

# Covid Learning and Support Scheme (CLASS)



## What is the CLASS programme?

The Department of Education has acknowledged the need to prioritize education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe. The [Covid Learning and Support Scheme \(CLASS\)](#) announced by the Department of Education in September 2021 is being put in place to help schools alleviate the adverse impacts of Covid-19 on pupil learning loss and wellbeing arising from school closures in 2020 and 2021. The new programme comprises two main elements:

- The provision of additional teaching hours to schools to support their work in addressing learning loss among pupils/students arising from periods of school closures.
- Opportunities for schools to share practice which is most effective in mitigating learning loss among pupils/students.

## What are the aims of CLASS?

**C** – Create opportunities for schools to provide additional child-centred teaching support for pupils who have struggled most during periods of school closure and those who continue to be affected by the impact the pandemic

**L** – Lead learning in an environment in which pupils have sufficient sense of physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

**A** - Allow for good routines to be re-established and maintained to the greatest extent possible so that all pupils can learn effectively

**S** - Support co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to redress the negative impact on pupils' wellbeing and to continue to foster pupils' sense of safety, calm, efficacy, and connectedness

**S** - Support the development of the essential skills that pupils need to experience success in learning throughout the school day.

Fundamentally, it is for schools to decide how to best utilise the CLASS programme hours within the aim and objectives of the programme in order to maximise positive outcomes for those children with the greatest need, and to tailor associated provision accordingly.



## Additional support for schools

### *What? When? How?*

#### What form of support will primary schools receive as part of the CLASS scheme?

Under the programme, each school will be allocated a block of additional teaching hours from which they can provide additional teaching support for the pupils in their school who have experienced difficulties in settling back into school and engaging with learning.

This additional support is a **once-off allocation for the current school year only**.

#### On what date can schools commence the implementation of the CLASS scheme?



The CLASS programme will commence on **11 October 2021**.

#### Is there a deadline by which hours allocated under CLASS should be used?

The additional teaching hours allocated to schools as part of CLASS may be used at any time during the 2021/2022 school year.

It is open to schools to decide whether to provide their school-based programme on a weekly basis or alternatively in an intensive block of time.

## How is a school's allocation of additional support under the CLASS programme calculated?

A school's allocation of additional hours under the CLASS programme will be based on enrolment bands, with enhanced allocations being provided for special schools and schools which are in the Department's Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme.

Enrolment data is drawn from 2020/21 school enrolments, as published on the Primary Online Databases, and is outlined in the grid below:

	Mainstream School Additional Teaching Hours Per year	Mainstream DEIS Additional 10% Teaching Hours Per Year	Average Number of Pupils at Mid-Point of Band	Special Additional Teaching per year	School Hours
<b><u>1-50 Students</u></b>	31.25	34.38	25	125	
<b><u>51-100 Students</u></b>	93.75	103.13	75	375	
<b><u>101-200 Students</u></b>	187.50	206.25	150	750	
<b><u>201-400 Students</u></b>	375	412.50	300	1,500	
<b><u>401-600 Students</u></b>	625	687.50	500	-	
<b><u>601-800 Students</u></b>	875	962.5	700	-	
<b><u>801-1000 Students</u></b>	1,125	1,237.50	900	-	
<b><u>1001+ Students</u></b>	1,200	1,320	-	-	

*(This graphic is taken from the DE circular 0045/2021)*

## Is it possible for small schools & rural schools whose allocation is quite low to cluster with other schools and employ one registered teacher who can deliver the additional hours assigned as part of the CLASS programme to a number of schools?

It is a matter for each school to decide how to best utilise their allocation of CLASS hours, as set out in DES Circular 045/2021, and the accompanying guidance. However, as the additional CLASS hours are a once-off allocation for the 2021/22 school year only, they should not be used to create new clusters, nor should schools disrupt their existing SET clusters to use these hours.

## When will the CLASS programme be provided?

CLASS is intended to be provided during the normal school day, but it may be appropriate for some social activities to be scheduled during lunch breaks.

## How are CLASS hours recorded on OLCS?

An information note was circulated to schools through the Online Claims System (OLCS), and the procedures for claiming hours have been published online at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/aec0a-covid-learning-and-support-scheme>

The example within this guidance involves a teacher who is appointed for 5 hours per week under the CLASS provision (i.e., in this case the teacher has a 1-hour appointment per day and would have a maximum 5 hours per week).

At primary level, schools can input any number of minutes for a teacher up to a maximum of 5 hours per day and 25 hours per week.

Any queries that schools may have in relation to technical difficulties associated with OLCS should be directed to [onlineclaims@education.gov.ie](mailto:onlineclaims@education.gov.ie)



## Identifying pupils in need of support

**How can schools ensure that children who have been identified as eligible for additional support under the CLASS programme are not adversely impacted by further learning loss or lack of interaction with their peers?**

The Department of Education guidance highlights the need for schools to pay particular attention to timetabling of sessions to ensure that pupils availing of CLASS supports do not inadvertently miss out on other valuable aspects of classroom learning if being withdrawn.

- Schools should collaboratively cross-reference the needs of pupils and consider common needs that can be met by grouping, to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning approaches.
- Schools may also schedule some activities during lunch break to minimise pupils' separation from their classroom and disruption to their routine.
- Various methods of providing additional support should be explored by schools and team teaching may be a suitable option whereby 'CLASS teachers' can work with children in their classroom environment.

## What cohort of pupils will be eligible for the additional support?

The extra resources provided to schools under the CLASS support programme is aimed at pupils of all abilities identified by the school as those who would benefit most from additional support to engage with learning following the Covid-19 lockdown period.

This includes children who have not previously been identified as needing extra support.

Schools have been given the flexibility to prioritise pupils for participation in CLASS with scope to extend the provision of this additional support beyond pupils with SEN.

### How will schools identify the children who will receive this additional support?

The *Continuum of Support* framework and the *Student Support File* process is already used in schools to assist in the identification of pupil needs, and as a problem-solving



model of assessment and intervention that enables schools to gather and analyse data, as well as to plan and review the progress of individual pupils. However, owing to the impact of the pandemic on pupils' overall development, learning and wellbeing, it is expected that a number of pupils who have not previously been identified as needing extra support may come to the fore,

## Who can work as a CLASS teacher?



### Who is eligible to be allocated to the role of CLASS teacher?

The additional teaching hours allocated to schools under this scheme may be provided by **registered teachers only**, either by:

- (1) Teachers who are currently on part time contracts and who may provide additional teaching hours up to a full teaching week of 25 hours at primary school level (such teachers will be paid at their existing personal rate of pay for any additional CLASS hours).
- (2) Teachers who may be engaged by the school to provide additional part-time teaching hours in the same manner in which schools engage substitute teachers. (Such teachers will be paid at the appropriate substitute hourly rate, appropriate to their qualification level, as set out in DES Circular 60/2020).

### **Can an experienced teacher be deployed to the CLASS role where it is deemed that they are best suited to working with children availing of the additional support?**

Schools know their pupils best and will have autonomy and flexibility to use their professional judgement to decide upon relevant priorities, which pupils engage with the programme and which teachers will deliver CLASS provision.

In some cases, depending on the nature and degree of supports required for the pupil(s) who will be availing of CLASS provision, it may be appropriate to consider deploying a suitably experienced teacher already within the school who is familiar to the pupil(s). In this case the teacher recruited under CLASS would then temporarily fill the vacant teaching role.

### **Are teachers who are in a job-share arrangement for the 2021-2022 school year eligible to engage with the CLASS programme?**

Job-sharing teachers in primary schools can carry out the CLASS hours, in the same manner in which they are allowed to carry out substitute work, up to a maximum of 25 hours per week total employment, inclusive of their normal job-share work days/hours. Job-sharing teachers who deliver CLASS hours will be paid at their personal rate of pay for those hours.

### **Is it open to teachers on Career Break to provide additional support as part of the CLASS programme? Will these teachers be paid at the casual substitute rate of pay?**

Under paragraph 8.1 of the Career Break Scheme (Circular 54/2019-Chapter 7), a teacher on Career Break may not be employed in an approved teaching or SNA post funded by monies provided by the Oireachtas. In exceptional circumstances, an employer may appoint a qualified teacher on Career Break for substitute teaching purposes, subject to a limit of 90 days in a school year at primary level.

For the 2021/22 school year, these restrictions have been lifted, as outlined in Information Note TC 0015/2021. Teachers on Career Break who deliver CLASS hours will be paid at their personal rate of pay for those hours.

## Can a retired teacher be employed as part of the CLASS programme?

Persons taking up CLASS hours must be registered teachers, and this includes registered retired teachers. However, retired teachers are reminded that the principle of abatement applies and the number of days worked may have an impact on pension.

## How can teachers who are engaged in the CLASS programme claim payment for hours worked?

At primary school level, the hours will be allocated to each school via the Online Claims System under the title '**Covid Learning and Support Scheme**' and will be available to be claimed via OLCS.

*(Please note that the Department of Education have indicated that further guidance will be issued to schools in advance of 11th October, in relation to how the hours can be claimed via OLCS).*

### DROICHEAD POINTS TO NOTE:

- Teaching must be with the same cohort of pupils
- The time requirement is 60 consecutive days
- Where an NQT is changing roles/position within the same school it is important to seek advice from the Teaching Council prior to commencing Droichead or as soon as it is known
- Where two schools use CLASS hours to employ the equivalent of a full-time teacher, the inter-school support model may be used.
- Further details on the Covid Learning and Support Scheme (CLASS) and Droichead is available [here](#)

## Can a newly qualified teacher be employed under the CLASS provision?

A newly qualified teacher (NQT) who is registered with the Teaching Council is eligible for employment under the CLASS provision.

## Is it possible for an NQT to complete Droichead whilst employed under the CLASS provision?

Yes, where an NQT is employed under the CLASS provision, they may apply for the Droichead process for the 2021/2022 school year once the Droichead Policy requirements are met. These requirements are set out in the [Post-Qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria 2021/2022](#) and the [Transitional Arrangements 2021/2022](#) as published on the Council's website.

The Post-Qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria 2021/2022 state that a primary teacher will normally undertake the Droichead process when employed

as a mainstream class teacher, however, in certain circumstances where he/she is the most appropriate teacher to support the needs of pupils, an NQT may complete the Droichead process in other teaching roles. It is also highlighted that for the period of employment must involve teaching the same cohort of pupils.

### What is the application deadline for NQTs who wish to undertake the Droichead Process under the CLASS provision?

While you cannot apply for *Droichead* any more than 5 working days prior to commencing employment, you may apply for *Droichead* at any stage after starting employment in a *Droichead* school. However, it is important to note that once you apply and receive approval to commence Droichead, you commence immediately and ensure that you will meet the minimum service requirement i.e., at least 60 consecutive school days\* with the same cohort of students before the end of the academic year.

A closing date will apply to receipt of applications. advance notice of the closing date will be posted on the Teaching Council website in the second half of the school year.

*\*Teachers on job-sharing or part-time contracts should note the following regarding a deadline date:*

This applies to teachers registered under Route 1 Primary or Route 4 Other, on job-share or part-time contracts of not less than 12.5 hours, for the duration of the academic year. This includes teachers employed as replacement teachers. Where such teachers commenced their role on or before the 18 October 2021, and whose contract extends to the end of the academic year, they must apply for Droichead on or before the 29 October 2021. In these instances, Droichead continue to the end of the academic year.

## The role of the CLASS teacher



### What will the role of the CLASS teacher be?

The teacher who is assigned the role of CLASS programme will be expected to implement a **child-centred programme** consistent with targets outlined by the school for each pupil and designed to meet their specific needs. It is anticipated that such programmes would address identified areas of need, help pupils to re-engage with school, support wellbeing and resilience and foster social development.

### What curricular areas/content should the content of the CLASS programme focus on?



Schools have flexibility to design and implement the CLASS interventions which they deem most suitable for the priority learning needs of participating pupils. In planning CLASS supports, it is paramount that teachers adopt a pupil-centred approach that harnesses the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each pupil.

Children engaging with this programme should be provided with opportunities to engage in a variety of enjoyable activities to target the priority learning and wellbeing needs outlined in their pupil support plan.

### **What methodologies/approaches should schools use in implementing the CLASS programme?**

There is no prescriptive or suggested ideal model for what the programme delivery should look like or specific parameters for schools to follow, such as an exclusive focus on particular groups of pupils or particular curriculum subjects.

Schools are encouraged to explore creative and innovative approaches in deciding how to utilise the additional teaching resource to address pupil needs and strengthen the capacity of children to be more independent, more self-regulating, and more resilient learners.

Schools should consider methodologies best suited to promoting meaningful inclusion such as differentiation, heterogeneous grouping, team-teaching and small-group teaching.

### **Should schools withdraw individual pupils for additional support?**

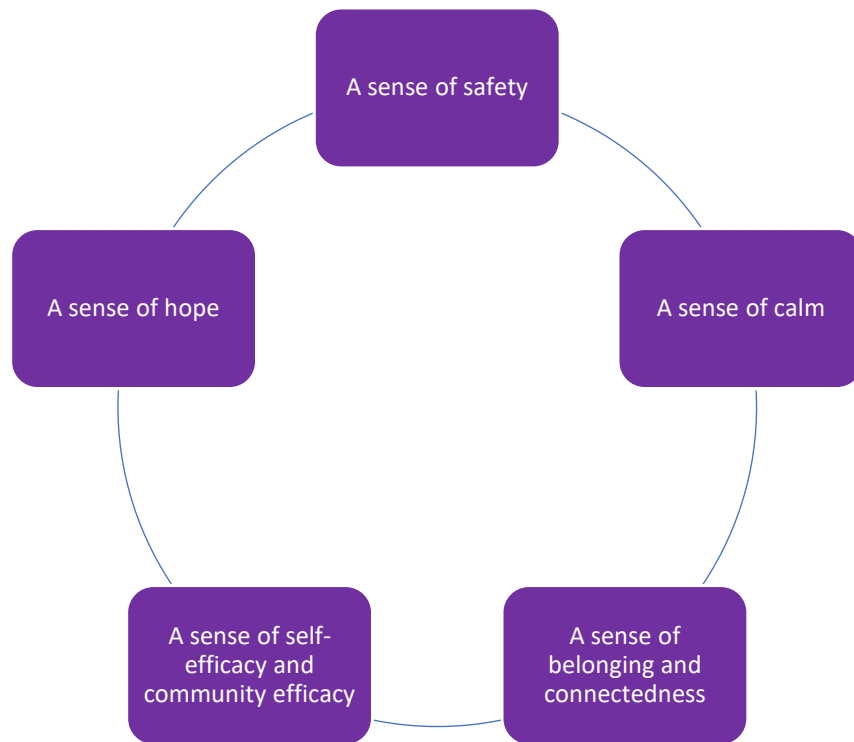
The guidance states that CLASS intervention hours must be used during the normal school day or where appropriate during lunch breaks. Some schools have expressed concern that withdrawing pupils for the additional support required will impact on their engagement with certain curricular areas and in-class activities, therefore contradicting the principle of inclusion and further isolating children who may have disengaged.

Recognising that class-based, peer-based activities are important for the social development of children who are identified as in need of additional support and promoting positive interactions with their peers, it is advised that the additional teaching hours must be provided during the normal school day with team-teaching and small-group teaching recommended.

However, in some cases, one-to-one support may be the most appropriate approach.

### **How should schools promote pupil wellbeing?**

The wellbeing of pupils can continue to be supported by fostering resilience using the same five key principles that were identified in previous guidance from the Department of Education to foster resilience in school communities throughout the pandemic.



Further suggestions are available in the NEPS Wellbeing Toolkit ([see here](#)).

## Monitoring and recording



### Who is involved in the planning of the CLASS programme?

Central to the aim of the CLASS scheme is targeted, pupil-centred support and it is important that children feel empowered and that their voice is listened to in the planning of programme content. Learning targets will be identified in collaboration with parents, relevant school staff and the pupils.

### How will the CLASS programme be assessed?

The focus of the programme is to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on educational standards by supporting pupils' learning and engagement on their return to school. It will be for schools to identify their own intended outcomes and associated success criteria and to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Internal school monitoring of progress is an essential feature of the CLASS programme including the use of teacher recording and observation. Schools should establish a tracking and recording system to ensure that the progress of all pupils participating in CLASS is monitored against targets agreed to each child.

When the CLASS intervention is complete, the allocated teacher in consultation with relevant teachers, parents/guardians and the pupils should update the Student Support File accordingly.

### **How will the Department of Education promote shared learning as referenced in Circular Letter 0045/2021?**

In addition to the provision of additional teaching hours, the Department of Education will support schools to share learning, so that schools can benefit from collaboration as strategies and practices that worked effectively to mitigate learning loss and support wellbeing throughout the pandemic can be communicated across the education system. It is anticipated that this sharing of expertise will benefit all schools and, importantly, enhance the quality of support provided to pupils/students. More details will be available later.

### **Where should queries in relation to the CLASS scheme be submitted?**

Queries on the content of this Circular should be emailed to the following email address: [CLASSQueries@education.gov.ie](mailto:CLASSQueries@education.gov.ie)