

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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To All School Principals

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Dear Principal

WRAPAROUND CARE, OUTDOOR SCHOOL SPORTS AND SINGING/MUSIC PROVISION

You will be aware that in early March the Executive published the document “*Moving Forward: The Executive’s Pathway Out of Restrictions*”. This provides a strategic plan for the easing of restrictions in a cautious and staged approach in order to avoid a cycle of restrictions. In education, we have now thankfully reached the point where schools have reopened for all pupils and we are now in stage 3 of the Executive’s plan for the easing of education restrictions, which is described as a “gradual easing phase”. We will continue to seek to ease restrictions wherever possible, however this can only be done having taken full account of the relevant public health advice.

As restrictions have been gradually eased, I have sought to prioritise the core curriculum activities within schools. This has meant that pupils are now able to enjoy the majority, but not all, of the educational activities that would have been available before the pandemic, provided that the guidance is adhered to and the appropriate mitigations are in place. There are some activities that have not yet been able to resume, and I would ask for your patience as we have to allow time for public health staff to monitor and analyse the ever changing epidemiological picture to ensure that we are able to respond in a timely and measured way. This will allow us to steadily progress along the Executive’s pathway in a sustainable manner, while doing all that we can to ensure we all remain safe.

In the context of continuing to seek to make measured relaxations in line with public health advice, I can now provide you with an update on the position in relation to three areas.

Wraparound Care

Following further engagement with the Department of Health and the Executive Office, I can confirm that schools can now provide wraparound care for pupils with immediate effect. This includes the provision of care both before and after school, for example the provision of breakfast clubs and after school care such as homework clubs.

The position remains unchanged in respect of all other extra-curricular activities, (with the exception of aspects of schools sports, see below) however my Department

continues to engage with the Department of Health in relation to the most appropriate means to permit a resumption of all such activities when it is safe to do so.

Extra-Curricular School Sports

In relation to the provision of extra-curricular school sports, regulations have been amended to permit the resumption of outdoor extra-curricular schools' sports with immediate effect. Indoor extra-curricular sports or inter-schools sports are not permitted at this time. It is essential that schools adhere to the guidance set by the relevant sports' governing body. There is no maximum number of participants specified within the regulations, however schools should seek to implement mitigating measures to ensure the safety of pupils and staff wherever possible, including the use of bubbles to reduce the number of close contacts each pupil has and by following the guidance set by the relevant sport's governing body. Schools should note that both indoor and outdoor PE continue to be permitted during normal school hours however it is recommended this should take place outdoors wherever possible.

Singing and Playing of Woodwind and Brass Instruments

You will be aware that in my letter to you of 1 April, I stated that no indoor singing or playing of wind or brass instruments should take place on school premises. In parallel, the Education Authority temporarily paused its Music Service. This decision took account of public health and scientific advice on this issue. As part of the Executive's measured and cautious approach, singing and the playing of woodwind and brass instruments were identified as being potentially more likely to facilitate transmission of the virus. In order to allow the focus to be on ensuring all pupils were able to return to school, indoor singing and playing of woodwind and brass instruments were paused. In parallel, the Education Authority decided that it would pause its wider Music Service while it examines how it can resume safely.

My Department has continued to engage with the Department of Health on this issue and I can confirm that pupils taking a practical music assessment for GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications that requires singing or the playing of a woodwind or brass instrument will now be permitted to do so indoors. This can be done providing suitable mitigations are in place such as ensuring suitable social distancing and that rooms are well ventilated. The EA is urgently reviewing its guidance for its Music Service and the appropriate mitigations will be included within this guidance in order to ensure that the safe resumption of music provision can take place as soon as possible.



Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education