

into



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

INTO
Vere Foster House
23 College Gardens
Belfast BT9 6BS

Phone: 028 90 38 14 55
Fax: 028 90 66 28 03
Email: infoni@into.ie
Web: www.into.ie
Twitter: INTO_NI

A nation's greatness depends upon the education of its people



BULLETIN 4

Working Through Covid in Schools Update

3rd November 2020

INTO has continuously lobbied and met with the managing authorities on behalf of its members, to ensure that their concerns are heard. It has also, at every opportunity, been involved in challenging them as we seek to ensure that advice being given to schools in relation to dealing with Covid-19, is effective and fit for purpose. This work will continue, with INTO officials and elected representatives scrutinising and contesting, where appropriate, the advice and recommendations coming from Management.

The Minister of Education may continue to deny that there is an issue in relation to transmission of the virus within schools, INTO, however is aware that staffing levels were reaching crisis point in many schools prior to 19 October. Even with the break, a return to school appears to signpost a continued staffing crisis. School leaders must be supported by their employing authorities when considering if they can keep their schools open to all pupils on a 5-day basis. Flexibility of attendance in addition to other mitigating factors will be key to reducing the risks in schools created by absent staff.

INTO is therefore asking school representatives to contact Northern Office to report all instances of Covid-19 outbreaks in schools and instances of staff absence which are Covid-19 related. This will allow INTO to challenge the Minister using evidence that is independent of both the PHA and the Department of Education. If there is no INTO school representative in your school, then you as a member should contact Northern Office to report outbreaks of Covid-19 in your school.

INTO remains concerned that principals have been overly burdened with additional workload due to the responsibility for track and trace placed on them by DE and the PHA. This is especially difficult for teaching principals, and INTO are seeking an extension of the principal release scheme, to allow principals to ensure that the members of the school community are as safe as is practicable, while not further impacting negatively on school budgets. INTO will continue to highlight this additional workload and responsibility being heaped upon principals and would like to inform principal members that in the letter received from the PHA on 22nd October by the INTO the following points were made;

- If a principal wishes to gain further advice regarding a complex COVID situation in their school, having spoken to a PHA call handler, they can **request to speak to the Consultant in Public Health Medicine who supports the PHA Covid-19 school team.**
- If the situation is complex a principal can request a summary of the actions proposed by the PHA be emailed to them.

There remains the high probability of remote learning being introduced in some if not all geographical areas. In line with the letter from the Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ms Fiona Hepper, INTO would remind all school leaders to facilitate time for the preparation of such a resource, teachers cannot be expected to deliver both simultaneously. Where staff are expected to work remotely or through blended learning members are reminded of the TNC 2020/1 agreement regarding workload as well as the need for individual privacy of members/teachers, online security, GDPR and safeguarding. Should these present any issues for members they should raise concerns with their employer and with their INTO School or Northern Committee Representative. Teachers must be mindful of the school safeguarding policy and it should be followed in regard to all contact remote or otherwise. Communication with pupils, in line with DE Circular 2020/5 remote learning, should follow agreed school guidance.

This is an ever-changing situation and INTO will continue to support all members with updated and essential information while sharing the concerns raised by members with those whose duty it is to manage the education system during this pandemic.

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