



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Summer Programme Guidance for Teaching and Learning

Home-based strand

Introduction

Teaching and learning were disrupted for children with complex special educational needs (SEN) over the course of the past two school years. To address some of the issues children with complex SEN have experienced, the Department is offering a school-based summer programme for a range of children with SEN and, where this is not available locally, a home-based programme may be accessed instead.

This guidance from the Department of Education provides a framework for the home-based summer programme provided by teachers to support children with special educational needs (SEN). Alternatively, parents may choose to avail of the services of an SNA to provide a programme of care to a child who meets the eligibility criteria. Further details relating to this aspect of the home-based summer programme are to be found in Appendix 1. The guidance should be read in conjunction with the [overview document](#) prepared by the Department to guide the operation of the home-based summer programme.

The desired outcomes for the children who will avail of the programme are that they will maintain their reconnection with the school, develop a better sense of their own wellbeing and experience increased confidence to continue with their education.

The key principles and approaches outlined in this guidance document are intended to assist parents in instructing the teacher(s)/tutor(s) they choose to deliver the home-based programme to address wellbeing, continuity of learning, aspects of educational regression, reconnecting with school and transitions. Parents opting to avail of the home-based programme should ensure that teacher(s)/tutor(s) are provided with a copy of this guidance and access to the child's most recent support plan which will be available from the child's school.

Key themes of this guidance

- Programme content
- Use of technology to support the child's engagement
- Learning to learn
- Teaching approaches
- The role of parents and teacher(s)/tutor(s)
- The child's voice

Rationale for providing a home-based Summer Programme

This home-based Summer Programme will focus on providing a foundation to address regression in student learning. It will also work towards ensuring the successful reintegration of children with their peers and assist them in making good transitions into their planned education setting for the next school year. The home-based programme is designed to enable the teacher(s)/tutor(s) to take account of and address children's individual needs.

Aims of the home-based Summer Programme

The aims of the home-based Summer Programme are to:

- Enable children to maintain a connection with learning and to pave the way for them to reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting
- Provide a foundation for addressing and limiting regression in learning
- Support families and provide respite, where appropriate
- Support children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- Provide children with the practical and technological skills they may need to engage and communicate in a meaningful way with blended learning in the future.

Which children are eligible to participate in the programme?

Children in the categories listed below are eligible for the home-based summer programme, where the child's school **is not providing** the school-based programme:

- Any children enrolled in a special school or a special class primary and post primary
- Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism: primary and post-primary
- Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties: primary and post-primary
- Pupils with Down syndrome: primary and post-primary
- Pupils in primary and post-primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:
 - children who are Deaf or most severe hearing impairment
 - children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
 - children who have a moderate general learning disability
 - children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

Children in the above categories entering primary school next September are also eligible for the programme.

Programme Content

In line with the aims of the programme, the following guidance is provided to help the teacher(s)/tutor(s) to prioritise children's key learning needs while supporting their wellbeing as they re-engage with learning.

Promoting a sense of SAFETY

Promoting a sense of safety helps children believe that their needs will be met now and in the future and that they are protected from harm.

The following can help promote a sense of safety:

- 'Slow down to catch up' - It is important not to rush into a focus on academic learning and 'catching up' before first re-establishing safety and calmness, thus ensuring children's readiness to learn
- It is recommended beginning with low level learning activities and revision before introducing new areas of learning or materials

- There should be a focus on re-establishing familiar routines in relation to engaging in learning activities (e.g. following a timetable / schedule/ work system) to facilitate a sense of safety for the child. It will be important to explicitly re-teach routines via clear and reassuring instruction
- For some children, teaching, modelling and consolidating the guidelines and norms which apply based on current COVID-19 related public health advice (e.g. hand washing, coughing / sneezing etiquette etc.) will be important.

Promoting a sense of CALM

Some children may have experienced a heightened sense of anxiety during their return to school. Acknowledging and addressing this anxiety will help support them with this.

The following can help promote a sense of calm:

- Children should be given opportunities to communicate or share their understanding and experience of school closures and their return to school. Activities like art may also support children in sharing their experiences and telling their story.
- Children's responses to stressful events are unique and varied. Some may verbalise their concerns, others may withdraw or present with challenging behaviours. It is important to recognise and acknowledge that a wide variety of reactions can be expected and these are normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Working with parents, consider ways to create a calm, structured space for learning within the home. A relaxation space or corner can be created which the child should use to take a break or self-regulate if needed.
- The opportunity to engage in quiet rhythmic activities like walking or yoga can be calming for some children. Teacher(s)/tutor(s) should consult with parents in relation to the types of activities which help to calm and settle their child.

Promoting a sense of SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Promoting social connectedness involves having relationships with others (individual or groups) who understand you and support you. Building connections and relationships with others provides the basis for engagement, emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.

The following can help promote a sense of social connectedness:

- Teacher(s)/tutor(s) should focus on building good relationships with children by greeting them warmly, listening to them, finding out about their strengths and interests, and letting them know they are there to help and support them.

- Creating opportunities for children to engage with creative, fun, high preference activities with the teacher(s)/tutor(s) will be important. These may include visits to parks and recreational facilities or working with computers in the home. Family members may be able to support this process and identify in particular the activities which the children enjoy most. Important social and life skills can be targeted as part of same.

Promoting a sense of EFFICACY in SELF and COMMUNITY

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can do what you need to do, deal with challenges and handle tough times. Community efficacy is the belief that you belong to a broader community that includes the school which will do what it needs to thrive and take care of its members.

The following can help promote a sense of efficacy in self and community:

- Learning activities should be tailored to children's needs and linked to their interests. These activities should be underpinned by teaching strategies that take account of children's learning styles and individual needs and allow them to experience success. Positive feedback, encouragement and affirmation will enhance children's sense of self efficacy. This supports wellbeing and should enhance connectedness with learning and help prepare children for returning to school.
- Teaching strategies to regulate emotions and manage anxiety will help children to cope with any worries and anxieties that they may feel about re-engaging with learning and preparing to return to school. The emphasis here will be dependent on individual children's needs based on their experiences over the past two school years. Work to support children in regulating emotion and managing with anxiety should build on and complement previous work to support children in this regard as detailed in their school support plan¹.
- Developing a sense of community may be facilitated by including the child in the planning of an enjoyable activity in liaison with parents (e.g. a trip to a local playground or coffee shop). This may also provide an opportunity to practise and develop important social or life skills.

Promoting a sense of HOPE

A sense of hope is related to fostering resilience and the expectation that things will work out for the child in relation to their engagement with learning and future return to school.

The following can help promote a sense of hope:

- Reassuring children with calming, hopeful messages about how the work done as part of the home-based summer programme will help to prepare them for their return to school in the new school year
- Reflecting positively on things that children participated in and enjoyed during

¹ [NEPS advice & resources for keeping children and young people well during COVID-19](#)

school closures, their return to school and enjoyable activities during the home-based summer programme itself should be encouraged. Talking about these examples of resilience can be healing and reassuring

- Re-engaging in routines where there is an emphasis on fun, high preference learning activities can help shift the focus away from any feelings of distress and allow children to enjoy the present moment and look forward with optimism.

Teacher(s)/tutor(s) should adopt a flexible and child-centred approach when planning a programme for participating children. Therefore, it is paramount that the programme planning builds on the individual strengths, interests and priority needs of each participating child by collaborating with parents and enabling the voice of the child.

Where children are transitioning to a new educational setting, support for the transition should be a specific focus within the summer programme support plan. Guidance on supporting effective transitions is available [here](#) and guidance on the continuity of learning [here](#).

Technology

Some children may use assistive technologies and devices such as alternate keyboards, voice recognition software, monitor magnification software and text to speech options, to maintain, or assist them with learning, communicating and interacting. If appropriate, teachers(s)/tutor(s) working with children as part of the home-based Summer Programme may use assistive technologies and devices to:

- Support learning (e.g. using a laptop to take research, take notes, use spellcheck, text reading or speech recognition software, provide practice and consolidation opportunities)
- Assist transitions to post-primary settings (e.g. calendars, schedules, alarms, organisational apps)
- Encourage communication (e.g. various software, messaging apps)
- Increase social opportunities (e.g. social media apps)
- Reduce stress (e.g. music players, calming apps)
- Promote recreational interests (e.g. researching and pursuing areas of individual interest).

Learning to learn

It will be very important for teacher(s)/tutor(s) providing the home-based programme to focus on skills associated with learning to learn.

Suggestions for supporting children with SEN:

- Work to re-establish school routines that help children to succeed in daily school life and continue to practise COVID-19 hygiene routines
- Establish children's social skills and self-regulation strategies for the school context
- Focus on developing effective task and organisational skills
- Reinforce communication skills and approaches to ensure that children can indicate choices and give their opinions

- Reflect on past successes (particularly those documented in the student support files) and how these were achieved to help children to become more aware of their existing good strategies
- Focus on 'learning to learn' by providing children with opportunities to talk about how they are learning, what helps them learn best and give them opportunities to present learning in a variety of ways.

Assessment of children's needs

Teacher(s)/ tutor(s) should provide a pre-programme survey to the child and their parents/guardians to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported. This will enable the teacher/tutor to individualise support by devising a Summer Programme Support Plan.

At the end of the programme, teacher(s) / tutor(s) should provide parents/guardians with an overview of each child's progress and a record of their learning. This information should be retained by the child's parents/guardians and provided to their class teacher/year head when schools reopen in September to help inform future educational planning for the 2021/22 academic year.

The role of the parent

Parental engagement is critical in enhancing outcomes for children and for achieving the aims of the home-based Summer Programme. When engaging with parents around the Summer Programme teacher(s)/tutor(s) should:

- Involve parents in the identification of their child's unique strengths, interests and needs, and in setting learning objectives
- Engage with parents in planning for transitions and routines, including transitions which are part of the home-based Summer Programme
- Seek and encourage the views of parents when selecting activities and teaching approaches.

The role of the teacher(s)/tutor(s)

Teacher(s)/tutor(s) chosen by parents to participate in the home-based scheme are required to give parents confirmation of their Teaching Council registration and to sign the Statutory Declaration. When the home-based programme is being prepared, the teacher(s)/tutor(s) chosen by parents to participate in the home-based scheme should:

- Give parents confirmation of their Teaching Council registration and sign the Statutory Declaration
- Seek access, through the parents, to the most recent support plan for the child
- Consult the parents and use a pre-programme survey to establish the child's priority learning needs, strengths, interests and how they could be best supported
- Design a comprehensive plan for the summer programme
- Communicate the plan for the programme clearly to the parents
- Discuss progress on the plan regularly with the parents
- Maintain a record of content and skills taught during the summer programm

- Provide a summary of this summary to the parents at the end of the programme.

Teaching approaches

When devising the programme, effective pedagogical approaches will be key to supporting learners to achieve and to experience success.

Guidelines for effective teaching approaches:

- Use visual structured teaching approaches, including schedules to help children's understanding of the structure and sequence of the day
- Maintain a focus on play and activity-based learning
- Identify the needs of the children before planning a programme of work
- Share clear learning intentions with the child and allow time for reflection on learning
- Scaffold knowledge and skills incrementally
- Let children know that it is not only acceptable to make a mistake but it is a fundamental step in the process of effective learning
- Ask open questions
- Provide wait time for thinking and answering questions
- Use graphic organisers and mind maps
- Use technology wherever possible and appropriate
- Provide opportunities for the child to work collaboratively with siblings in the digital setting
- Encourage children's autonomous learning
- Provide regular feedback to encourage the child to the next steps
- Use quizzes and competitions to encourage motivation and make learning fun
- Provide opportunities to consolidate and reflect on learning.

The Child's Voice

The child's voice should be an essential part of the planning and decision-making process about the home-based summer programme. Listening intently to the voice of the child helps to ensure that the specific learning and wellbeing needs of the child are addressed in a truly child-centred way. Involving children in target setting and monitoring their own progress can be empowering and motivating for them. Some children may have language and communication difficulties, so it is important to use appropriate means to enable them to communicate their views and to provide their input (e.g. through the use of visual supports, choice boards or assistive technology).

Conclusion

The document is designed to provide teacher(s)/tutor(s) with guidance on the design and delivery of a home-based summer education programme which supports children with SEN prior to their return to school. The desired outcomes for the learners are that they will maintain their reconnection with the school, develop a better sense of their own wellbeing and experience increased confidence to continue with their education. Through the delivery of this home-based summer programme teacher(s)/tutor(s) should strive to enhance wellbeing and reduce regression in learning to prepare children with SEN for their return to school in September.

Appendix 1

SNA support for children

It is expected that, in most instances, parents will seek the services of a teacher to implement a programme of learning as outlined above. Alternatively, some parents may choose to avail of the services of an SNA to provide a programme of care to a child who meets the eligibility criteria. In these circumstances, parents are advised to engage with their child's school on the additional care supports which are included in their personal pupil plan and which could be provided by the SNA for the summer programme.

SNA Supports

Circular 30/2014, outlines the role of an SNA in a school context. The following are examples of care needs which the SNA may assist with in the home environment under the direction of the parent:

- Assistance to attend or participate in recreational activities, walks, or community-based outings, under the direction of parents.
- Assistance with mobility and orientation: where a child with special needs requires adult assistance.
- Implementing activities drawn, as appropriate, from the plan for the child

The role of the parents

It is envisaged that parents of children who qualify for this care programme, will register on the Department of Education website. The parent must satisfy themselves that the chosen SNA has been Garda vetted for the purpose of Child Protection. When the SNA has been chosen, the parents may provide him/her with access to the child's most recent personal pupil plan (available from the school). Parents should share relevant information with the SNA, for example the likes, interests and care needs of the child. Parents and the SNA should agree on daily routines and activities that would support the child's care needs. Parents are encouraged to maintain a record of completed activities which can be shared with the child's school.

The child's voice

Children's views should be central in decision-making regarding their care because this can be empowering and motivating for them. When engaging with the children who are availing of the home-based care programme, SNAs should listen to their input regarding the:

- Nature and level of adult support in relation to care needs
- Recreational activities, walks, or community-based outings in which they engage.