff will supervise and support vulnerable and key worker children in engaging with the remote learning tasks and activities provided to all pupils. This will include providing appropriate, support, explanations and directions in regard to the remote learning materials. Schools should differentiate teaching and learning activities in accordance with the age, ability, aptitude and Special Educational Needs (SEN), if appropriate, of all pupils.

INTO’s understanding and expectation is quite clear in that schools will have a rota of teachers available for face-to-face supervised learning of vulnerable and key workers’ children on campus. Teachers, not on the rota and working from home will be providing differentiated remote learning activities to all of their pupils including the vulnerable and key workers’ children attending school. This guidance simply gives clarity to the fact that children attending school, can access these remote lessons in the same manner as children who are not in school and are learning from home. The teaching and non-teaching staff who are in school will not be directly teaching but will be offering direction and support to the attending children engaged in differentiated remote learning tasks.

INTO will resist any attempt to require its teachers, engaged in supervising learning with children in a face-to-face setting, to simultaneously provide remote learning tasks to pupils learning from home.

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.

* **Special School/EOTAS Provision**Special schools and EOTAS are currently under direction from the Executive to remain open to all pupils. The NITC have written to OFMDFM to request an urgent review of this decision <https://www.into.ie/ni/2021/01/11/nitc-letter-to-ofmdfm/> .
It is essential that practical safety steps are followed at all times by all staff:
- Ensure you are aware of all risk assessments and mitigations. Highlight any mitigations which are not in place or ineffective immediately with your H&S reg/Principal/Board of Governors/COLO.
- Use PPE. Facemasks do work. Children with communication delay are impacted by facemasks but it is not detrimental to their health. Not using such equipment has the potential to damage you and your pupils’ health.
Don't sacrifice safety due to the equipment limitations.
- Think of every way to maximise social distancing – reduced numbers of staff and pupils in class may need to be identified on a risk assessment.
- Ventilate the room (see ventilation advice in INTO FAQs).
- Slow down your day in school to leave space for maximising safety.
If you feel you are at risk speak to your principal and H&S rep immediately. Advice and support is available by contacting INTO infoni@into.ie
* **CV/CEV**
EA guidance (8/1/21) states Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) people who are working and are unable to do so from home are advised not to attend the workplace. (Currently being reviewed by PHA). Anyone who cannot attend work due to this advice will be eligible for their normal pay. If, however, they choose to attend work a risk assessment must be completed <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools>

Clinically vulnerable, including pregnancy, must have a risk assessment completed. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools>

Members must assess their personal risk and inform their principal where they believe they should not present to school in the interest of their own health and their families and in the interest of the public good.

* Further to this INTO advises members that they should inform their Principal (or, if you are a Principal member, your Board of Governors) that they cannot present to school in the following instances:

A teacher who has underlying health conditions should have a risk assessment completed in line with [DE guidance](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools). Members should phone their GP or 111 if they are unsure and follow the advice given.

Teachers who support/care for someone with an underlying health conditions should have a risk assessment completed where they feel it is necessary for them to work from home. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-supporting-staff-return-schools>

Teachers who are pregnant should work from home.

Teachers who have children who have not yet reached school age and have no available childcare must not bring those children to school with them and should work from home.

Teachers who have children of school age up to the end of Year 10 and who cannot arrange safe alternative childcare arrangements should, contrary to the advice from the Department, advise their Principal (or Chair of Governors in the case of a Principal members) that, unless their presence is absolutely essential to the safe operation of the ‘supervised learning’ in their place of work, that their school should allow them to work from home.

Other than the exceptions laid out in the ‘Guidance on Absence Relating to Coronavirus’ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Guidance%20on%20Absence%20Relating%20to%20Coronavirus%20%28COVID-19%29%20-%20Advice%20for%20Principals%20~%208%20October%202020.pdf>  issued by DENI, the agreed attendance procedures for teachers still apply <https://www.into.ie/ni/help-advice/procedures-policies/teacher-attendance-procedure/> .  Therefore, once you have advised your school that you are available to work in school or work from home, or that you are unable to work due to COVID-19 or another reason related to ill health, you have no further need to update the school unless your circumstances change in any way.  If you are off sick you should continue to report extensions to your sickness absence to the Principal, or if you are a Principal, to the Board of Governors, by supplying a sick line from your GP, where and when available.  Principals, in their response to the daily Department of Education Survey, should assume the status of staff remains unchanged unless it has been indicated otherwise since the previous days survey response.

Members who identify with any of these needs must follow scientific and medical advice to minimise social contact and work from home. These members will enjoy the full support of the INTO. There may be other circumstances, not yet identified in this guidance or elsewhere that may result in a teacher feeling unable to report for work and members should contact INTO for further advice in these situations by email to infoni@into.ie

* COVID positive case in school
In the event of a confirmed case within the school community, current practice as outlined in the DE restart Guidance (8/12/20)
Full Guidance: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Coronavirus%20Guidance%20for%20Schools%20and%20Educational%20Settings%20-%20December%202020.pdf>
Management of positive cases flowchart <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Management%20of%20Covid-19%20Positive%20Case%20in%20a%20School%20Setting.pdf>
* INTO has called on the Minister of Education to state a of school as a last resort as was the message in the last lockdown and in keeping with the current message of stay at home from the Executive
* Alternative childcare arrangements should be sought before deciding to send a child to school.