



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

5 October 2020

Minister Norma Foley, TD,
Minister for Education,
Department of Education and Skills,
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A Aire, a chara,

I write on behalf of the INTO, the trade union that represents 42,000 teachers in Ireland's primary and special schools.

We note that the five level plan for living with Covid-19 states that the safe continuation of education and childcare is a key priority and that it is government's intention that schools and creches will remain open in levels 1-4 with protective measures in place.

To date at stakeholder consultations we have received no clarification on what protective measures would apply in primary and special schools at these four different levels. In our view it is inconceivable that the same protections - hand sanitising, hand washing, enhanced cleaning, ventilation, pods and bubbles - would be deemed to be sufficient at all of these four levels.

It is very clear from the five level plan that in all other situations and workplaces that there will be a marked difference in the approach taken at the different levels.

We also note that should an area of the country move to level five, recommendations for schools and creches will be based on the precise situation and evidence at the time. The evidence to date is that by the end of the first month of the school year 187 schools had testing completed as a consequence of public health risk assessment and that there were 59 confirmed cases in primary and special schools.

Now that NPHE has recommended to government that the whole country moves to level 5, we urgently require a clarification from government as to what additional measures government would take to protect everyone in primary and special schools at level four compared with what is currently in place for schools including those in Dublin and Donegal, where level three applies.

Crucially we now also need clarity on the plans for primary and special schools in areas where level five would apply. In our view it is incomprehensible that our schools, which have the largest class sizes in Europe, would remain fully open at a time where infection levels were so high in the community that no indoor gatherings or events were permissible. While we share the ambition to have schools safely open, it is not acceptable that teachers appear to be placed at greater risk of infection compared with citizens and workers generally, and compared with teachers in comparable countries. Government must immediately seek a comprehensive review of expert Irish public health advice relating to primary and special

schools. If there is clear medical evidence and advice behind current policy on schools, we need to see and examine this as soon as possible.

Accordingly, we request that your Department provides us with the clarifications we require early this week and for that purpose that a special meeting of key stakeholders be held at the earliest opportunity.

We look forward to your urgent response.

Is mise, le meas,


John Boyle
General Secretary

cc Minister Stephen Donnelly T.D.
Deirdre Shanley