

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



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16 March 2020

Dear Principal

Firstly let me say that I am fully cognisant that COVID-19 is in the forefront of the public's mind at the moment and the preparation you have undertaken within your schools thus far is very much appreciated by me.

Just two weeks ago one of the senior Medical Directors in the World Health Organisation said that the world is facing two very distinct battles in the coming weeks and months; one is the battle against COVID-19 and the second is the battle for social media. I am aware of the importance of information at this time and as such I have now asked my Officials to instigate twice weekly information bulletins for schools throughout Northern Ireland. The one you have just received is the first to be issued this week. As we clear issues within my Department let me assure you that school principals will be the first to have this information.

I also want to make clear to you I will not be giving weight to popular opinion on social media as regards COVID-19 but instead will be following the expert clinical advice provided to me by the Chief Medical Officer, the PHA and drawing from guidance issued by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

It appears likely that at some point in the future I will have to close schools based on the approach I have outlined above. This is not a step to be taken lightly and without due consideration to the significant consequences. Firstly this will be a policy decision backed up by clear and unambiguous advice from the Chief Medical Officer and the Public Health Agency. Secondly its ramifications will be a very significant number of parents being removed from their current jobs and instead staying home to look after their children. Some of these will be doctors, nurses, police officers, paramedics and fire fighters, the very people we need at this key moment in time to complete the mission critical contingency planning for the weeks and months ahead.

Finally can I thank you, and all your staff, for your forbearance thus far as we face a challenge unprecedented in modern history. I would appeal to everyone to stay calm and

approach this challenge with the determination, professionalism and skills I know each of you possess.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

PETER WEIR MLA
Minister of Education