



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Return to school: Report on findings of surveys in primary schools and special schools

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1. Introduction

This report presents an analysis of data from a number of surveys in primary and special schools carried out by the Inspectorate during the period 09 December to 15 December 2020. It is one of a series of reports on the Inspectorate's research activity in schools during the 2020/21 school year. These include a report on the findings of similar surveys that were carried out in primary, special and post-primary schools in October 2020.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design of the survey

Online surveys were administered to a random sample of learners, parents, principals and teachers in primary schools and special schools throughout the country. The survey questions were based on four key themes:

Table 1: Survey Themes

1) Experience of school
2) Wellbeing
3) Teaching and learning
4) Implementation of COVID-19 measures

All responses were anonymous. Qualitative and quantitative data arising from each of the surveys were analysed and used to inform this report.

The purpose of the surveys was to:

- Provide an overview of the successes and challenges experienced by schools during this period under four key themes.
- Identify specific issues relevant to (i) the primary school sector and (ii) the special school sector.

2.2 Data sample

The principals of the schools selected for participation were provided with information about the surveys. A link to the surveys was subsequently emailed to schools on 09 December 2020 and principals were requested to facilitate the distribution of online links to the relevant surveys to teachers and parents. The link for the online learner survey for completion at home by learners was sent to parents. The online surveys remained open for respondents until 15 December 2020.

The sample of schools included Irish-medium schools and schools participating in *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS), the action plan of the Department for educational inclusion. The survey was available in English and *Gaeilge*. A different sample was used for

each group of respondents.¹ The sampling excluded the schools which had participated in the surveys that took place in October 2020.

2.3 Number of respondents

Table 2 below illustrates the number of respondents for each survey:

Survey type	Number of primary schools and special schools contacted prior to survey distribution	Number of responses received per survey type
Principal	50	37
Teacher	32	184
Learner	34	857
Parent	33	1,223

Parents were invited to complete the survey in respect of any child(ren) in their family attending primary school or a special school. This contributed to the overall high number of responses to the parent surveys.

More girls than boys responded to the learner surveys. The responses were distributed almost evenly across the class groups from third to sixth class. Just over half (51%) of the primary principals who responded were teaching principals. Out of the total primary principal cohort, a small number (16%) were in schools with designated DEIS status. A fifth (20%) of the primary teachers who responded worked in schools with assigned DEIS status.

A majority of the primary teachers (69%) were mainstream class teachers, a quarter (25%) worked as special education teachers, and the remainder worked in special classes or in a variety other roles.

¹ For example, in School A, principals were invited to complete the principal survey, but teachers, parents and learners were not. In School B, teachers were invited to complete the teacher survey, but principals, parents and learners were not.

2.4 Limitations of the surveys

It should be noted that the data relates to surveys of principals, teachers, parents and learners who completed the surveys in light of their experiences since the start of the school year in September. Perspectives and priorities may well have changed in light of evolving circumstances since then. The rate of survey responses in special schools was low. Where responses for specific survey items were particularly few in number, the data from respondents from primary schools and from special schools was merged.

2.5 Quantitative terms used in this report

When using quantitative terms in this report, the following descriptors were employed:

Almost all	More than 90%
Most	75% – 90%
Majority / more than half	51% – 74%
Half	50%
Less than half / a significant minority	25% – 49%
A small number / less than a quarter	16% – 24%
A few	Less than 15%

2.6 Analysis of data

Quantitative data was analysed using survey software. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The data was subsequently collated, reviewed and used to inform this report.

3. Overview of survey findings by respondent type

3.1 Survey of principals

Principals who responded to the survey indicated that, overall, schools were operating effectively in the current circumstances. In addition, they felt that teaching and learning were going well in their schools. Additional supports had been introduced to support the wellbeing of staff and learners. Almost all schools had digital platforms in place, and most teachers and learners were familiar with using them. Principals indicated that arrangements had been made to ensure that learners could continue their learning in the event of a partial or full school closure. Principals considered that measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools were being implemented successfully. Typical challenges cited related to the range of supports available to the principal in terms of wellbeing. Accessing substitute cover for teacher absences has continued to be a significant challenge for a substantial proportion of principals.

3.2 Survey of teachers

Most teachers in primary schools and special schools agreed that their school was running effectively and they indicated that they were coping well in their teaching roles since the schools had reopened. They had accessed online resources to support their teaching and most were happy with learners' progress. A majority of teachers in both primary schools and special schools used digital platforms on a regular basis. Varied levels of knowledge were reported in terms of learners' abilities to use these digital platforms. Notwithstanding the measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms, the majority of teachers expressed satisfaction with their teaching, and also with levels of learner engagement. Some teachers indicated that the range of methodologies they could use had been limited by the introduction of physical distancing measures in schools. A small number of teachers in both special and primary schools indicated they did not feel safe in their school.

3.3 Survey of learners

Overall, responses from learners were positive. They strongly indicated that they were happy to be back at school and were satisfied with their school experiences and that included opportunities to play with their peers. Learners' responses were generally positive also in relation to teaching and learning. Most learners agreed that they were happy to be in school and that their learning was going well. There was general agreement that most people in

their class followed the school rules about preventing the spread of COVID-19 and observed physical distancing.

3.4 Survey of parents

Parents overall indicated that their children were happy to be back at school and that their children had settled well in school in the first term. They agreed that their children were making progress with their learning. Parents indicated that schools had communicated well about the measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and they were satisfied that schools were working appropriately to mitigate the transmission of the virus.

3.5 Summary of open response comments

Surveys of principals, teachers and parents included an open response box where respondents had the option to provide additional commentary. The tables at Appendix 1 present an overview of the range and frequency of this commentary.

Twenty-nine principals chose to provide comments in the open text box. These comments covered a range of areas with the most prevalent topics being positive commentary around the successful reopening and day-to-day operation of the school, and negative commentary around the wellbeing of the school community. A total of 269 parents provided observations. The most commonly referenced areas were: praise for the work of the school, the challenges associated with the range of COVID-19 measures, and concerns that related to learners' wellbeing. Forty-nine teachers provided comments. The most prevalent items² in these comments in order of frequency were: concerns regarding the perceived safety of schools; concerns related to wellbeing, and issues around teaching and learning.

The box below provides examples of commentary provided by respondents:

School are doing great. (Parent of child from special school)

I would like to commend all members of staff for all their hard work ensuring the school could reopen safely and ensuring the day-to-day safety of all in the school community. My child is settled, happy and safe. As a parent, I feel the school body are doing all in their power to create a happy, safe learning environment in this difficult time. (Parent of primary school child)

A big effort has been made by both staff and learners to make school run as smoothly as possible in the current climate. (Teacher from special school)

² The second most frequently reported items were categorised as 'general observations'. These were wide-ranging in nature and outside the scope of this report.

The principal, teaching staff, ancillary staff, board of management, parent body and pupils have worked together effectively since September to maintain an atmosphere of calm, safety and co-operation in the school. Morale has remained high and I am grateful to be able to come to work every day. (Teacher from primary school)

I think both the children and the majority of the staff are happy to be back at school. (Principal from primary school)

4. Detailed findings by theme

4.1 Experience of school

Survey responses from learners, parents, principals, and teachers indicate that, schools continued to operate effectively during the first term of the 2020/21 school year, having successfully re-opened in September 2020. Survey responses also indicate that, in the main, the experience of school was positive for school communities. Principals and teachers indicated that their schools were operating effectively and that they were working successfully in their respective roles. To support them in their work, the Department of Education provided a comprehensive range of guidance. The resources provided included guidance on developing a COVID-19 response plan for the safe reopening of schools, training for school staff, and advice on hygiene and safety regulations in the school environment.³ Survey responses by school personnel showed that they had accessed this documentation.

Most parents of learners in primary schools (95%) and special schools (93%), agreed or strongly agreed that their child had settled well into school in the period from September to December 2020. A similar proportion of parents of learners in special schools (92%), and in primary schools (96%) indicated that teachers and staff had supported their child in settling into school during this period. One parent of a primary school child observed: *'Great job being done by teachers in [named school] ... Children happy and well adjusted. So glad that they can have on site learning available with their peers. It means so much to the kids to be in their school environment'*. With regard to the experiences of junior infant pupils, almost all (93%) of the fifty-six parents who responded stated that their child had successfully transitioned into primary school and had settled well into their new class. Almost all parents of learners in special schools (96%), and those in primary schools (98%) agreed that their child was able to get to and from school safely.

Learners indicated high levels of satisfaction regarding their school experiences during the first term of the 2020/21 school year. Most learners (80%) agreed that they were happy to be at school.⁴ Just under a fifth of learners (17%) indicated that they were unsure of how they felt about being at school. While the surveys did not ask learners to elaborate on their

³ The full range of guidance documents provided by the Department to support the re-opening of primary and special schools is available at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a0bff-reopening-our-primary-and-special-schools/>.

⁴ The rate of survey responses in special schools was low. Where responses for specific survey items were particularly few in number, the data from respondents from primary schools and from special schools were merged. In a number of instances, such as the example above, and in some subsequent findings, data has not been disaggregated to distinguish between responses from special schools and those from primary schools.

responses, comments provided by some parents suggest that preventative measures related to COVID-19, such as enhanced hygiene, sanitisation and ventilation measures, coupled with elevated anxiety levels among children around the virus, may have adversely affected some learners' experience of school. One parent of a primary school child observed that: *'I find my daughter is quite anxious ... because of the fear of Covid but the school is doing all possible to maintain stability for them in school'*. Nonetheless, most parents of learners in special schools (86%), and almost all parents of pupils in primary schools (91%) agreed that their children were happy to have returned to school. One parent of a primary school pupil praised their child's school, noting that the school had: *'gone over and above to ensure both of my children are having a great school experience. They are both really settled and enjoying their studies, and being back to school'*. It is notable that very few parents⁵ indicated that their children were not happy about being back at school.⁶

The return to school was a successful and positive experience for principals and teachers overall. Despite the challenges, almost all principals (96%) agreed or strongly agreed that schools operated effectively throughout the term. Teachers were also in agreement that schools had functioned effectively throughout the term, with almost all teachers (96%) in primary schools and special schools responding positively to this survey item. One teacher in a special school praised the efforts of their school community as follows: *'A big effort has been made by both staff and students to make school run as smoothly as possible in the current climate'*. Most principals (76%) indicated that they were fulfilling their leadership roles successfully since their schools had reopened. Most primary teachers (88%), and almost all teachers in special schools (92%) agreed that they were managing well in their teaching roles. One teacher observed that: *'The principal, teaching staff, ancillary staff, board of management, parent body and pupils have worked together effectively since September to maintain an atmosphere of calm, safety and co-operation in the school. Morale has remained high and I am grateful to be able to come to work every day'*.

In preparation for the reopening of schools in September, the Department of Education issued a range of documents and supports to assist schools with reopening. These included a COVID-19 response plan for the safe reopening of schools; training and resources; supports for the special education sector; advice on adherence to COVID-19 regulations in the school environment; and guidance on learning and school programmes. Just over half of the principals surveyed (54%) agreed that they were happy with the range of supports available to them. While a majority of principals (57%) indicated that they were able to access substitute cover on each occasion on which a teacher was absent, over two fifths of principals (43%) indicated that they experienced difficulties securing cover when teachers were absent. This difficulty was also reflected in the qualitative responses provided by

⁵ No parent of a learner in a special school reported that their child was unhappy in school. The comparable proportion at primary level was 5%.

principals with one stating that *'teacher substitution is a major issue and a worry to me as principal'*.

4.2 Wellbeing

The need for schools to prioritise activities to support the wellbeing of learners and staff was emphasised in the guidance documents made available to schools. The evidence from this survey suggests that considerable success was achieved in this regard.

Almost all principals (95%) confirmed that their schools had put additional supports in place for the wellbeing of learners. Most teachers in special schools (88%), and in primary schools (81%), expressed satisfaction with the support their school was providing for learners' wellbeing in the context of COVID-19. One teacher described the manner in which learners had adapted successfully to the changed context, *'The children have settled into school well and the changes (handwashing, pods etc.) have become second nature at this stage'*.

Parents also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the supports that schools had provided for learners' wellbeing. In this regard, almost all parents of learners in special schools (96%) and most parents at primary level (84%) agreed that teachers and staff were supporting their child's wellbeing. High levels of praise for teachers and staff were evident in the comments provided by parents, with one parent describing their child's school as having *'gone above and beyond with their preparations and implementations to prevent the spread of COVID'*. The majority of parents of learners in special schools (71%), and most parents at primary level (83%), indicated that they were aware of the supports available if they were concerned about their child's wellbeing. Almost all learners (93%) confirmed that they knew who to approach in their school if they had concerns.

The Inspectorate's engagements with principals in the course of advisory sessions conducted throughout the first term of the 2020/21 school year indicated that many schools had availed of resources prepared by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) for use by school personnel during COVID-19. Survey responses from principals indicated that most schools (84%) had put additional supports in place for the wellbeing of staff. Almost all teachers in special schools (92%), and a similar proportion of teachers in primary schools (89%) were satisfied with the level of supports their schools had in place to provide for their wellbeing in the context of the pandemic. A small proportion of teachers in special schools (4%) and in primary schools (11%) indicated that they were not satisfied with the level of support their schools had in place to provide for their wellbeing. One primary teacher summarised the challenges experienced by their school community, observing that, *'I feel safe because I eat my lunch by myself and usually do not have any contact with other teachers but it makes the job incredibly lonely and isolated'*.

As a result of the implementation of the increased hygiene and sanitisation measures in schools, most principals (78%) indicated that they felt safe in school. A similar proportion of teachers in special schools (78%) and teachers in primary schools (77%) agreed or strongly

agreed that they felt safe in school. One teacher in a primary school praised the work of their principal, noting that, *'Our principal has worked very hard to make our school safe'*. With regard to the survey data, a small proportion (4%) of teachers in primary schools and special schools stated that they did not feel safe in their school. In their comments, some teachers talked about the difficulties of staying safe, with one primary teacher saying, *'I feel social distancing is hard to maintain among pupils'*. Much of the teacher commentary highlighted the impact of the increased ventilation requirements arising from the range of COVID protocols. One teacher observed: *'It is utterly miserable being this cold'*. Similar concerns were also evident in comments provided by parents: *'I have three children in primary'*, observed one parent, *'all are freezing in school with many extra layers of clothes on'*.

4.3 Teaching and Learning

A review of survey data shows that principals and school communities have worked to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning.

Collaboration with colleagues benefits teachers' professional practice and enhances educational provision for learners. Most principals (83%) considered that there was a high level of professional collaboration among teachers in their school. A similar proportion of teachers in special schools (84%), and in primary schools (87%), reported high levels of collaboration among teachers in their school. One primary teacher observed that *'teachers are working collaboratively and effectively in ensuring the safety of everyone in the school'*.

Almost all principals (97%) indicated that teaching and learning were going well in their schools. All teachers in special schools and almost all teachers in primary schools (96%) were happy with their teaching. Furthermore, all teachers in special schools and almost all teachers in primary schools (96%) indicated that they had accessed online resources to support their teaching. Almost all of the teachers in special schools (92%) and in primary schools (95%) indicated that they had found these resources to be of use. Almost all teachers in special schools (92%) and teachers in primary schools (93%) were positive about learners' levels of engagement during lessons.

Physical distancing requirements impose direct constraints on schools and classrooms and as a consequence, many teachers have had to adapt their approaches to teaching. A majority of teachers in special schools (72%), and most teachers in primary schools (84%) indicated that they were using different teaching approaches from those used previously. A few teachers in special schools (83%), and just over a quarter of teachers in primary schools (70%) felt confident that this did not impact adversely on the quality of their teaching. Almost all principals (97%) surveyed agreed that teaching approaches had changed as a result of the pandemic. Despite the changes in day-to-day school life, much of the commentary provided by parents on teaching and learning was positive. An observation from a primary parent noted that: *'The school is doing a brilliant job in keeping everything normal and fun for the kids and both of my children are very happy in school'*.

The majority of learners (86%) in schools indicated that they were enjoying their lessons 'all' or 'most' of the time. A few learners (13%) indicated that they enjoyed their lesson 'sometimes'. Curriculum guidance at primary level suggests that planned learning experiences should provide opportunities for social interaction and collaboration between pupils and learners. More than half of teachers in special schools (56%), and over a third of teachers in primary schools (36%), indicated that they were able to continue to provide opportunities for their learners to work collaboratively all or most of the times during lessons. Two fifths of teachers in special schools (40%), and more than half of those in primary schools (58%) indicated that they sometimes provided opportunities for learners to work collaboratively.

In terms of learning, respondents were generally in agreement that learners were progressing. Almost all principals (97%) felt that the learners in their school were making progress. A similar proportion (92%) of teachers in special schools and teachers in primary schools considered that the learners in their schools were making progress in their learning. Almost all parents of learners in special schools (91%), and parents in primary schools (94%) agreed that their children were making progress. Most learners (89%) also agreed that they were getting on well with their learning. A few learners (10%) indicated uncertainty regarding their learning.

High quality feedback to pupils on the quality of their learning is an integral component of the teaching and learning process. Most learners (81%) agreed that their teacher provided feedback on their learning. A few learners (13%) were uncertain of whether or not their teacher let them know how they were getting on with their learning.

Circular 0074/2020⁷ requires all schools to have in place a communication and learning platform that supports them to respond to a partial or full school closure. Schools are provided with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Grant funding to support the embedding of digital technologies in teaching and learning. In 2020, €100 million issued to schools, which was the final tranche of the overall package of €210 million, for ICT infrastructure as provided for in the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020*. Funding for ICT was issued directly to schools on the understanding that schools were best placed to determine the ICT needs of their school community. €50 million was issued for the 2019-2020 school year in April 2020 with a further €50 million issued in December 2020 for the 2020/21 school year. Schools could use this funding to acquire software applications or platforms to enable remote learning and communications and for the provision of devices on loan to teachers and learners to facilitate engagement with remote learning.

⁷ Circular 0074/2020, *Communication/Teaching & Learning Platform* is available at <https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/>.

The survey findings indicated very positive results on the availability and use of digital technologies in schools. All⁸ principals indicated that their schools had a digital learning platform in place to support teaching and learning. It is worth noting that the proportion of teachers agreeing with this statement was significantly smaller. Most teachers in special schools (84%), and in primary schools (86%), stated that their schools had a digital learning platform in place to support teaching and learning. A majority of teachers in special schools (62%) and in primary schools (64%) indicated that they used digital platforms regularly in their teaching. Notably, principals' perceptions of teachers' use of digital platforms was more positive with most principals (84%) reporting that teachers used digital platforms regularly in their teaching. A similar proportion of principals (86%) considered that the learners in their schools could use these digital platforms. Responses from teachers were more varied. A significant minority of teachers in special schools (19%), and most teachers in primary schools (86%), stated that the learners in their classes had knowledge of how to use digital platforms.

Schools were required to make adapted provision for learners who could not return to school because they were medically certified as being at very high risk from COVID-19. The purpose of this adapted education provision was to ensure that learners who were medically certified as being at very high risk to the virus could maintain a meaningful connection with their class and school in order to successfully continue their learning from home. Supports for this cohort of learners are outlined in *Continuity of schooling: Supporting primary pupils who are at very high risk to COVID19*.⁹ Some of the schools selected for participation in the principal surveys included a small cohort of learners who were medically certified as being at a very high risk to COVID-19. All principals with very high risk learners agreed that they had measures in place to ensure that these learners could continue their learning. In general, survey responses showed that this support was provided by mainstream class teachers, special educational needs teachers and by teachers who were themselves working from home because they were designated to be at very high risk from COVID-19.

4.4 Implementation of COVID-19 measures

Schools were required to implement a range of measures to minimise and manage the risk of transmission of infection. Responses to the surveys show that there was widespread implementation of necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. This was also reflected in the Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling (SSPS) inspection visits that were conducted by the Inspectorate on behalf of the Health and Safety Authority. All

⁸ The term 'all' is used throughout this report to indicate a 100% response rate.

⁹ The Department of Education's advice on re-opening primary and special schools is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a0bff-reopening-our-primary-and-special-schools/>.

principals, all teachers in special schools, and almost all teachers in primary schools (98%) agreed that their schools had a COVID-19 policy in place. All principals, all teachers in special schools, and almost all teachers in primary schools (98%) agreed that their school had appointed a lead worker representative. All principals agreed that they maintained a contact tracing log. Almost all principals (97%) agreed that their school had a policy on visitors to the school building. All principals agreed that their schools have a designated isolation room as required.

Principals indicated that there were very high levels of cooperation with the schools' arrangements regarding COVID-19 among learners, teachers and parents. Almost all learners (98%) agreed that their teachers and other adults in school helped them to follow the school rules regarding the prevention and spread of infection. All principals and all teachers in special schools and almost all teachers in primary schools (97%) were aware of the measures to take if a learner in their school displayed possible COVID-19 symptoms. Almost all parents of learners in special schools (95%) and in primary schools (97%) were aware of the actions that the school would take if their child became unwell during the course of the school day. One parent stated '*Very happy with how our [named school] managed a positive case of Covid. Excellently managed and great communication to all parents*'. Almost all learners (94%) agreed that they remained at the same group in the classroom always or most of the time. A similarly high proportion of learners (98%) stated that in the yard they remained with learners from their own classroom. Three-quarters of learners (75%) agreed that most pupils in their classroom generally adhered to school rules concerning physical distancing. Just under a fifth of learners (19%) said that this occurred less frequently or sometimes.

All teachers in special schools, and almost all teachers in primary schools (94%) indicated that they had undertaken COVID-19 training provided by the Department of Education. All teachers in special schools, almost all teachers in primary schools (99%) and all principals agreed that hand sanitisers were available at the main entrance to their school. Identical proportions of these respondents confirmed that their school had hand sanitisers in classrooms. Most teachers in special schools (84%) and almost all teachers in primary schools (97%) indicated that the learners in their class sanitised their hands on the way into the school building most of the time or more frequently. Similar proportions of teachers in special schools (80%) and in primary schools (97%) indicated that learners sanitised their hands regularly during the school day. This was further confirmed by responses from learners. Almost all (94%) agreed that learners in their classroom always used hand sanitiser when they entered the school building. In addition to using hand sanitiser in the morning, the majority of learners (65%) agreed that they always used hand sanitiser throughout the day. One quarter of learners (25%) indicated that they used sanitiser most of the time and just a few learners (9%) stated they used sanitiser sometimes during the course of the school day.

Almost all parents of learners in special schools (97%) and parents at primary level (96%) stated that their child's school was working effectively to prevent the introduction and

transmission of infection. There was evidence to suggest highly effective communication between schools and parents in relation to COVID-19 protocols. Comments from parents praised the manner in which schools ensured that parents were informed and up-to-date. One parent commented that their child's school had been: '*... incredible throughout this pandemic. Clear, open and regular communication with parents. All actions explained fully and in the interests of our children's wellbeing. My kids have adapted given all that is going on and this is very much down to the supportive and dedicated staff at the school*'.

Parents indicated an awareness of the measures their child's school had taken to prevent the spread of the virus. A majority of parents of learners in special schools (57%) agreed that their child knew the school rules about preventing the transmission of infection. The comparable figure for primary schools was 98%. Almost all parents of learners in special schools (98%) and in primary schools (99%) indicated that they were aware of the measures to follow if they needed to contact the school. Similarly, most parents of learners in special schools (89%) and almost all parents at primary level (93%) agreed that they had been informed by their child's school of the procedures to follow if they wished to visit the school premises.

All principals, most teachers in special schools (84%), and almost all teachers in primary (94%) confirmed that they had a plan in place to ensure that learners could continue their learning in the event of a partial or full school closure.

5. Findings and conclusions

5.1 Main findings

Experience of schools

The survey findings indicated that schools continued to operate effectively throughout the first term of the 2020/21 school year, having successfully re-opened in September. Learners, parents, principals and teachers agreed that this period was one in which schools were operating effectively and that learners had settled well into school. Almost all parents of junior infants considered that their child was transitioning successfully into their new school. Most parents of learners in special schools and almost all parents of learners in primary schools agreed that their children were happy to be back at school. This was confirmed in findings from the learner surveys with most learners agreeing that they were happy to be back at school. In the main, principals and teachers indicated that they were coping well in their respective roles. Over two fifths of principals reported difficulties in accessing substitute cover when a teacher was absent from their school. Most teachers confirmed that they had accessed the advice and guidance provided by the Department of Education to prepare for the re-opening of schools and the mediation of the curriculum in the 2020/21 school year.

Wellbeing

Promoting the wellbeing of school communities was a fundamental element of the Department's overall plan to support a successful return to school in September 2020. As schools continued to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, positive findings in relation to wellbeing were noted in survey responses. Almost all of the principals who were surveyed indicated that additional supports were in place to support the wellbeing of learners. Most teachers considered that schools were supporting learners' wellbeing. Similarly, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the supports available for the wellbeing of learners. Almost all principals confirmed that their school had additional supports in place to provide for the wellbeing of staff. Almost all teachers in special schools and most teachers in primary schools indicated that they were satisfied with these supports. As a result of the successful implementation of the range of COVID-19 preventative measures, most principals and teachers considered that they were safe in school. Almost all learners confirmed that they knew who to approach in school if they needed help. Most learners indicated that they had opportunities to socialise with their friends during the school day.

Teaching and Learning

While the disruption to day-to-day school life caused by COVID-19 was unprecedented, survey respondents were very positive about provision for teaching and learning. Almost all

principals, teachers and parents agreed that learning was progressing well. Most learners indicated that they were enjoying their lessons most or all of the time. Most learners agreed that their teachers provided regular feedback to them on their learning. Almost all principals and teachers indicated that teaching and learning were going well in their school. Almost all survey respondents were positive about the level of learner engagement during lessons. Most principals and teachers indicated that there were high levels of professional collaboration among colleagues. Positive findings were also noted in relation to the use of digital technologies to support teaching and learning. All principals agreed that their schools had digital learning platforms in place to support teaching and learning although survey responses also indicated that there was varied knowledge among schools on how to use these platforms

Notwithstanding these positive findings, it was evident that the range of measures put in place by schools to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus had impacted on teaching approaches. Most teachers in primary schools and a majority of teachers in special schools indicated that they were using different pedagogical approaches. Just more than half of teachers in special schools and over a third of teachers in primary schools indicated that they continued to provide regular opportunities for learners to work collaboratively during lessons.

Implementation of COVID-19 measures

Schools were required to implement a range of additional safety measures to mitigate transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Survey responses indicated that schools were successful in ensuring sustained compliance with these measures; very high levels of compliance with COVID-19 measures were reported across school communities. Principals indicated there were very high levels of cooperation amongst learners, teachers and parents in support of the implementation of COVID-19 preventative measures. Similarly, positive findings were evident in surveys completed by teachers, parents and learners. In particular, surveys indicated that communication between schools and parents in relation to COVID-19 were effective.

5.2. Main conclusions

- Primary school and special school communities have worked effectively to address the challenges associated with the pandemic.
- The findings of the surveys suggest that collaboration among members of the school community has been a key factor in the effective operation of primary schools and special schools during the first term of the 2020-21 school year.
- The issue of teacher supply, and in particular, the recruitment of substitute teachers continued to present challenges for many principals over the course of the term
- Teachers have generally adapted their approaches to teaching and learning to good effect in the context of the pandemic.

- In line with requirements for physical distancing, teachers should exploit opportunities for collaborative learning including the potential for class based group work online.

Appendix 1: Qualitative data from primary and special schools

Appendix 1(a): Responses from parents

Responses from parents		
Response category	Primary school	Special school
Positive: School functioning well	115	6
Negative: General observation	38	1
Negative: Compliance with Covid protocols	33	0
Negative: Learner wellbeing	30	0
Positive: Learner wellbeing	28	0
Negative: Contact Tracing	18	0
Negative: Communication with school	11	0
Positive: Communication with school community	11	0
Negative: Quality of teaching	9	0
Positive: General observation	9	0
Negative: Ventilation and temperature	8	1
Negative: Face coverings	4	0
Negative: Digital technologies	3	0
Negative: Teacher absences	2	1
Positive: Commentary in respect of Department of Education	2	0
Negative: Issues relating to toilets	1	0
Negative: Provision for learners with additional needs	0	2

Appendix 1(b): Responses from teachers

Responses from teachers		
Response category	Special school	Primary school
Negative: Safety of schools	1	53
Negative: Wellbeing	1	28
Negative: Issues related to teaching and learning	0	21
Negative: Compliance with Covid protocols	0	16
Negative: Ventilation	0	10
Negative: Digital teaching and learning	0	8
Ambivalent: General observations	0	7
Negative: Certificate examinations	0	7
Positive: Wellbeing	0	5
Positive: School open and functioning	2	4
Positive: Compliance with Covid protocols	0	1
Positive: Digital technologies	1	0

Appendix 1(c): Responses from principals

Responses from principals	
Response category	All schools
Negative: Wellbeing of school community	27
Positive: School open and functioning	9
Ambivalent: General observation	6
Positive: Positive comments regarding the Department of Education	6
Negative: Issues related to teaching and learning	6
Negative: Communication with Department of Education and/or other agencies	5
Negative: Teacher supply	4
Positive: Compliance of school community with restrictions	3
Negative: Accommodation issues	3
Positive: Wellbeing of school community	2
Negative: Covid restrictions: compliance	1
Negative: Funding	1

Appendix 2: Quantitative data from primary and special schools

Appendix 2(a): Responses from learners in primary schools

What type of school are you in?		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
I am in a primary school	857	100.00%

I am a		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Boy	346	40.37%
Girl	503	58.69%
I'd prefer not to say	8	0.93%

I am in..		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
3rd Class	213	24.85%
4th Class	193	22.52%
5th Class	214	24.97%
6th Class	237	27.65%

How do you feel about being in school at the moment?		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Happy	682	79.58%
Unhappy	28	3.27%
I am not sure	147	17.15%

I am enjoying my lessons in school		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
All the time	285	33.26%
Most of the time	453	52.86%
Sometimes	115	13.42%
Never	4	0.47%

How are you getting on with your learning?		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
My learning is going well	762	88.91%
I am not sure	88	10.27%
My learning is not going well	7	0.82%

My teacher lets me know how I am getting on with my learning		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	692	80.75%
No	52	6.07%
I'm not sure	113	13.19%

I get a chance to work with my classmates during lessons		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	762	88.91%
No	95	11.09%

I get a chance to play with my friends during the school day		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	431	50.29%
Most of the time	309	36.06%
Sometimes	112	13.07%
Never	5	0.58%

I know who I can talk to in my school if I am worried about anything		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	800	93.35%
No	57	6.65%

My teacher and other adults in the school help us to follow the rules for COVID-19		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	755	88.10%
Most of the time	81	9.45%
Sometimes	19	2.22%
Never	2	0.23%

Pupils in my classroom follow the rules about handwashing while they are in school		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	567	66.16%
Most of the time	229	26.72%
Sometimes	58	6.77%
Never	3	0.35%

Pupils use hand sanitiser when they come into the school every morning

857 Responses

Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	696	81.21%
Most of the time	114	13.30%
Sometimes	39	4.55%
Never	8	0.93%

Pupils in my classroom use hand sanitiser during the day

857 Responses

Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	560	65.34%
Most of the time	213	24.85%
Sometimes	77	8.98%
Never	7	0.82%

Pupils in my classroom follow the rules about social distancing while they are in school		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
All of the time	288	33.61%
Most of the time	359	41.89%
Sometimes	163	19.02%
Never	47	5.48%

We stay in the same group at our table in the classroom		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Always	671	78.30%
Most of the time	134	15.64%
Sometimes	43	5.02%
Never	9	1.05%

In the yard, we play with the children from our own classroom		
857 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Always	806	94.05%
Most of the time	35	4.08%
Sometimes	12	1.40%
Never	4	0.47%

Appendix 2(b): Responses from teachers in primary schools

I am a teacher in a...		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Primary school	159	100.00%

I teach in a...		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
DEIS school	32	20.13%
Non-DEIS school	127	79.87%

My teaching role this year...		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Mainstream class teacher	110	69.18%
SET	40	25.16%
Special class teacher	7	4.40%
Other	2	1.26%

Select the class(es) that you are teaching this year:		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Junior infants	25	8.96%
Senior infants	30	10.75%
1st class	27	9.68%
2nd class	20	7.17%
3rd class	25	8.96%
4th class	37	13.26%
5th class	45	16.13%
6th class	40	14.34%
Early start	10	3.58%
Special class	20	7.17%

At the moment					
159 Responses					
Answer	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am coping well in my role as a teacher since the school re-opened	43 (27.04%)	97 (61.01%)	10 (6.29%)	6 (3.77%)	3 (1.89%)
My school is running effectively in the current circumstances	80 (50.31%)	72 (45.28%)	3 (1.89%)	2 (1.26%)	2 (1.26%)
I am satisfied with the support my school is providing for teachers' wellbeing in the context of COVID-19	60 (37.74%)	69 (43.40%)	13 (8.18%)	11 (6.92%)	6 (3.77%)
I am satisfied with the support my school is providing for pupils' wellbeing in the context of COVID-19	78 (49.06%)	64 (40.25%)	10 (6.29%)	6 (3.77%)	1 (0.63%)
Teachers in my school are working together to identify and build on the starting points of learning for students in the context of COVID-19	71 (44.65%)	67 (42.14%)	12 (7.55%)	7 (4.40%)	2 (1.26%)

Digital technologies are an integral part of my teaching		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	128	80.50%
No	31	19.50%

If yes, how often?		
128 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Every lesson	4	3.13%
Every day	94	73.44%
A few times a week	28	21.88%
Less often	2	1.56%

I have accessed online resources to support me in my teaching		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	153	96.23%
No	6	3.77%

If yes, were these resources useful?		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	151	94.97%
No	8	5.03%

My school has a digital learning platform in place		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	136	85.53%
No	23	14.47%

I use the school's digital platform regularly in my teaching		
136 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	87	63.97%
No	49	36.03%

The pupils in my class know how to use the school's digital platform:		
136 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	109	80.15%
No	27	19.85%

I have read the documents on the gov.ie/back to school website		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	137	86.16%
No	22	13.84%

Teaching is going well in my classroom		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	46	28.93%
Agree	107	67.30%
Don't know	2	1.26%
Disagree	3	1.89%
Strongly disagree	1	0.63%

Pupils are engaging well during lessons		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	47	29.56%
Agree	102	64.15%
Don't know	5	3.14%
Disagree	4	2.52%
Strongly disagree	1	0.63%

In the current circumstances, I am using different teaching approaches from those I used previously		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	133	83.65%
No	26	16.35%

As a result		
133 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
My teaching is better	6	4.51%
My teaching is just as good	93	69.92%
My teaching is not as good	34	25.56%

As a result		
23 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
My teaching is just as good as a result	21	91.30%
My teaching is not as good as a result	2	8.70%

With the current classroom arrangements I am able to provide pupils with opportunities to work collaboratively during lessons		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Always	7	4.40%
Most of the time	51	32.08%
Sometimes	93	58.49%
Never	8	5.03%

The pupils in my class are making progress in their learning		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	38	23.90%
Agree	109	68.55%
Don't know	10	6.29%
Disagree	1	0.63%
Strongly disagree	1	0.63%

The pupils in my class are familiar with using digital technologies as part of their learning		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	16	10.06%
Agree	109	68.55%
Don't know	17	10.69%
Disagree	16	10.06%
Strongly Disagree	1	0.63%

My school has...		
159 Responses		
	Yes	No
A COVID-19 policy	156 (98.11%)	3 (1.89%)
A lead worker representative(s)	157 (98.74%)	2 (1.26%)
Hand sanitisers at all of the main entrances	158 (99.37%)	1 (0.63%)
Hand sanitisers in all classrooms	157 (98.74%)	2 (1.26%)
An isolation area	154 (96.86%)	5 (3.14%)

The pupils in my class or setting...				
159 Responses				
	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
Sanitise their hands on the way into the school building	141 (88.68%)	13 (8.18%)	2 (1.26%)	3 (1.89%)
Sanitise their hands regularly during the school day	145 (91.19%)	10 (6.29%)	2 (1.26%)	2 (1.26%)
Follow the rules about physical distancing	60 (37.74%)	54 (33.96%)	36 (22.64%)	9 (5.66%)

I have completed the COVID-19 training provided by the Department of Education		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	150	94.34%
No	9	5.56%

I am satisfied with the health and safety arrangements in place in my school to prevent infection from COVID-19		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	77	48.43%
Agree	62	38.99%
Don't know	9	5.66%
Disagree	8	5.03%
Strongly disagree	3	1.89%

I know what to do if a pupil in my class displays possible COVID-19 symptoms		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	155	97.48%
No	4	2.52%

My school has arrangements in place to ensure that pupils can continue their learning in the event of a partial or full school closure		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	150	94.34%
No	5	3.14%
Don't know	4	2.52%

Please select the arrangement(s) your school has in place:		
150 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Providing work and feedback by using the postal service	12	4.44%
Providing work and feedback by e-mail	49	18.15%
Providing work and feedback using an online platform	126	46.67%
Lessons via video recording	20	7.41%
Live lessons via online platform	15	5.56%
A mix of the above	45	16.67%
Other	3	1.11%

I feel safe in my school		
159 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	59	37.11%
Agree	64	40.25%
Don't know	18	11.32%
Disagree	12	7.55%
Strongly disagree	6	3.77%

Appendix 2(c): Responses from principals in primary schools

I am a principal in a...		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Primary school	37	100%

I am...		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
A teaching principal	19	51.35%
An administrative principal	18	48.65%

I work in a...		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
DEIS school	6	16.22%
Non-DEIS school	31	83.78%

Move the slider to indicate the number of teachers in your school		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
31	1	2.70%
23	1	2.70%
20	3	8.11%
17	3	8.11%
16	1	2.70%
15	1	2.70%
14	1	2.70%
13	4	10.81%
12	2	5.41%
11	1	2.70%
10	1	2.70%
8	3	8.11%
7	5	13.51%
6	5	13.51%
5	1	2.70%
3	2	5.41%
2	2	5.41%

My school is in County...		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Carlow	1	2.70%
Cavan	1	2.70%
Cork	1	2.70%
Donegal	2	5.41%
Dublin	8	21.62%
Galway	2	5.41%
Kerry	4	10.81%
Kilkenny	1	2.70%
Laois	1	2.70%
Limerick	2	5.41%
Longford	1	2.70%
Mayo	1	2.70%
Meath	2	5.41%
Monaghan	2	5.41%
Tipperary	1	2.70%
Waterford	1	2.70%
Westmeath	2	5.41%
Wexford	3	8.11%

Wicklow	1	2.70%
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My school is running effectively in the current circumstances		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	21	56.76%
Agree	14	37.84%
Don't know	2	5.41%

I am coping well in my leadership role since the school re-opened		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	8	21.62%
Agree	20	54.05%
Don't know	2	5.41%
Disagree	5	13.51%
Strongly Disagree	2	5.41%

I am satisfied with the range of supports available to me to as a principal		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	20	54.05%
No	17	45.95%

I have been able to access substitute cover when a teacher has been absent in my school		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	21	56.76%
No	16	43.24%

How often have you been able to access substitute cover?		
21 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Every time	14	66.67%
Most times	7	33.33%

I have read the documents on the gov.ie/backtoschool website		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	37	100%

Teaching and learning are going well in my school		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	16	43.24%
Agree	20	54.05%
Don't know	1	2.70%

Teaching approaches in my school have changed in the context of COVID-19		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	21	56.76%
Agree	15	40.54%
Disagree	1	2.70%

In the context of COVID-19, there is a high level of collaboration in regard to teaching and learning among teachers in my school

37 Responses

Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	14	37.84%
Agree	17	45.95%
Don't know	1	2.70%
Disagree	4	10.81%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.70%

My school has a digital learning platform to support teaching and learning as per Circular 0074/2020

37 Responses

Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	37	100%

The school's digital platform					
37 Responses					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The teachers in my school use the school's digital learning platform regularly in their teaching	10 (27.03%)	21 (56.76%)	0 (0.00%)	6 (16.22%)	0 (0.00%)
The pupils in my school know how to use the school's digital learning platform	10 (27.03%)	22 (59.46%)	3 (8.11%)	1 (2.70%)	1 (2.70%)

The pupils in my school are making progress in their learning		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	17	45.95%
Agree	19	51.35%
Don't know	1	2.7%

As a result of COVID-19 my school has put additional supports in place for the well-being of staff		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	22	59.46%
No	9	24.32%
Don't know	6	16.22%

As a result of COVID-19 my school has put additional supports in place for the well-being of pupils		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	35	94.59%
No	1	2.70%
Don't know	1	2.70%

My school has...		
37 Responses		
Answer	Yes	No
A COVID-19 policy	37 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
A lead worker representative(s)	37 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
A policy on visitors to the school building	36 (97.30%)	1 (2.70%)
Hand sanitisers at all of the main entrances	37 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
A contact tracing log	37 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
An isolation room/area	37 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)

I am satisfied with the health and safety arrangements that are in place in my school to prevent infection from COVID-19		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	35	94.59%
No	2	5.41%

I know what to do if a pupil in my school displays possible COVID-19 symptoms.		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	35	100%

COVID-19 Arrangements					
37 Responses					
	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Pupils are co-operating with the school's arrangements regarding COVID- 19	30 (81.08%)	6 (16.22%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.70%)	0 (0.00%)
Teachers are co-operating with the school's arrangements regarding COVID- 19	31 (83.76%)	6 (16.22%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Parents are co-operating with the school's arrangements regarding COVID- 19	25 (67.57%)	11 (29.73%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.70%)	0 (0.00%)

My school has students who are not at school because they are medically certified as being at very high risk to COVID-19		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	6	16.22%
No	31	83.78%

My school has arrangements in place to ensure that students who are at very high risk to COVID-19 can continue their learning while at home		
6 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	6	100.00%

Please select the arrangement(s) your school has in place (Select all that apply)		
5 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
A designated teacher from the school's existing support resources	1	16.67%
Support from class teachers	4	66.67%
A designated teacher who is at very high risk to COVID-19 and who is available to work from home	1	16.67%

My school has arrangements in place to ensure that pupils can continue their learning in the event of a partial or full school closure		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	37	100.00%

Please select the arrangement(s) your school has in place:		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Providing work and feedback by using the postal service	9	9.78%
Providing work and feedback by e-mail	25	27.17%
Providing work and feedback using an online platform	36	39.13%
Lessons via video recording	16	17.39%
Live lessons via online platform	6	6.52%

I feel safe in my school		
37 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	17	45.95%
Agree	12	32.43%
Don't know	4	10.81%
Disagree	3	8.11%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.70%

Appendix 2(c): Responses from parents in primary schools

My child is in..		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
A primary school	1167	100%

My child is in..		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Junior Infants	165	14.14%
Senior Infants	122	10.45%
1st Class	123	10.54%
2nd Class	138	11.83%
3rd Class	130	11.14%
4th Class	150	12.85%
5th Class	139	11.91%
6th Class	190	16.28%
A special class	10	0.86%

My child has settled well into school this term		
1002 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	564	56.29%
Agree	389	38.82%
Don't know	11	1.10%
Disagree	29	2.89%
Strongly Disagree	9	0.90%

My child has settled well into his/ her new school		
165 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	119	72.12%
Agree	41	24.85%
Don't know	1	0.61%
Disagree	4	2.42%

Teachers and staff have supported my child in settling into school this term		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	797	68.29%
Agree	321	27.51%
Don't know	34	2.91%
Disagree	11	0.94%
Strongly Disagree	4	0.34%

How is your child feeling about being in school at the moment?		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Happy	1067	91.43%
Unhappy	55	4.71%
I'm not sure	45	3.86%

My child is making progress in his/her learning in school		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	662	56.73%
Agree	438	37.53%
Don't know	38	3.26%
Disagree	21	1.80%
Strongly Disagree	8	0.69%

Teachers and staff are supporting my child's wellbeing		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	728	62.38%
Agree	365	31.28%
Don't know	48	4.11%
Disagree	23	1.97%
Strongly Disagree	3	0.26%

I am aware of the supports that are available if I am concerned about my child's wellbeing		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	968	82.95%
No	199	17.05%

My child is able to get to and from school safely		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1139	97.60%
No	18	1.54%
Don't know	10	0.86%

My child's school has let me know what it is doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1139	97.60%
No	28	2.40%

My child's school is working hard to prevent the spread of COVID-19		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	827	70.87%
Agree	296	25.36%
Don't know	30	2.57%
Disagree	10	0.86%
Strongly Disagree	4	0.34%

My child's knows the school rules about preventing the spread of COVID-19		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1146	98.20%
No	5	0.43%
Don't know	16	1.37%

The school has informed me of the procedures to follow if I wish to visit the school		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1091	93.49%
No	38	3.26%
Don't know	38	3.26%

I know what to do if I need to contact the school		
1167 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1154	98.89%
No	13	1.11%

I know what the school will do if my child becomes unwell		
0 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	1132	97.00%
No	35	3.00%

Appendix 2(d): Responses from parents in special schools

My child is in..		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
A special school	56	100.00%

My child is		
35 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
4 years old	2	5.71%
5 years old	2	5.71%
6 years old	4	11.43%
7 years old	3	8.57%
9 years old	3	8.57%
11 years old	1	2.86%
12 years old	3	8.57%
13 years old	4	11.43%
14 years old	2	5.71%
15 years old	5	14.29%
16 years old	2	5.71%
17 years old	2	5.71%
18 years old	2	5.71%

My child has settled well into school this term		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	34	60.71%
Agree	18	32.14%
Don't know	2	3.57%
Disagree	1	1.79%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.79%

My child has settled well into his/her new school
0 Responses

Teachers and staff have supported my child in settling into school this term		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	40	71.43%
Agree	11	19.64%
Don't know	3	5.36%
Disagree	1	1.79%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.79%

How is your child feeling about being in school at the moment?		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Happy	48	85.71%
I'm not sure	8	14.29%

My child is making progress in his/her learning in school		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	24	42.86%
Agree	27	48.21%
Don't know	4	7.14%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.79%

Teachers and staff are supporting my child's wellbeing		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	24	67.86%
Agree	27	28.57%
Don't know	1	1.79%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.79%

I am aware of the supports that are available if I am concerned about my child's wellbeing		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	40	71.43%
No	16	28.57%

My child is able to get to and from school safely		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	54	96.43%
No	1	1.79%
Don't know	1	1.79%

My child's school has let me know what it is doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	54	98.21%
No	1	1.79%

My child's school is working hard to prevent the spread of COVID-19		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	44	78.57%
Agree	10	17.86%
Don't know	1	1.79%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.79%

My child knows the school rules about preventing the spread of COVID-19		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	32	57.14%
No	12	21.43%
Don't know	12	21.43%

The school has informed me of the procedures to follow if I wish to visit the school		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	50	89.29%
No	4	7.14%
Don't know	2	3.57%

I know what to do if I need to contact the school		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	55	98.21%
No	1	1.79%

I know what the school will do if my child becomes unwell		
56 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	53	94.64%
No	3	5.36%

Appendix 2(e): Responses from teachers in special schools

I am a teacher in a ...		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Special school	25	100.00%

At the moment					
25 Responses					
Answer	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am coping well in my role as a teacher since the school re-opened	10 (40.00%)	13 (52.00%)	1 (4.00%)	1 (4.00%)	0 (0.00%)
My school is running effectively in the current circumstances	15 (60.00%)	9 (36.00%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (4.00%)	0 (0.00%)
I am satisfied with the support my school is providing for teachers' wellbeing in the context of COVID-19	13 (52.00%)	9 (36.00%)	1 (4.00%)	1 (4.00%)	1 (4.00%)
I am satisfied with the support my school is providing for pupils' wellbeing in the context of COVID-19	12 (48.00%)	11 (44.00%)	1 (4.00%)	1 (4.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Teachers in my school are working together to identify and build on the starting points of learning for students in the context of COVID-19	12 (48.00%)	9 (36.00%)	1 (4.00%)	3 (12.00%)	0 (0.00%)

Digital technologies are an integral part of my teaching		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	21	84.00%
No	4	16.00%

If yes, how often?		
21 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Every lesson	2	9.52%
Every day	15	71.43%
A few times a week	4	19.05%

I have accessed online resources to support me in my teaching		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	25	100.00%

If yes, were these resources useful?		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	23	92.00%
No	2	8.00%

My school has a digital learning platform in place		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	21	84.00%
No	4	16.00%

I use the school's digital platform regularly in my teaching		
21 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	13	61.90%
No	8	38.10%

The pupils in my class know how to use the school's digital platform		
21 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	4	19.05%
No	17	80.95%

I have read the documents on the gov.ie/back to school website		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	24	96.00%
No	1	4.00%

Teaching is going well in my classroom		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	12	48.00%
Agree	13	52.00%

Pupils are engaging well during lessons		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	8	32.00%
Agree	15	60.00%
Don't know	2	8.00%

In the current circumstances, I am using different teaching approaches from those I used previously		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	18	72.00%
No	7	28.00%

As a result		
18 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
My teaching is better	1	5.56%
My teaching is just as good	15	83.33%
My teaching is not as good	2	11.11%

As a result		
7 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
My teaching is just as good as a result	4	57.14%
My teaching is not as good as a result	3	42.86%

With the current classroom arrangements I am able to provide pupils with opportunities to work collaboratively during lessons		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Always	1	4.00%
Most of the time	13	52.00%
Sometimes	10	40.00%
Never	1	4.00%

The pupils in my class are making progress in their learning		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	4	16.00%
Agree	19	76.00%
Don't know	2	8.00%

The pupils in my class are familiar with using digital technologies as part of their learning		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	28.00%
Agree	8	32.00%
Don't know	4	16.00%
Disagree	5	20.00%
Strongly Disagree	1	4.00%

My school has...		
25 Responses		
	Yes	No
A COVID-19 policy	25 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
A lead worker representative(s)	25 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Hand sanitisers at all of the main entrances	25 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Hand sanitisers in all classrooms	25 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)
An isolation area	25 (100.00%)	0 (0.00%)

The pupils in my class or setting...				
25 Responses				
	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Never
Sanitise their hands on the way into the school building	17 (68.00%)	6 (24.00%)	1 (4.00%)	1 (4.00%)
Sanitise their hands regularly during the school day	16 (64.00%)	4 (16.00%)	5 (20.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Follow the rules about physical distancing	6 (24.00%)	7 (28.00%)	5 (20.00%)	7 (28.00%)

I have completed the COVID-19 training provided by the Department of Education		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	25	100.00%

I am satisfied with the health and safety arrangements in place in my school to prevent infection from COVID-19		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	15	60.00%
Agree	8	32.00%
Disagree	1	4.00%
Strongly disagree	1	4.00%

I know what to do if a pupil in my class displays possible COVID-19 symptoms		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	25	100.00%

My school has arrangements in place to ensure that pupils can continue their learning in the event of a partial or full school closure		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Yes	21	84.00%
No	2	8.00%
Don't know	2	8.00%

Please select the arrangement(s) your school has in place:		
21 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Providing work and feedback using an online platform	16	34.04%
Providing work and feedback by using the postal service	5	10.64%
Providing work and feedback by e-mail	8	17.02%
Live lessons via online platform	5	10.64%
Lessons via video recording	4	8.51%
A mix of the above	9	19.15%
Providing work and feedback by using the postal service	5	10.64%
Providing work and feedback by e-mail	8	17.02%
Providing work and feedback using an online platform	16	34.04%
Lessons via video recording	4	8.51%
Live lessons via online platform	5	10.64%
A mix of the above	9	19.15%

I feel safe in my school		
25 Responses		
Answer	Count	Percent
Strongly agree	15	60.00%
Agree	7	28.00%
Don't know	2	8.00%
Disagree	1	4.00%