

12 March, 2020

STATEMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

An announcement was made this morning by the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD of the closure of schools, pre-schools and further and higher education settings, for a period until 29 March 2020, to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. This will take effect from 6pm this evening, Thursday 12 March. This is in line with the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team.

All pupils and students, from pre-school to third level are urged to practice social distancing, and to minimise physical contact with each other, to help avoid the spread of Covid-19. This should include minimising social contact, avoiding meeting up and keeping physical space between them. Parents and guardians are urged to support their children to maintain this approach.

In order to minimise the impact on teaching and learning, all schools will be asked to continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide online resources for students or online lessons where schools are equipped to do so. Schools are asked to be conscious of students that may not have access to online facilities and to consider this actively in their response.

Schools are asked to prioritise supporting exam classes to continue to prepare for State examinations.

Physical classes in universities and higher education facilities will not be held during the closure. Institutions can make other arrangements for teaching and learning and other activities in line with their business continuity plans and contingency planning.

Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD said:

“I am deeply conscious of the impact that school and education setting closures have on students, on families and on the wider community. This is a necessary and proportionate measure that we are taking as a pro-active measure to help contain the threat of Covid-19.

“This is the right decision at the right time. It is taken in the best interests of our children, our young people, our school and college communities and our wider society.

“At this point in time the closure is planned for two weeks, from tomorrow until 29 March. The Government, in conjunction with the public health authorities, will keep the situation under ongoing review. Any change to that date will be communicated widely.

“Pupils should take their books and learning materials home with them this evening.

“This is a very challenging time for our pupils, our teachers, our students and our colleagues in further and higher education.

“Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine – we all live in one another’s shadow. If there was ever a time for us to appreciate how closely we are connected, how much what we do matters to others, how much we rely on each other, this is it. This is a time where we all need to work together for the best possible outcome for our students. The support of everyone across the sector is vital, as we all strive to ensure that this threat is dealt with as effectively as possible.”

The Department of Education and Skills will remain open and will continue to provide supports to the education sector at this time.

The Department of Education and Skills has been liaising closely on a continual basis with the Department of Health in relation to Coronavirus/Covid-19 since early January. This will continue.