



13 March 2020

Dear Principal and Teachers

As you all know the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD yesterday announced the closure of schools, pre-schools and further and higher education settings, for students, for a period until 29 March 2020, to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. This is in line with the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team. The Government, in conjunction with the public health authorities, will keep the situation under ongoing review. Any change to that date will be communicated as soon as it is known.

All pupils in schools are urged to practise 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.

This is an unprecedented situation and we are all conscious that in difficult times school communities come together to find solutions and always work in the best interest of their students. The Department is aware that schools have been actively engaging in contingency planning for an event such as this over the past few weeks.

In order to minimise the impact on teaching and learning all schools are 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. School buildings should be available to staff if they wish to access the facilities in order to provide online delivery, or essential services once this is in line with HSE advice on social distancing etc.

In order to assist all schools to support students your attention is drawn to a range of online resources to assist schools to provide ongoing support to students during school closures.

Scoilnet is a resource to support schools, teachers, students and parents. Scoilnet has a number of home usage supports for teachers and students to benefit from, these are detailed in Appendix 1. Scoilnet will be updating the material available on its website regularly.



In addition to the Scoilnet there are other resources available to schools. The Digital Technology team has developed a new dedicated webpage of curated content to support schools and teachers engaged in distance learning in order to provide continuity to pupils/students. The page can be accessed at:

<https://www.pdst.ie/distancelearning>.

Using some of the online platforms and/or tools that are detailed on this page, schools will be enabled to limit the impact of school closures by giving learners access to materials, support, classwork and feedback.

This is a very challenging time for schools, teachers, students and parents. It is critical that during these challenging times we continue to work together and that the focus of all is on the best possible outcomes for our students. The support of everyone across the sector is vital, as we all strive to ensure that this public health threat is dealt with as effectively as possible.

The Department of Education and Skills, and its various services, will remain available providing advice and supports to the education sector at this time.

Yours sincerely

Seán Ó Foghlú  
Secretary General



## Appendix 1: Scoilnet

Scoilnet is a resource to support schools, teachers, students and parents and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.scoilnet.ie/scoilnet/news/article/news/detail/News/des-announcement-and-scoilnet-supports/>

1. **Scoilnet Website** – students and teachers can access over 20,000 resources shared by primary and post-primary teachers anytime, anywhere. Search materials by class/year group, subject, strand, and learning outcomes.
2. **World Book Online** –all students in Ireland have open and free home access to World Book Online. World Book is a trusted encyclopedia containing thousands of informational articles with stunning illustrations, videos, interactive maps, research help, and activities.
3. **Scoilnet Dedicated Subject Pages** – the Scoilnet team is working hard to bring teachers and students dedicated post-primary subject pages where they will find teacher-shared collections, collections by organisations, and what's in demand or popular on Scoilnet right now for their subject area.  
Choose from: [Maths](#), [Science](#), [Irish](#), [English](#), [History](#), [Modern Foreign Languages](#), [Geography](#), [Politics and Society](#).
4. **Scoilnet Theme pages** –primary school teachers and students can access subject-based themed pages. Each theme page presents a set of links and resources on a particular topic.
5. **Scoilnet Learning Paths** –a Learning Path is a feature on Scoilnet that enables teachers to select and organise resources from the Scoilnet site into a sequence or collection and quickly share it with their peers or pupils.
6. **Scoilnet Threads** – assign an oral History project and watch as your students submit their projects online through the Threads online space.
7. **CensusAtSchool** – get your Maths class to participate in the CensusAtSchool national online questionnaire. The class data is then collated and made available to class teachers, so that students can see the real-life relevance of statistics.



## Appendix 2:

### Information regarding the platforms/tools available to support distance learning

The PDST Digital Technology team has developed a new dedicated webpage of curated content to support schools and teachers engaged in distance learning in order to provide continuity to pupils/students.

Using some of the online platforms and/or tools that are detailed on this page, schools will be enabled to limit the impact of school closures by giving learners access to materials, support, classwork and feedback. There are a number of dedicated areas on the webpage (available at [www.pdst.ie/distancelearning](http://www.pdst.ie/distancelearning)) to support teachers in this task.

- **The Platform Section:** This section explores the different online platforms that schools are currently using or may choose to use to connect with their pupils/ students as they continue their learning experience at home (for example, Microsoft Office, GSuite, etc.). The key features of each platform are outlined, as well as how these can be used for the purposes of distance learning.
- **The Reliable Sources of Information Section:** Content in this section highlights reliable online repositories where teachers can access curriculum-related content to plan lessons and can share curated information with their pupils (e.g. Using Learning Paths in Scoilnet). Attention in this section is also drawn to websites that learners can access at home to engage in remote learning/ project-based work/ etc. Here resources such as World Book Online, DK Findout and Epic are featured.
- **The Online Tools Section:** Within this section a number of digital tools are explored which teachers can use to support pupils/ students who are learning at home. Each tool featured in this section is described, linked to how it might be used in practical terms for distance learning and also includes links to associated resources/ video tutorials etc.
- **The Video Content Section:** Here a number of video hosting sites are listed which teachers can use to source and share appropriate digital content with their pupils/ learners to explore topics and consolidate learning at home.