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Dear Principal

School Development Planning, Statutory Assessment, Pupil Reporting Arrangements and Study Leave

I am writing to provide clarification on a number of issues as the summer term commences.

School Development Planning

As you know, there is a legal requirement on schools to prepare a School Development Plan, with the detailed requirements relating to the preparation of the plans set out in The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

The Department is conscious that normal self-evaluation activities have been disrupted due to the pandemic and this has impacted on the School Development Planning process. We are also mindful of the additional pressures on school leaders in relation to staff absence and the requirement for periods of remote learning throughout this academic year.

In light of this, the Department is content to relax requirements for the 2022/23 academic year. Schools may wish to prepare a transitional plan for 2022/23. Alternatively, schools may find it more useful to amend or, for those in the final year of the three year cycle, extend the current School Development Plan for an additional year. Further more detailed guidance on School Development Planning will issue later this week.

A review of accountability and governance frameworks has recently commenced and it will examine the potential to streamline the School Development Planning process

going forward. The intention is to engage with school leaders as the review progresses and I will update you further as we progress.

Statutory Key Stage Assessment

The Department is also content to dis-apply all requirements for schools to carry out Key Stage Assessment during the 2021/22 academic year. This is designed to reduce burden and support flexibility for schools given the ongoing disruption this academic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is the Department's intention to commence a review of statutory Key Stage Assessment arrangements in the near future. The review had previously been delayed due to the pandemic but we hope to move forward over the coming months and to engage with school leaders and teachers on the purpose, nature and design of Key Stage Assessment.

Pupil Reporting Arrangements

The Education (Pupil Reporting) Regulations (NI) 2009 apply to all grant aided schools except nursery schools or pupils in primary schools or special schools who have not attained the lower limit of compulsory school age. The Regulations require an annual report to be provided to parents by 30 June and also set out what the report should contain at each Key Stage.

In both 2019/20 and 2020/21, due to the significant COVID-19 disruption, the Department gave flexibility in regard to this requirement and the content of the report provided to parents. I know you will concur, however, that reporting to parents is a key element of supporting children's learning and consequently there is a return to the usual legal requirements for the 2021/22 academic year.

Study Leave

Given the importance of maximising face-to-face teaching for pupils, I would note that as set out in DE Circular 2020/08 study leave should only be granted for pupils undertaking public examinations and **not** for pupils taking internal school examinations. In addition, remote learning should not be utilised to facilitate study days for internal exams.

The Department would also strongly recommend that extended study leave should not be granted to Year 11 pupils taking GCSE modular exams and that any short periods of study necessary prior to such exams should be facilitated within school wherever possible. It is extremely important to maximise teaching time for these pupils as they continue their GCSE studies into Year 12.

The AS timetable is largely complete by mid-June, the Department would, therefore, also recommend that pupils in Year 13 return to be taught in school until the end of the summer term. These pupils are mid A Level course and a significant amount of face-to-face learning has been lost during the past three academic years.

I trust this provides clarity on these issues. I wish to thank you for your continued commitment to supporting our children and young people.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Kingon". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

DR SUZANNE KINGON