

Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools

The Roadmap for the Full Return to School incorporates all the detailed guidance documents and communication materials which are referenced (but not necessarily replicated) in the summary document, all of which are available at www.gov.ie/backtoschool. This includes the public health advice from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and the Return to Work Safely Protocol developed by the Health & Safety Authority.

The Public Health Advice for the re-opening of schools and educational facilities makes two specific references to ventilation practices which schools should consider, and if appropriate to their specific school context, implement

“Consider if room ventilation especially in classrooms can be improved without causing discomfort. Where possible the opening of doors and windows should be encouraged to increase natural ventilation” (Section 5.6 Environmental Hygiene); and

“Increase air flow and ventilation where climate allows (open windows, use air conditioning where available, etc.)” (Section 8.1, checklists for School Management, Teachers and Staff)

In addition, section 7 of the Return to Work Safely Protocol notes that

Air conditioning is not generally considered as contributing significantly to the spread of COVID-19. Switching off air conditioning is not required to manage the risk of COVID-19. For organisations without air conditioning adequate ventilation is encouraged, for example, by opening windows where feasible etc.

The completion and implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan by a school is the means through which schools can best prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and demonstrate that they are operating in accordance with the requirements of the Roadmap, the Public Health advice and the Return to Work Protocol, and other detailed guidance provided by the Department.

The following practical measures for the deployment of good ventilation practices in schools should be considered by schools in the implementation of their COVID-19 Response Plans,

1. The opening of windows to introduce fresh air is very important and should continue to be used during school opening times via a proactive rather than reactive approach.
2. Achieving fresh air via a number of windows partially opened as required rather than one window fully open can help to maximise the use of window driven natural ventilation distribution across the room without causing discomfort.
3. In colder weather any local chilling effect can be offset by opening the windows nearest and above the radiators.
4. Consideration should be given to local circumstances that may require to have additional windows open such as after break time activities.

5. Rooms with adequate fresh air should not be stuffy or have condensation on the window glass.

6. Schools should also ensure that all permanent ventilation openings in rooms are fully open and not blocked by wall hangings etc. These normally are either a circular or rectangle ventilation grill on the external classroom wall or linear slot type ventilators built into the window frames. All of these should be opened all the time, if they have been taped and sealed for decorating purposes then the tape/sealing should be removed.

7. All mechanical ventilation systems and any air conditioning systems should be set to 100% fresh air, any air conditioning units that cannot operate on 100% fresh air should be left off. Check with unit suppliers if in doubt.