



8 March 2021

Dear Principal,

As you are aware the Government decided on a phased return of students to in-school education.

These phases have been developed in close collaboration with post primary education stakeholders and follow ongoing engagement with the Department of Health and Public Health, HSE.

The Department of Health and the HSE have reaffirmed that the gradual phased reopening can proceed as planned. The next phase of return is on Monday March 15th for 5th years in post primary schools.

Public health has reviewed the measures put in place to ensure safe operation of schools and is satisfied that these infection prevention and control measures, if rigorously adhered to, will keep the school community safe during this period. They emphasise that all measures must be followed carefully by students, staff and parents

In preparing for reopening I would like to remind schools of the additions to the COVID-19 Response Plan required by the Work Safely Protocol. These additions were communicated to all schools on the 23rd February. They can be found [here](#).

Schools are reminded of the following important infection control measures:

- **Avoiding unnecessary travel and minimising opportunities for students to congregate.** In the interests of minimising the spread of COVID-19, schools must make every effort to avoid organising events that could lead to the congregation of students and any unnecessary travel.
- Schools are reminded that they should not organise trips or visits for groups of students that require travel outside the school premises other than where normal instruction takes place on two or more sites (such as schools operating on split campuses). **There is no curricular or examination requirement that necessitates the organisation of such visits.**
- **Geography fieldtrips**
The organisation of Geography fieldtrips is not a requirement of the Leaving Certificate Geography course, and such trips should not be organised at the present time. Schools were advised in the **Assessment Arrangements for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021** available [here](#), that in the event of COVID-19 related travel restrictions, options other than the



geography field trip were to be used. For each leaving certificate cohort the State Examinations Commission provides a list of the options for the Geography Investigation. The 2021 list is available [here](#).

- **Informal meetings of students outside of school.** Schools are asked to remind students that informal meeting up outside school, for example to participate in a study group or to rehearse for a school-related activity, is not permitted under current public health restriction measures.

The Department is very appreciative of the ongoing efforts of the school community working to limit the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in schools and ensuring that the infection control measures put in place in line with the school COVID-19 response plans are effective in making schools safe for students and staff.

Yours faithfully,

Deirdre Shanley
Assistant Secretary