



**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary Schools  
And the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards of Community  
National Schools**

**COVID-19:**

**Temporary Changes to the Parental Leave Scheme and Unpaid Leave Scheme and other  
temporary arrangements  
for Teachers employed in recognised Primary Schools**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The next phase of the partial re-opening of primary schools will take place on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021, to facilitate in-school provision for Junior Infant, Senior Infant, First Class and Second Class pupils. The Department is cognisant that there may be teachers who, due to specific circumstances which exist at this time, may be unable to attend the workplace and require more flexibility in relation to leave arrangements.
- 1.2 In order to provide support to teachers, there will be a temporary change in specific terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and the Unpaid Leave Scheme during this partial re-opening period, as detailed in this Information Note.
- 1.3 The changes for this next phase of partial re-opening of primary schools are to be implemented by each employer with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021. Aside from the temporary changes detailed in this Information Note, all teachers must continue to adhere to the agreed terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and Unpaid Leave Scheme.
- 1.4 Where an application for leave is in process up to the relevant date of re-opening, a teacher should be facilitated to continue to work remotely in the interim days. However, from the date of this partial re-opening phase i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> March, a teacher who is required by the school to be on-site to support pupils and cannot attend the workplace due to childcare considerations, must utilise these leave arrangements.
- 1.5 Schools are required to ensure that there are sufficient staff numbers on site to facilitate the safe operation of in-school teaching and learning and the phased arrangements outlined below to support schools to implement the interim opening.
- 1.6 In circumstances where a teacher has been certified as medically unfit to attend the workplace or where a teacher is on approved leave during this period of partial re-opening, the employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace this teacher in the classroom.

- 1.7 The contents of this Information Note also applies to teachers employed in special schools and special classes in mainstream primary schools. Therefore, this Information Note supersedes Information Note TC 0001/2021.

## **2. Parental Leave Scheme**

### **2.1(a) Application Procedures**

The Parental Leave Scheme at Chapter 5 of Circular 54/2019 states the following at paragraph 6.1:

*'Application for Parental Leave should be made by the teacher to his/her employer at least 6 weeks prior to the planned commencement date using the Application Form at Appendix A.'*

- 2.1(b) Employers should at their discretion, under Section 8(4) of the Parental Leave Act, 1998 waive or reduce the requirement for the 6 week notification for Parental Leave applications, during this period of partial re-opening.
- 2.1(c) Where this 6 week notification requirement is waived, the deadlines detailed for the employer Confirmation Document referenced at paragraph 6.2 and the notification to the Department/ETB at paragraph 7.1 of the Parental Leave Scheme should be adjusted accordingly.

### **2.2(a) Pattern of Parental Leave**

The Parental Leave Scheme states the following at paragraph 4.1:

*'A teacher may avail of Parental Leave in blocks of at least one week up to a maximum of 22 weeks (26 weeks from 1st September 2020). Please note each period of Parental Leave must be a minimum duration of 7 consecutive days including weekends, school closures and days on which a teacher is not timetabled for attendance occurring within that period.'*

- 2.2(b) A teacher may be unable to attend the workplace on certain days during this period, due to specific circumstances. An employer should, having considered the circumstances, approve Parental Leave in blocks of less than one week, where the teacher is eligible to apply for Parental Leave.
- 2.2(c) Prior to the approval of such a Parental Leave arrangement, the employer and the teacher must agree in advance, the pattern of workplace attendance, during this period of partial re-opening.
- 2.2(d) For non-ETB schools, where Parental Leave applications for less than blocks of one week, are approved by the employer, the details of this leave should be recorded on the On Line Claims System (OLCS). An employer can record Parental Leave in separate days on the OLCS as Leave Category "Family Leave" followed by Leave Sub Category "Special Pattern of Parental Leave in Exceptional Circumstances".

## **3. Unpaid Leave Scheme**

- 3.1 The Unpaid Leave Scheme at Chapter 11 of Circular 54/2019 allows for a maximum of 10 unpaid school days in each school year. Paragraph 1.1 states:

*'Unpaid Leave may be granted in exceptional circumstances where the employer is satisfied that there is a compelling obligation involving absence from duty.'*

Paragraph 2.1 states:

*'Applications for Unpaid Leave should be made to the employer at least 6 weeks prior to the planned commencement date, using the Application Form at Appendix A.'*

- 3.2 During this period of partial re-opening, an employer should ease this requirement in order to provide a level of flexibility for teachers who cannot source childcare for school age children.

#### **4. Employer Policy on Teacher Absences**

- 4.1 The employer must take account of the availability of appropriately qualified replacement teachers, when considering applications for non-statutory leave.
- 4.2 In circumstances where a teacher has been certified as medically unfit to attend the workplace or where a teacher is on approved leave during this period of partial re-opening, the employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace this teacher in the classroom.

#### **5. Teachers at higher risk of COVID-19**

- 5.1 An employer should, where a teacher has been categorised by the Occupational Health Service (Medmark) as at High Risk of serious illness if he/she contracts COVID-19, during this phase and on a temporary basis, facilitate more flexible working arrangements made possible by the presence of significantly reduced pupil attendance. A teacher who is over 60 years of age should also be temporarily facilitated by these arrangements. This may include re-assignment of a teacher to other duties within the school or at home. This may include the re-assignment of teacher roles within the complement of teachers available to the school.
- 5.2 Such teachers may carry out on a temporary basis, tasks appropriate to the list of duties incorporated at paragraph 12 of [Circular 0049/2020](#) in this respect. This may include supporting pupils who have not returned to school because of medical vulnerability as well as supporting other school staff, including other teachers, SNAs or administrative staff. These duties include:
- Liaising closely with and supporting the work of the substitute teacher(s) who becomes responsible for the teaching duties of the teacher on special leave with pay.
  - Supporting and engaging, using online technology, the work and progress of very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend school.
  - Participating in staff meetings, team/subject planning meetings and all other normal meetings using online technology.
  - Participating in relevant professional development through online media.
  - Developing aspects of the school's teaching resources or teaching plans.
  - Undertaking administrative or other tasks associated with a post of responsibility (provided they hold the post in line with relevant DES publications) to the greatest extent possible using online technology.

- 5.3 A teacher who has been categorised as High Risk by Medmark or a teacher who is over 60 years of age, who is facilitated to work remotely during this period of phased return to school, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system. The employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace the High Risk teacher in the classroom.
- 5.4 All arrangements made under this section are temporary measures and are in place only for this partial re-opening period where, to minimise movement in the State, schools are not in a position to re-open fully.
- 5.5 At all other times, teachers must be available in the normal way to support pupils as required, provided that they are given appropriate PPE and that the school is fully implementing their COVID-19 Response Plan.

## **6. Pregnant teachers at higher risk of COVID-19**

- 6.1 The HSE has recently published guidance for the education sector in respect of pregnant employees. Upon the full re-opening of schools, this HSE guidance will be implemented in the education sector. The Department will provide employers with details of these new arrangements in advance of a full re-opening of schools.
- 6.2 In the meantime, during this period of partial re-opening, a pregnant teacher should consider themselves in the High Risk category and the teacher should temporarily continue to work remotely.
- 6.3 In this regard, a pregnant teacher who is facilitated to work remotely, during this partial re-opening period, must be recorded by the employer under the OLCS leave sub-category 'Personal Leave', sub-category titled 'COVID-19: Very High Risk Group' or on the relevant ETB system. The employer may appoint a substitute paid by the Department/ETB to replace the pregnant teacher in the classroom.
- 6.4 A pregnant teacher who feels they may be at Very High Risk of serious illness from COVID-19 can submit an on-line application for COVID-19 Health Risk Categorisation or re-categorisation to Medmark.

## **7. Review**

- 7.1 The changes to the terms and conditions of the Parental Leave Scheme and the Unpaid Leave Scheme and other arrangements set out in this Information Note, will be kept under review by the Department during this period of partial re-opening.
- 7.2 No temporary adjustments to these leave schemes or temporary arrangements constitute a precedence for longer term arrangements following the full re-opening of schools and are being facilitated only in the context of increased flexibility available to schools because of the very limited attendance patterns in this period.

**8. Employee Assistance Service**

- 8.1 The [Employee Assistance Service](#) is available as a supportive resource for employees. The free phone confidential helpline is 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**9. Circulation of Information Note**

- 9.1 Please ensure that copies of this Information Note are provided to all members of the Board of Management/Education and Training Boards and its contents are brought to the attention of all teachers in your employment including those on leave of absence.

All queries should initially be brought to the attention of the employer who may wish to consult with their representative organisation. Any further queries may be directed to the Department at the following email address: [teachersna@education.gov.ie](mailto:teachersna@education.gov.ie)

Clare Butler  
Principal Officer  
Teacher/SNA Terms & Conditions

Padraig Maloney  
Principal Officer  
Payroll Division

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