



IPPN Submission to the Department of Education and Skills

**Full re-opening of schools after COVID-19 mandated
closures**

13th May 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	IPPN RECOMMENDATIONS.....	2
3	KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES THAT REQUIRE CLARIFICATION	4
3.1	SOCIAL DISTANCING IN SCHOOLS.....	4
3.2	STAFF AND PUPIL WELLBEING.....	8
3.3	TEACHING AND LEARNING.....	9
3.4	SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	11
3.5	SCHOOL BUILDINGS	12
3.5.1	<i>All Schools</i>	<i>12</i>
3.5.2	<i>Small Schools – Specific Issues</i>	<i>13</i>
3.5.3	<i>Western Building Systems (WBS) – Specific Issues.....</i>	<i>13</i>
3.6	ADMINISTRATION.....	14
3.6.1	<i>Staffing.....</i>	<i>14</i>
3.6.2	<i>Summer.....</i>	<i>16</i>
3.6.3	<i>New school year.....</i>	<i>16</i>
3.6.4	<i>Finance.....</i>	<i>17</i>
3.7	PARENTAL CONCERNS	17

1 INTRODUCTION

This submission captures the issues, concerns and suggestions of school leaders in relation to the full reopening of our primary schools after the mandated COVID-19 closure of all schools on 12th March 2020.

Given the tight deadline, consultation with IPPN members was necessarily limited to the IPPN Board of Directors, National Council, certain Support Groups and other groups of school leaders who we engaged with in virtual meetings during the period 5-12 May, as well as key input from IPPN Support Office staff who handle member queries and advocacy.

Appendices 1 and 2 were provided by a school in North Wicklow, as an example of the types of issue that Boards of Management are grappling with. These illustrate the clarifications required by the Department of Education and Skills and other stakeholders, so that this school, and all other primary schools, can face into the transition back to onsite teaching and learning with confidence.

2 IPPN RECOMMENDATIONS

We will begin by highlighting our key recommendations. They are necessarily high level, but aim to encapsulate the main points as outlined by principals and deputy principals across the country, which are detailed in the next section - *Key issues and challenges that require clarification*.

1. **Clear guidance** in relation to all of the issues, challenges and concerns outlined below needs to be provided to all schools as soon as possible. Ideally it would be available online, so that the most up-to-date information is available when it is needed, and that it reflects current best practice. The most critical guidance relates to the protection of all members of the school community and the procedures and resources needed to ensure same.
2. Schools need to have **flexibility in how they allocate staff**, including Special Education Teachers, to comply with social distancing requirements.
3. **Additional funding** must be provided to schools up front to enable them to implement the guidelines in full. In addition, the **centralised procurement and distribution** to all schools of **appropriate and sufficient PPE equipment and materials** prior to their full reopening in the Autumn would greatly alleviate schools of a significant burden over the summer months.
4. **Support** must be given to schools in managing the full reopening of their buildings to staff and pupils – it must be a collaborative, rather than an inspection-based approach
5. **Additional leadership and management time** to be provided to teaching principals to flexibly meet the needs of the school. Some teaching principals may prefer to have additional support to focus on administration, so they can spend more time in the classroom – flexibility is the key here
6. **Training of all staff** must be provided prior to reopening - so everyone has the same information at the same time. Additional training of caretaking and cleaning staff is also required
7. **No school should lose a staff member** owing to COVID-19 e.g. parental decision to keep children at home/defer their child's start in junior infants
8. **A checklist for schools** - incorporating key short-term, medium-term and long-term actions – would be very helpful

9. **A 'General Contract'** to be provided centrally for all parents for the new school year to accept the new terms and conditions that balance the safety of the school community with their child's right to an education
10. **No new initiatives** can be introduced in primary schools in the 2020/21 school year - to respect school staff who must prioritise getting their schools up and running in very changed circumstances – this will be sufficiently challenging for the next school year
11. **Inspections should be paused** until at least January 2021. The role of inspectors should be temporarily changed to support schools to get back up and running and to restore normality.

3 KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES THAT REQUIRE CLARIFICATION

From the feedback we have received, it is clear that it is very difficult for principals, deputy principals and school Boards to engage in any form of planning in the absence of clear guidelines from the DES. Key information regarding the full reopening of schools needs to be with schools as soon as possible so that parents, children and staff can be reassured ahead of the September reopening. This would ideally include a checklist for schools - short term, medium term and long term actions – as well as detailed guidelines. The main issues, challenges and proposed solutions have been categorised and detailed below.

3.1 SOCIAL DISTANCING IN SCHOOLS

There are significant concerns about any school's ability to fully implement guidelines to protect everyone in the school community. Clarification in relation to the following will be a good starting point, but it must be borne in mind that it is not possible to fully eliminate risk in any primary school, given the age of pupils and the sheer number of people involved, the key issue being that there is no vaccination to help mitigate the risks of infection. At a minimum, **clear guidance applicable across all schools is required** in relation to the following:

- What is a school's 'starting point' for a full reopening?
- How much space is required between tables/desks, is there a maximum number in a classroom, is there an optimal layout etc. This is essential to figure out how many staff and pupils can be on site on any given day.



Courtesy of Margaret Beausang, principal of Kilcredan School, Ladysbridge, Co. Cork

- Training of ALL school staff is required before schools reopen – similar to the Child Protection training – so everyone has the same information at the same time
- Logging of those who have access to the school to facilitate contact tracing, if the need arises – what format, what details need to be captured. Ideally the format would be similar to the proposed tracing app
- Will principals need to minimise interaction with pupils and staff, to manage risk? There will be implications for communication and leadership
- What is required for the classroom/ staffroom/ building to be safe? See also *School Buildings* below.
 - Hygiene procedures - hand washing, hand sanitisers, cleaning
 - Is warm/hot water required?
 - Should children bring their own soap and sanitiser?
 - Is PPE required? What type? How to source? Funding for PPE? It must be equitable for all schools
 - Should cleaning companies be certified? What about cleaning staff employed directly by schools – is this feasible?
 - Is an isolation room required to deal with suspected illness?
 - Door handles / fire doors / push panels/bars - how do we ensure they are free from contamination? They are used extremely frequently by staff and pupils.

- The centralised procurement and distribution to all schools of appropriate and sufficient PPE equipment and materials prior to their full reopening in the Autumn would greatly alleviate schools of a significant burden over the summer months.
- A risk assessment template should be designed centrally for schools - to help determine what actions are required. The DES has some relevant documents and the HSA produced a good template for schools. Perhaps they could provide an updated template, including guidance on Coronavirus, based on templates related to infection control as a starting point. The ability of schools to administer and manage such procedures needs to be considered, especially small schools. In assessing risks, the responsibilities of everyone in the school community need to be clarified, as well as the resource implications:
 - Board of Management, as the employer
 - Principal and senior leadership team – day-to-day responsibility
 - Teachers / SNAs
 - Administration, caretaking/cleaning staff
 - Visitors / contractors
 - Parents
 - Pupils
- Based on the above, whether schools need to facilitate a **gradual phasing** of a return to onsite teaching and guidance re. options for same –
 - What can Boards do to facilitate a full reopening?
 - A number of school leaders measured their classrooms and indicated that to provide 2m distance between pupils and staff, they could probably manage to have one third of pupils in the classroom.
 - With additional training, give consideration to continuing remote learning in September, until the risks are considerably lower
 - When onsite learning is considered safe and practicable, consider options for pupil attendance, including the following:
 - Every other day
 - Every other week
 - Extended week
 - All classes in operation but 33% of pupils attend each day, thus 33% of the pupils in each classroom – pupils attend every third day
 - Are different approaches needed depending on pupil age e.g. infant classes?

[Note: in relation to proposals around 'half days' whereby some pupils would attend school in the morning, the remainder in the afternoon – there are significant issues for deep cleaning and the coordination of drop off and collection times, thus this is not considered feasible for any size of school]

- Children from the same family to attend school on the same day/s, along with pupils who do not have siblings up to a safe maximum number. This is likely to be the easiest approach for parents
- Note: there are potential childcare issues for staff if days are staggered.
- **Staggering of start/end times and breaks** to minimise number of people in shared spaces
 - toilets, corridors, staffroom, entrances/exits, yard
 - where there is a playground/yard, it would be segregated into zones with, for example, 6 pupils playing together each day in each zone (the same pupils in each group each day)
 - how to manage school drop off/collection to minimise interaction between parents/guardians/staff/pupils
- Guidance needs to take into account the different issues in smaller and larger schools
- Communication with parents and guardians in relation to restrictions – managing expectations and concerns - Information sessions for parents – centrally produced booklet and/or video to explain new safety procedures
- Sharing of desks, books, ICT devices, materials – how to prevent, funding to purchase additional resources to avoid sharing
- Helping young children understand the necessity for social distancing
- School transport and social distancing en route to school – impact on capacity, escorts...
- Field trips, excursions, tours, sports events
- Assembly time, staff meetings and other larger gatherings
- Preparation of meals for breakfast club, school meals programme and other food-related work
- Bathrooms and shared toilet spaces - recommendations around supporting children with toileting needs, cleaning of school bathroom and toilet areas, relevant PPE equipment etc.
- Staff rooms - Protocols around use of the staff room, cleaning of same after use. Should teachers and staff use the staff room at all?
- Policy needed for personnel travelling from school to school, such as shared teachers, an cigire, social workers, sales reps – as they could potentially carry the virus from school to school
- Insurance implications where a school cannot adhere to all guidance
- Implications for after school activities in the school building
- The main aim of schools when we return is to restore normality and reduce stress/anxiety. A notification of an inspection shortly after a school reopens would cause unnecessary stress and

pressure on everyone in the school community – therefore inspections should be paused until at least January 2021 and the focus of inspectors should shift to the provision of support to schools during the transition back to normality.

3.2 STAFF AND PUPIL WELLBEING

- Will staff be tested for Coronavirus prior to a full reopening? Whatever is put in place must also apply to subs, or anyone who will be in close proximity to other staff and/or pupils.
- How are SNAs to be protected, as they work very close to children with special needs - some are flight risks, others need help with eating and toileting?
- Full-time subs to be allocated to a cluster of schools to limit spread of infection between schools
- Support for teaching principals during the critical phase of transition back to onsite teaching – additional time to be provided to flexibly meet the needs of the school
- People with underlying medical conditions / who are immune-compromised/ immune-suppressed/ pregnant:
 - What are the expectations and the implications for them?
 - Can remote learning be continued to keep them safe?
 - Do staff with underlying conditions have to return to school – how would their absence be handled if deemed too dangerous? Is substitute cover provided for those who are social distancing?
 - Recommendations around staff work practices
- Procedures to manage a possible/confirmed outbreak - for monitoring health of pupils and staff in school
 - Dealing with staff and pupils showing symptoms that could point to COVID-19 infection
 - Notification to HSE/authorities in relation to possible cases/outbreak
- Mental health/emotional support for schools and pupils struggling to deal with restrictions/social distancing
- Concerns were expressed about creating negative interactions between teachers and pupils, and potentially leading to phobia (don't touch that, don't stand there etc.)
- Specific issues relating to pupils with SEN and Special Schools (see *SEN* section below)
- It is essential that school leaders have a minimum number of weeks' break from school work over the summer months – they have already been continuously out since 12th March putting new systems and procedures in place and have significantly more work to do before schools reopen on top of all the normal work they usually do onsite

- How to support children (especially infant pupils) when they fall / have a minor injury that is usually dealt with in school e.g. cut/scrape, as well as more serious issues e.g. children who may be prone to epileptic seizure (for example).
- Concerns where parents are unwilling to send their children back to school at all while the virus is present in the community – implications for those pupils’ learning and wellbeing.
- Parents of new junior infants deciding to keep their children back a year:
 - what are the implications in terms of pupil numbers on staff numbers for the coming school year - will schools lose staff because of Coronavirus?
 - Should schools mark current pupils absent?
 - Will the volume of attendance reports to NEWB/Tusla soar?

3.3 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The above issues and concerns around social distancing and the wellbeing of the school community lead to specific questions around the practicality of providing school-based teaching and learning from September:

- Consideration to be given to teachers remaining with their existing class, in the same class level, for a short period. The very abrupt closure of schools meant there was no chance to say goodbye, or to prepare pupils for the next class level. Sixth class pupils need closure to their primary school experience and junior Infants need the safety of what they were used to. Indeed, given the upheaval in recent months for everyone, all pupils and teachers would likely benefit from some continuity from the last school year to the next. If schools reopen in September, the move to new classes and new schools could take place in October or after the midterm break. This could pose difficulties for schools in relation to recruitment, class allocation and capacity planning, but could be considered among a range of options, by individual schools.

- How to manage remote and physical teaching concurrently - Is there an expectation that pupils not physically in schools will have remote learning support as well as those in schools receiving on-site support? Capacity for same would be a huge concern. No teacher can do both concurrently. Redeployment of special education teachers (SET) would be one option to explore. Consideration needs to be given to what can be offered – perhaps centrally - where capacity doesn't allow for remote learning to be facilitated at all. For example, can the RTÉ and TG4 TV programmes be continued, and indeed expanded, for the new school year to facilitate remote learning for pupils who are returning to school on a phased/staggered basis?
- The achievement gap – will children who have not 'enjoyed' the same access to online and remote learning support - due to little or no access to IT devices, or a lack of parental support - have fallen further behind as a result? Support will be needed for these pupils to help them 'catch up' with their peers
- How can certain aspects of the curriculum that usually involve physical contact be delivered e.g. PE/contact sports/paired reading?
- How can programs like woodwork/cookery be provided safely? Should schools switch the focus e.g. from cookery to nutrition? What supports are available for this?
- Supports for teachers working outside normal hours e.g. to facilitate remote learning of vulnerable pupils or an extended schedule. How can this be captured, recognised and recompensed?
- What is the expectation for SETs? If smaller class groupings are being proposed, how will SETs be deployed, should infant/senior classes/ disadvantaged children be prioritised for redeployment? Could they be deployed to facilitate remote learning?
- Will Resource Teachers for Travellers (RTTs) be reinstated to support vulnerable children in the Traveller/Roma communities?
- Schools should have a streamlined approach to homework during the transition phase. For example, an agreed approach for each class level could be adopted uniformly for the first term.
- Who is responsible for pupil preparation for religious sacraments that are postponed until the next school year- the 2019/20 class teacher or the 2020/21 class teacher? Again, to manage expectations and minimise frustration, an agreed universal approach would be beneficial.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The following are the additional issues raised by school leaders in the special schools and special classes sector:

- It is particularly important that there are clear guidelines for special schools to help alleviate the concerns that many children and their parents feel
- Working with pupils with very high care / medical needs is very 'hands on'. It is not possible to keep social distancing when helping with toileting and feeding, delivering physio programmes, hoisting, changing position/moving, using playground equipment, alighting from/getting on buses and so on.
- SEN pupils require face to face contact to gain their attention and can require the staff to be quite close. How can this be done safely?
- Supporting the feeding of children in a special schools and SEN settings
- Special school pupils would have very little grasp of the concept of social distancing. Some pupils spit and/or drool constantly. Most schools have pupils who are immuno-compromised - is it safe for them to return?
- How would SEN pupils respond to the use of PPE – for themselves, and for staff?
- Pupils with challenging behaviours pose additional risks in terms of physical distancing
- Implications for the use of sensory rooms, ball pools, trampolines, swings, soft play areas and other SEN equipment
- The additional cleaning required in a special school would far exceed that of a regular mainstream primary school. Significant concerns have been raised about who would do it / how often / what extra equipment and supplies are now required /how is it paid for and from where do the funds come?
- Special schools are already under extreme financial strain covering their basic needs, as well as the six-monthly service of hoists and other safety equipment, which can cost upwards of €10,000 a year. The Capitation Grant does not cover existing expenses as it is – how are schools to fund the extra cleaning and supplies when they are already struggling financially?
- SNAs - Implications for how they carry out their general duties
- Will staff need PPE equipment? Who will coordinate/supply/fund/provide training in the use of?
- In relation to SEN teachers and special classes within a mainstream school, can in-class support/integration be facilitated or are we putting everyone at an increased risk?

3.5 SCHOOL BUILDINGS

3.5.1 All Schools

The following pertain to all schools:

- Should a recognised authority review every school's readiness to reopen to ensure all criteria are met, and to escalate provision of additional resources where these have proved to be a barrier to a full reopening? In Denmark, the municipal council or the management body assesses a school's readiness based on the health authority's guidelines. In fact, this applies to every educational setting – day care centres, pre-schools, primary and post-primary schools, special educational settings etc.
- PPE, sanitising equipment requirements
- Training for cleaning and caretaking staff in relation to cleaning procedures, equipment and products
- Additional funding for deep cleaning and additional cleaning, particularly during transition phase, as well as disposable materials. Many schools do not have sufficient funding to clean the school daily.
- Many classrooms do not have washing facilities and/or hot water – what is the minimum requirement for classrooms specifically? Are outdoor washing facilities required?
- If classrooms are to be cleaned between groups of pupils, who is going to do that? Most schools do not have full-time cleaners/caretakers. Who will pay for it?
- Bathrooms and shared toilet spaces - recommendations around supporting children with toileting needs, cleaning of school bathroom and toilet areas, relevant PPE equipment etc...
- If modifications to plumbing/toilets are required, in the interest of a speedy resolution, can this be delivered locally and will there be funding available?
- Staff rooms - protocols around use of the staff room, cleaning of same after use. Should teachers and staff use the staff room/ communal space at all?
- How are visitors to schools to be managed? Should a directive be issued that only parents/inspectorate be allowed visit schools all other communication with a school be done via email or phone? If that cannot be mandated, agencies such as NEPS, Inspectorate, Tusla will need to produce their protocols and procedures for visiting schools to minimise risk.
- Availability of posters for all schools – entrances, toilets, classrooms, staff rooms
- Guidelines re. use of items that would usually be communal e.g. cutlery, crockery – should staff bring their own?

- Guidelines re. pupils' personal effects, such as toys, books and other items that would typically be shared
- How do we ensure social distancing during break times? Children will automatically group together for chats/games etc.
- Implications for Health and Safety Audits and Risk Assessments.

3.5.2 Small Schools – Specific Issues

- How will social distancing operate in smaller classrooms?
- Additional challenges of preparing for multi-grade classes where a staggered approach is needed, which may require a mix of onsite and remote learning for a time
- Not all classrooms are the DES-specified size, many are much smaller, so the number of pupils per room needs to be based on available space and classroom layout rather than on average/ideal figures
- How to manage in small school e.g. two teacher schools with no full-time SET or ancillary staff.

3.5.3 Western Building Systems (WBS) – Specific Issues

- Where projects are underway over the Summer to rectify building defects, when do school leaders and staff access the building to 'establish' the school? One such school has 13 appointments to make, 84 sixth class leaving (including 1 in the ASD class), 77 new infants starting (including 2 in the ASD class)
- WBS-built schools are in a race to get the construction work completed before schools are due to return. They have all the normal concerns, along with concerns as to when they can actually move back to school. Many of them can't access their schools from May 18th as they are construction sites.
- Can any additional support/flexibility be provided to these schools to help them get up and running?

3.6 ADMINISTRATION

New Zealand (NZ) has been lauded for its handling of Coronavirus and its ability to reopen the country relatively quickly. The NZ Ministry of Education centrally arranged for the distribution of devices, upgrades to internet/broadband and the distribution of hard-copy work packs. They created templates for schools which are clear and easy to use. A dedicated website was also established, providing clear, practical information applicable to all schools. A similar approach in Ireland would be strongly advised.

In addition to the above, a uniform approach to the following across schools is vital:

3.6.1 Staffing

- Schools should have flexibility in relation to how they allocate staff, including Special Education Teachers. Currently a principal cannot, by circular, use a SEN teacher to teach a class. In order to comply with social distancing requirements, if a school has space, they could for example create three classes instead of two using the SET, so long as they could show that they were still meeting the needs of the SEN pupil(s).
- Substitute cover for staff who may be unable to work in schools due to their own health or the health of a family member
- Concerns about the supply of substitute teachers - retirees and teachers on leave should be allowed to act as subs if they wish. Consider employing 4th year student teachers where there are supply issues.
- The splitting of classes that is usually done where no substitution is granted – e.g. EPV days, teacher absences that do not currently have cover such as uncertified sick leave, illness in family - cannot be facilitated in light of social distancing. To ensure sufficient staff available in schools, substitute cover must be provided. A uniform approach across all schools is vital. Teachers need to know about EPV days before they book and pay for courses.
- If sufficient staff to meet social distancing guidelines are not available to teach in schools, do schools have to close?
- Professionals/substitute teachers/shared teachers travelling between schools – will paperwork/permits be required?
- Do staff need to complete a self-declaration form about Covid-19 illness/contact with someone with Covid-19/whether they are in a 'vulnerable' category?

- Staff who live with frontline workers – are there specific guidelines for them in terms of managing risk?

3.6.2 Summer

- July provision – is it going ahead? how can it be delivered in the context of social distancing?
- Expectations around contact with schools and parents during July and August
- Recruitment - How will interviews take place? It may not be practical to have virtual interviews if there is poor broadband/no Wi-Fi in schools/homes.
- School Calendar - If schools are directed to open in September, can discretion be given to returning in August vis-à-vis the standardised school year?

3.6.3 New school year

- A checklist for schools - short term, medium term and long term actions – would be very helpful
- A hold needs to be put on new initiatives being introduced to schools in the coming year
- A 'General Contract' for all parents for the new school year to accept the new terms and conditions that balance the safety of the school community with their child's right to an education
- Standard approach to deal with parents or children who break social distancing rules or who refuse to accept the 'General Contract' referred to above
- Agreement with insurance providers that they will cover schools' risks in relation to COVID-19
- Completion of all the 'normal' documentation in advance of a new school year, given that teachers and principals have not been able to access school buildings at the time of this submission:
 - Challenges in the provision of information about current sixth class pupils to their post-primary school
 - School attendance and completion - clarity is required around procedures for recording absences and the communication with parents
 - Clear procedures for all schools regarding new Junior Infants is crucial. Usually, at this time of year, schools would hold induction mornings so that those pupils would become acquainted with the school, and staff are also on hand to observe, note atypical behaviours and maybe contact parents regarding issues observed. Supporting JI parents who are new to the school will also be challenging.
 - Clarity around open evenings which usually occur in September and October and how this could be approached before the window for admission is opened
- Potential to host a graduation of current sixth class pupils during the new school year – GDPR, insurance and other considerations need to be taken into account.

3.6.4 Finance

- Funding will be of major concern going forward for all schools:
 - Funding of additional cleaning – training, equipment, materials, staff hours
 - One principal conducted a review of potential costs and asked suppliers to provide indicative prices:
 - Hand sanitizers, €15 per unit for the dispensers and €15 for the sanitizer. A medium-size school would need at least 12 of each €360 and then €180 per refill, likely to be twice a week
 - Disposable gloves €4.80 per box of 100 - 21 staff, 2 cleaners = €120 per week
 - Disposable aprons €9 per 200 on a roll, start off with one roll per staff member €200 approximately
 - Anti-bacterial spray and hand soap x 100 per week = €600 a week
 - Plus extra refuse sacks, soap and z fold towels that we normally spend about €500 per month on
 - The new estimated cost per month €3,000
- It should be noted that many schools generate vital income through the rental of halls and parental contributions. This income subsidises essential school maintenance in many cases. How will this be taken into account in the full reopening of schools and funding for the coming year?

3.7 PARENTAL CONCERNS

Parents will of course have concerns about most, if not all of the above issues and challenges. Other concerns they have raised include:

- Managing their own return to work while schools not delivering onsite teaching full-time – childcare issues
- Broadband and access to devices is an issue in many families
- Financial concerns – far more families may need the Back to School grant
- Managing a high volume of communication – especially for smaller schools with teaching principals
- Handling of complaints – BoM responsibilities.

Appendix 1 - ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED PRIOR TO RE-OPENING

A.N. OTHER SCHOOL

Responsibilities of the Board of Management

It is the responsibility of the Board of Management

- to ensure compliance with all advice and recommendations issued by the Department of Education in respect of the re-opening of schools
- to ensure protocols for hygiene practices and etiquette are disseminated to parents and staff members including
 - o handwashing with water and liquid soap, and when it is necessary to
 - o use of hand sanitizer
 - o cleaning of surfaces (tables, door handles, toilets, etc.)
- to ensure the school has access to sufficient supplies of liquid soap, hand sanitizer, etc.
- to ensure adequate arrangements are in place for the thorough cleaning of rooms after use
- to ensure protocols for social distancing are disseminated to parents and staff members including
 - o suitable arrangements for the drop off and collection of children
 - o numbers of children allowable in classrooms at one time
- to ensure signage with regard to hygiene and social distancing protocols are displayed prominently throughout the school building
- to ensure protocols for the wearing of PPE by staff are disseminated to parents and staff
- to ensure the school has sufficient supplies of relevant PPE
- to ensure protocols are agreed and disseminated to parents and staff with regard to how instances of children or staff presenting with symptoms related to Covid-19 are to be handled
- to ensure there are protocols in place if the schools receives confirmation that a child, parent or staff member has tested positive for Covid-19
- to make decisions as to whether it is sufficiently safe to open the school.

Other Considerations for the Board of Management

- Accommodations for staff with relevant underlying health conditions
- Accommodations for staff with immediate family members with relevant underlying health conditions, or living with frontline workers
- Accommodations for staff who do not have childcare available to them for dependents
- Accommodations for children with relevant underlying health conditions or children with parents with relevant underlying health conditions
- Accommodations for children whose parents do not wish them to attend school.

See Appendix 2 below for school re-opening options.

In making decisions about the practical arrangements to be put in place so that the school can re-open, account must be taken of the following:

Hygiene etiquette

To ensure good hygiene:

- all staff and students must use hand sanitizer upon arrival at the school
- all staff and students must wash their hands using water and liquid soap at least once in every two-hour period
- all staff and children must cough or sneeze into their elbow

- all staff and student must wash their hands after coughing or sneezing
- all staff and student must dispose responsibly of tissues, paper towels, etc.
- all staff should wear disposable gloves when handling materials (books/copies) belonging to the children
- all materials used by children in school should remain in school and materials that children use at home should remain at home
- children may only handle their own materials and must not handle those of others (borrow, share, etc.)
- all staff and students must use hand sanitizer if moving between rooms.

Cleaning

- each room (including toilet areas) and all contact points must be cleaned thoroughly before use by another group of students
- shared resources must be cleaned thoroughly before use by other children
- communal toilet areas must be cleaned at least twice a day
- communal toilet areas must be supervised
- toilet seats must be cleaned with a disposable wipe after use by the children
- bins must be emptied at least once a day
- keyboard and computer mouse must be cleaned daily with disposable wipes - hands must be sanitized or washed before and after use of keyboard and mouse.

Social Distance Protocols

- children must be positioned so that there is a minimum of two metres between each child (per current HSE guidelines)
- it may be necessary to split class into groups and use more than one classroom to ensure the social distance protocols are observed
- alternatively, only smaller groups from each class should be in school at any one time (co-ordination to ensure siblings are accommodated at the same times would be required)
- if activities can take place outside, it is recommended to do so
- starting and finishing times may be staggered to ensure smaller numbers of adults on school grounds at any one time
- children should be brought to and collected from school only by immediate family members
- the school building should be accessed by adults other than staff members only when absolutely necessary
- all queries to teachers from parents should be done via email
- children should line up in such a way as to ensure a minimum of two metres between each child
- markings must be in place to indicate 2 metre spaces where children line up to enter the building
- if an option to reopen is chosen which would require the group of students to attend for a period of longer than 2 hours, then break times will be required and consideration will need to be given to how children are accommodated and supervised in the yard
- in such circumstances, any member of staff who may be required to administer first aid will need access to specific PPE.

Arrangements for Staff

- social distancing protocols must be observed by staff
- meetings between staff members can be convened online or in such a way as to ensure social distancing protocols are observed
- break times will be organized in such a way that limited numbers access the staffroom at the same time so that social distancing protocols are observed

- where possible and practical, staff should wear disposable gloves
- staff should use hand sanitizer before and after using the photocopier.

Particular Considerations for Infant Classes

- maintaining social distancing protocols with Infant classes will be problematic and may require additional PPE
- increased levels of cleaning will be required in Infant rooms
- increased levels of supervision will be required for children from Infant classes who are using communal toilet areas (this could be provided by SNA's whose children were not attending school at that time)
- such supervision will involve reminders about wiping the toilet seat, hand-washing and maintaining social distance, where possible
- only shared resources that can be cleaned after use should be made available for structured activity times (i.e. – no playdough).

Particular Considerations for Children with Special Needs

- maintaining social distancing protocols with special needs (particularly those with care needs) will be problematic and will require additional PPE for SNA's and staff members who may have close personal contact with them
- movement of children to and from support settings should be kept to a minimum and support should be offered, where practical and possible, in or in the vicinity of the child's classroom.

Miscellaneous Issues

- as considerable teacher/pupil contact time has been lost and it is likely that contact time in the immediate future will be reduced, core concepts and aspects of the curriculum should be prioritised
- the provision of online activities and resources will need to be continued for those children who can't or don't attend school
- it will be particularly important to be mindful of the particular stresses with which children are coping and the potential consequential impact on their mental and physical well-being
- particular consideration would need to be given to the appropriateness of speech and drama / games / orchestra being accommodated as such teachers/coaches would be working with more than one group (if particular protocols are observed this could be possible)

Appendix 2 – Reopening Options A.N. Other School

Option	Description	Pros	Cons
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class attends for whole day but are split into smaller groups and are accommodated in different rooms. • Specific classes attend on specific days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children receiving agreed inputs at the same time • No need for thorough cleaning between groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More staff required • Content taught to same class by different people • Play/break time required
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole class attends for 2-hour period but are split into smaller groups and are accommodated in different rooms. • Specific classes attend on specific days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children receiving agreed inputs at the same time • More classes are accommodated in one day • Reduced handwashing required • No need for play/break times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More staff required • Content taught to same class by different people • Need for thorough cleaning between groups
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller group attends for whole day • Different groups attend on different days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to manage drop off and collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same content taught multiple times • Requires co-ordination between siblings • Play/break time required
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller group attends for 2-hour period • Different groups attend on different days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More groups are accommodated in one day • Easier to manage drop off and collection • Reduced handwashing required • No need for play/break times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same content taught multiple times • Requires co-ordination between siblings • Need for thorough cleaning between groups