



Information Note TC 0013/2021

**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary,
Community and Comprehensive Schools and
The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards**

**COVID-19: Working Arrangements for
Very High Risk Teachers and Special Needs Assistants
and
Pregnant Teachers and Special Needs Assistants
employed in recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Based on the most recent HSE advice, the 'very high risk' group of people is currently advised to cocoon. The link to the most recent HSE advice is at:
<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/people-at-higher-risk.html>.
- 1.2 In accordance with paragraph 4.1 of Circular 0021/2021 a teacher or special needs assistant (SNA) who is categorised by the Occupational Health Service (OHS) as at a very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19 is currently facilitated by his/her employer to work remotely i.e. work from home.
- 1.3 Whilst the Department awaits certain clarifications on the HSE guidance for pregnant education sector employees, a pregnant teacher or SNA is currently facilitated by her employer to work remotely i.e. work from home, under paragraph 4.3 of Circular 0021/2021.

2. Working Arrangement for remainder of 2020/21 school year

- 2.1 For the remainder of the 2020/21 school year, a teacher or SNA who has been categorised by the OHS as in the 'Very High Risk' group (including those who have been fully vaccinated), should continue to work remotely i.e. work from home.
- 2.2 Similarly, a pregnant teacher or SNA is advised to continue to work remotely i.e. work from home, for the remainder of the 2020/21 school year. A pregnant teacher or SNA is not required to be categorised by the OHS to work from home.
- 2.3 The alternative working arrangements for the 'Very High Risk' group and pregnant teachers or SNAs are detailed at paragraph 3 below.



3. Alternative Working Arrangements - 'Very High Risk' Group and Pregnant Teacher/SNA

- 3.1 A teacher/SNA who is medically fit for work and has been categorised as 'Very High Risk' by the OHS or a teacher/SNA who is pregnant is available to work remotely.
- 3.2 The work assigned to the teacher/SNA should be determined by the employer, in consultation with the employee, and may include relevant duties that support the work of the school in developing and delivering its programmes of teaching and learning for pupils/students.
- 3.3 So as to provide clarity, detailed below is an outline of the possible options to facilitate remote working for a 'Very High Risk' or pregnant **teacher** whose duties may include:
- Liaising closely with and supporting the work of the substitute teacher(s) who becomes responsible for the teaching duties of the 'Very High Risk' or pregnant teacher on special leave with pay.
 - Supporting and engaging, using online technology, the work and progress of very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils/students 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.
 - Reviewing and developing whole-school policies, in line with the school's priorities and in light of the current context.
 - Undertaking administrative or other tasks associated with a post of responsibility (provided they hold the post of responsibility in line with relevant Department of Education publications) to the greatest extent possible using online technology.
 - Utilisation of the school's digital platform to provide live lessons to their class in some instances.
 - Sharing of key teaching points of lessons and activities for the class with a substitute teacher. The teacher can also provide or recommend resources including books and/or packs of concrete materials for use by the class that are relevant to the planned lessons.
- 3.4 At post primary level, the 'Very High Risk' or pregnant teacher should participate on a remote working basis in the arrangements for the Accredited Grades process for their students, including estimating the percentage mark in each subject that each candidate is likely to have achieved if they sat the Leaving Certificate Examinations in 2021 and participating in the in-school subject alignment group process.
- 3.5 Priority should be given to sourcing a substitute teacher that is appropriately qualified to teach the required subject or level, however it may be difficult to replace a 'Very High Risk' or pregnant teacher particularly in certain areas at both primary and post primary level or certain subjects at post primary level, so it is important that the employer puts in place measures to facilitate the ongoing engagement of the 'Very High Risk' or pregnant teacher with the teaching and learning of their class/subject.



- 3.6 For teachers who are working remotely, this may also include nomination to a Local Education Centre in order to support the learning of pupils/students from other schools who are at very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19.
- 3.7 For **SNA**s, who continue to work under the direction of the principal or other teacher as determined by the principal, these duties may include:
- Liaising closely with, working under the direction of the principal/class teacher(s).
 - Liaising closely with, engaging with, advising and supporting the work of the substitute SNA. This advice can include:
 - Advice on what typically works for the child/student in school.
 - Demonstration/advice/training on strategies to support the child's/student's needs.
 - Support to develop a schedule to structure the child's/student's day.
 - Help with provision of social stories to support the child's/student's understanding of the ongoing health emergency.
 - Support, advice and reinforcement to address behaviours that challenge.
 - Work on providing educational or therapeutic resources / materials in collaboration with the teacher and substitute SNA.
 - Supporting, engaging with and monitoring very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend school, using online technology or telephone support, if online systems are not available.
 - Participating in staff meetings and all other normal meetings using online technology or by telephone, if online systems are not available.
- 3.8 If remote working in an SNA's current role is not feasible, then the assignment of work may be outside of their usual core duties.

4. OHS Health Risk Categorisation Assessments – 2021/22 School Year

- 4.1 Where the OHS categorised a teacher/SNA as 'Very High Risk' at any time before or during the 2020/21 school year, the COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report will automatically expire on 30th June, 2021 and therefore will no longer be valid beyond that date. In this regard, for non-ETB schools, the employer must record an end date of 30th June, 2021 on the individual OLCS leave record under 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' for the 'Very High Risk' teacher/SNA (including pregnant teacher/SNA). For ETB schools, a similar recording process should be carried out in line with IT system requirements.
- 4.2 For the 2021/22 school year, a teacher/SNA who believes he/she is at very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19 must complete the online OHS COVID-19 Risk Assessment Questionnaire and submit it to the OHS as detailed at paragraph 4.1 of Circular 0021/2021. In order to be provided with a COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report in advance of the 2021/22 school year, the COVID-19 Risk Assessment Questionnaire must be submitted to the OHS no later than **16th July, 2021**.



- 4.3 As per paragraph 4.1 of Circular 0021/2021, having considered the medical information provided with the OHS COVID-19 Risk Assessment Questionnaire the OHS will provide the teacher/SNA with a 'COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report'. This Report advises whether or not the teacher/SNA is at a very high risk of serious illness from contracting COVID-19 and must be provided to the employer.
- 4.4 In line with the ongoing updating of HSE advice or a change in the teacher's/SNA's medical diagnosis, the COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation Report may expire at any stage throughout the school year.
- 4.5 A change in HSE advice during the 2021/22 school year may result in a health risk re-categorisation for a 'Very High Risk' teacher/SNA, meaning they will be required to return to the workplace. Where there is a change in HSE advice for the higher risk groups, the OHS will contact the teacher/SNA who submitted a COVID-19 Risk Assessment Questionnaire in respect of the 2021/22 school year, to invite them to re-submit a new Questionnaire.
- 4.6 In accordance with Circular 0021/2021, where medical diagnosis changes, the teacher or SNA must inform the employer immediately.
- 4.7 The Department is awaiting HSE/NPHET advice regarding the return to the workplace of those in the 'Very High Risk' group who have been fully vaccinated. Where there is updated advice from HSE/NPHET, the Department will advise employers immediately.
- 4.8 The Department is also awaiting updated guidelines from the HSE in relation to pregnant teachers and SNAs. When these guidelines have been updated, the Department will advise employers immediately. It should be noted that the interim arrangements for remote working for a pregnant teacher or SNA set out in this Information Note are in place until the end of the current school year only. It is expected that a pregnant teacher or SNA who is medically fit to do so, subject to new and updated guidelines from the HSE, will return to the workplace in the 2021/2022 school year.

5. COVID-19 Vaccinations

- 5.1 Where a teacher or SNA has a COVID-19 vaccination appointment is during school hours, the absence will be treated in the same manner as other medical appointments.
- 5.2 In this regard, paragraph 1.3 of the Sick Leave Scheme as contained in [Circular 0054/2019](#) for teachers and [Circular 0060/2019](#) for SNAs refers.

'Sick Leave may be granted to a teacher or SNA who is unable to perform his/her duties

- *because of illness, injury or*
- *when absent for the purpose of obtaining medical related services (e.g. Doctor/Dentist) provided such appointments could not have been arranged outside of regular working hours or working days.'*



- 5.3 Similar to the Sick Leave Scheme, the teacher or SNA should provide confirmation of the vaccination appointment.
- 5.4 Where a teacher or SNA has side effects following the COVID-19 vaccination, resulting in absence from duty, the terms and conditions of the Sick Leave Scheme will apply.

6. Circulation of Information Note

- 6.1 Please ensure that this Information Note is circulated to all members of the Board of Management/Education and Training Boards and its contents are brought to the attention of all teachers and SNAs in your employment, including those on leave of absence.
- 6.2 This Information Note can be accessed on the Department's website at www.education.ie.

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