

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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To School Principals

Dear Principal

UPDATE ON PHASED RETURN OF PUPILS TO SCHOOL

Following the Executive meeting this morning, I wish to update schools on the arrangements that the Executive agreed in relation to the return of schools. While you may already be aware of the decisions through the media, I am writing to you to provide more detail.

My main objective has always been a full return of all pupils to school in line with public health advice. Education has rightly been prioritised by the Executive for all the benefits that brings to our children and also for the longer term societal and economic benefits.

I recognise that a longer period of notice before pupils return to school would be preferable, however the Executive wished to consider my proposals as part of the wider review of the COVID restrictions that took place today.

I believe that we have now reached an important milestone in our journey through this pandemic and one that gives us a timetable for all of our children to return to school to engage in face to face teaching and enjoy the company of their peers.

Previous Executive decisions permitted the return of pre-school and Primaries 1-3 from 8 March, and to remain in school until the Easter break. Years 12-14 will also return on 22 March. In addition, I can further advise that today it was agreed:

- Primary pupils in P4-P7 can return to full-time face-to-face teaching from 22 March.
- Post-primary pupils in Years 8-11 will be returning to full-time face-to-face teaching from 12 April. This will be subject to a review at the end of March.

Schools should continue to provide remote learning until pupils return to school. Schools should also continue to provide supervised learning for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers until either they are scheduled to return to school or the start of their scheduled

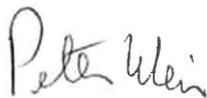
Easter holidays, whichever is sooner. Special schools and EOTAS Centres will continue to operate as normal.

School managed breakfast clubs, education visits, inter-school sports and after school activities will remain paused until advised otherwise. My department will liaise with the Department of Health to clarify the position before schools return after Easter.

Registered childcare providers operating breakfast clubs and after school care remain open and are unaffected.

Changes to the Temporary Continuity Direction will be made as a matter of urgency on the basis of the decisions reached today by the Executive.

I am grateful for the effort that both you and your staff continue to make in supporting all of our children through this incredibly challenging time. Tremendous work has gone into providing remote learning for pupils, and today we are a large step closer to the point where they can reach their full potential in a classroom setting.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Weir".

PETER WEIR, MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION