



Circular 0018/2026

**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Post-Primary
Community and Comprehensive schools and
Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards.**

**Standardisation of the school year in respect of primary and
post-primary schools for the years 2026/27, 2027/28 and
2028/29**

**Including guidance for schools on the need to provide for contingency
arrangements to deal with unforeseen closures.**

Purpose

There are two parts to this circular:

Part 1 advises managerial authorities of the agreement that has been reached between the parties to the Teachers' Conciliation Council in relation to the standardisation of the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms for the school years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.

Part 2 provides guidance for school authorities on the need to provide for contingency arrangements to deal with prolonged unforeseen school closures. For example, a number of severe weather events occurred in recent years that required school closures. In this context, schools are required to follow the guidance set out in part two to plan for such unforeseen events.

In this circular "**school authority**" refers to the relevant managerial authority for the school concerned that is the relevant ETB in the case of ETB schools and board of management/manager in the case of other schools.

Part 1: Standardisation of the school year

1 (a) Principles informing agreement

In reaching agreement the parties took account of a number of relevant factors:

- the objective of avoiding problems for families which can be caused by variation in closure arrangements where children are attending different schools



- the requirement for a school to be open for all students/pupils for **a minimum of 166 days** at post-primary level and a minimum of **182 days** at primary level
- the date of the bank holiday in June and consequently the effective end of normally timetabled classes in post-primary schools and commencement date of the State examinations
- the difference in the length of the school year at primary and post-primary level and the potential for a lengthy final term in the primary sector depending on when Easter falls
- the timing of the bank holiday in October
- the desirability of having a reasonable interval between the end of first term and Christmas
- the need to publish a school calendar
- the need to provide for contingency arrangements to deal with unforeseen school closures, for example due to weather, etc. Such arrangements to be made available on the school's website.

1 (b)Timeframe of agreement

The agreement reached covers the arrangements that will apply to all schools from the start of the 2026/27 school year and covers three school years. The parties will review the operation of the arrangements not later than the autumn of 2028 for the purpose of agreeing the arrangements that will apply subsequently. The parties have also agreed that in the event that any unforeseen difficulty arises in relation to the operation of the arrangements now agreed, the matter can be raised at the Teachers' Conciliation Council.

Schools are required to reopen for tuition for all pupils/students on the weekday immediately preceding and immediately following each break period covered by this agreement.

Primary schools and special schools must be open for all pupils for a minimum of 182 school days. The practice of sending children in junior infants home early from school at the commencement of the school year is permissible for a period of no more than ten school days.

Post-primary schools must be open for **all** students and all year groups for a minimum of 166 school days. Staggering, at the commencement of the school year, is limited to a minimum of two days, and all students must return for tuition on the third day of the school year without exception.

The arrangements for 2026/27 onwards are set out in **appendix A** of this circular.



1 (c) Religious observance and standardisation

The above arrangements are agreed without prejudice to closure on specific days, subject to the overall requirement of 166 days at post-primary level and 182 days at primary level, dictated by religious observance that is required in schools under the patronage of different denominations or faiths.

1 (d) Extent of flexibility outside of the standardised breaks

It is not a requirement of this agreement that the commencement or end of the school year either at primary or post-primary level should be standardised. However, while schools may use their discretionary days, where available, to determine the precise start and end of the school year, it is recognised the commencement of State examinations will mean that post-primary schools will not be open for tuition beyond the Friday preceding the June bank holiday in any year.

The expectation is that the school year will normally commence during the week in which the 1st of September falls. However, a school year may commence in the week prior to that in which 1st of September falls in circumstances where otherwise it would not be practicable for the school to meet the overall requirement of a minimum of 166 days at post-primary level or 182 days at primary level, and in such a case the school should ensure that the date of commencement is as close as possible to 1st of September.

Schools are reminded that any day on which a school completes less than a full school day's tuition shall not be counted as a full school day for the purposes of meeting the overall requirements of 166 days at post-primary or 182 days at primary level.

The arrangements may provide some limited flexibility to schools on certain other days outside of the defined periods. The scheduling of such days must not be used to extend or modify the periods set out in this circular in respect of mid-term, Christmas or Easter breaks save where religious observance requirements of a school under a particular patronage make this necessary.

1 (e) Public Service Agreements

The Public Service Agreements make provision for additional time of one hour per week. Any aggregation of these hours (subject to consensus among the school staff) into full school days will necessitate attendance by teaching staff on days outside of the 182 and 166 tuition days required at primary and post-primary respectively. Circular 0008/2011 provides that at primary level aggregation into full days is subject to a maximum aggregation of the equivalent of two full days.

The contingency arrangements for the February mid-term and Easter breaks do not preclude a school from identifying any of these days for the purposes of aggregation of



hours. However, schools should ensure that an alternative arrangement for the use of the aggregated hours can be activated if changes are subsequently required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Part 2: Contingency arrangements for making up lost time due to unforeseen school closures

The parties have recognised that there is a need to include flexibility and to provide for contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures for example due to weather. It is important that any time lost due to unforeseen closures is made up by the school so that teaching and learning is not negatively impacted.

The purpose of the contingency arrangement is:

- to assist school authorities to plan for any impact that unforeseen school closures may have on teaching and learning.
- to inform the school community of the plans that are in place to make up for time lost.

The contingency arrangement should take account of both circular 0018/2026 "Standardisation of the school year in respect of primary and post-primary schools for the years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, and where closures are due to weather, the guidance available to school authorities by the [Office of Emergency Planning](#) on the [Be Winter Ready](#) website.

The main focus for school authorities in the event of an unforeseen closure, is to ensure that any impact on teaching and learning is addressed in an appropriate manner. Since both the time of year of the closure and the amount of time lost can vary from school to school, the actual impact on teaching and learning is something that can only be assessed at individual school level.

2 (a) Contingency arrangements to deal with prolonged unforeseen school closures.

Although spells of prolonged unforeseen school closures due to severe weather events for example are relatively few, school authorities are required to have clearly documented procedures in place for the occasions when a school may have to close in order to ensure the safety of all pupils/students and staff. A sample template contingency plan which schools can use is published alongside this circular.



The Government “Be Winter-Ready Information Campaign” provides advice and information to help the public including schools to be better prepared to deal with a period of severe weather. The [Office of Emergency Planning](#) has prepared a booklet “Be Winter-Ready” and developed a website [Be Winter Ready](#) to provide practical advice and contact details of the main services that can provide help in extreme weather-related emergencies. It is important for school authorities to be prepared, to keep themselves informed and to follow the advice published on the [Be Winter Ready](#) website.

Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures is set out below. This guidance sets out a structured approach to determining the measures to be put in place to make up for time lost. The guidance provides that subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to address shortfalls and to ensure that the curriculum is completed by the end of the school year should be put in place.

2 (b) Checklist to assist planning for contingency arrangements for making up for lost time:

1. The school authority should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closure days that have occurred.
2. The school authority should, in consultation with the principal and teachers, assess the effect of the loss of tuition and identify any shortfalls that have occurred as a result of the unforeseen closures.
3. The school authority should consult with the principal and teachers with a view to ensuring that the curriculum for each class/year group can be completed before the end of the school year. Subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to facilitate such work should be put in place. A non-exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:
 - prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
 - reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
 - consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours, etc.
 - in the case of post-primary schools ensuring examination and transition year classes attend all classes to the end of May.
4. If necessary, the school authority should review the school calendar with a view to identifying any available discretionary days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up the loss. In this regard, the school authority should take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils/students, parents and staff.



5. In cases where a school has been affected by prolonged school closures for example due to severe weather, and where the school authority considers that the above measures will not adequately address the loss in tuition involved, the school authority may, having established what arrangements for school transport may or may not be feasible if other schools are remaining closed, decide to implement either or both of the following contingency arrangements:
 - the February mid-term break may be reduced by up to three days subject to the requirement that all schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday of the week in which this break falls
 - the Easter break, in primary schools, may be reduced by up to three days by the school remaining open up to and including the Wednesday immediately preceding the Easter weekend. All primary schools must be closed on the Thursday and Friday immediately preceding the Easter weekend and remain closed for the remainder of the Easter break as set out in **Appendix A** of this circular.
6. The school authority should consider the implications of any measures identified for pupils/students, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school, etc.

The contingency arrangements within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures do not provide for remote teaching and learning.

Each school authority shall also provide to parents, at the beginning of each year, a calendar which includes details of school closures. It should be made clear that the calendar could be subject to change as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

A copy of the school calendar and contingency plan must also be made available on the school's website.

7. Queries in relation to this circular

Queries in relation to this circular should be emailed to:

schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie



8. Dissemination of circular

A copy of this circular should be provided to members of the board of management and the staff of the school. A copy should also be provided to the parents' association. This circular may be accessed on www.gov.ie. An Irish version of this circular is also available on www.gov.ie

Paraic Joyce
Principal Officer
School Governance Section

February 2026



Appendix A: Standardised school years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29

The following are the agreed arrangements in respect of the standardisation of the breaks at Christmas, Easter and mid-term in the first and second terms for the school years 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29:

School Year 2026/27

October 2026 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 26 October 2026 to Friday 30 October 2026** inclusive.

Christmas 2026

All schools will close on **Tuesday 22 December 2026**, which will be the final day of the school term. All schools will re-open on **Wednesday 6 January 2027**.

February 2027 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 18 February 2027 and Friday 19 February 2027**. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5-day break for the period from **Monday 15 February 2027 to Friday 19 February 2027** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 15 February 2027 to Friday 19 February 2027** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 17 February 2027**.

Easter 2027

All schools will close on **Friday 19 March 2027**, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a **primary** school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 24 March 2027**. All schools will re-open on **Monday 5 April 2027**.



School Year 2027/28

October 2027 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 25 October 2027 to Friday 29 October 2027** inclusive.

Christmas 2027

All schools will close on **Wednesday 22 December 2027**, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on **Thursday 6 January 2028**.

February 2028 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 24 February 2028 and Friday 25 February 2028**. (Primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5-day break for the period from **Monday 21 February 2028 to Friday 25 February 2028** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 21 February 2028 to Friday 25 February 2028** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 23 February 2028**.

Easter 2028

All schools will close on **Friday 7 April 2028** which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a **primary** school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 12 April 2028**.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 24 April 2028**.



School Year 2028/29

October 2028 mid-term break

All schools will close from **Monday 30 October 2028 to Friday 3 November 2028** inclusive.

Christmas 2028

All schools will close on **Friday 22 December 2028**, which will be the final day of the school term.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 8 January 2029**.

February 2029 mid-term break

All primary schools will close on **Thursday 15 February 2029 and 16 February 2029** (primary schools may use 3 discretionary days to extend this break to an alternative option of a 5-day break for the period from **Monday 12 February 2029 to Friday 16 February 2029** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.)

Post-primary schools will close from **Monday 12 February 2029 to Friday 16 February 2029** inclusive unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures.

Where contingency arrangements are required a school authority may reduce the length of the February mid-term break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 14 February 2029**.

Easter 2029

All schools will close on **Friday 23 March 2029**, which will be the final day of the school term, unless changes are required as part of contingency arrangements to make up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures. Where contingency arrangements are required a **primary** school authority may reduce the length of the Easter break by remaining open up to and including **Wednesday 28 March 2029**.

All schools will re-open on **Monday 9 April 2029**.