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19 May 2020

Dear Principal

Firstly, thank you so much for all of your efforts in these very difficult times, your support for the children and staff in your school is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Shared Education activity across all of our schools with pupil to pupil activity ending for most in early March 2020. EA staff normally involved in Shared Education have been redeployed to other critical functions. It is anticipated that the pandemic will continue to impact on our schools as a result of the ongoing need for social distancing measures and uncertainty in relation to the potential for a second wave.

As you are aware, the Delivering Social Change - Shared Education Signature Project (DSC SESP) closes in June 2020 and any costs committed by SESP schools up to June 2020 will be met. The Department has also funded a pilot resource model operating during 2019/20 to help inform longer term approaches to Shared Education, any costs committed to June 2020 will also be met. Our intention had been to bring forward a mainstreamed resource model for September 2020.

In the circumstances, the Department of Education has taken the decision to suspend Shared Education pupil to pupil activity for the 2020/21 year. This decision is intended to afford you a degree of certainty in taking forward your plans for 2020/21 and reduce the level of planning needed for shared activities in this academic year. It will also ensure that you can concentrate efforts when pupils are allowed back into the classroom on recovery and consolidation.

Given the current circumstances and the end of SESP funding, Shared Education activity in 2020/21 will instead focus on strengthening delivery. **2020/21 will become a transition year towards a mainstreamed model of Shared Education.** The Department and the EA will be focussing efforts on the outcomes of evaluations of SESP, NSSI and the 2019/20 pilot, reflecting on your very valuable feedback. When pupil to pupil activity does resume, we will have worked together to address the issues you have raised during evaluations, including: timetabling in post-primary; confidence around

teaching sensitive and controversial issues; levels of bureaucracy; access to transport; and how Shared Education aligns to and supports the curriculum.

We intend to make available targeted Teacher Professional Learning and support for online contact and we will also continue to provide funding for the leadership of Shared Education. Shared Education co-ordinators and leaders will be instrumental in the months to come in recovery efforts and planning for the resumption of normality. EA colleagues will provide further information in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation and commitment to both the SESP and the 2019/20 pilot. Over the last five years SESP has created shared learning experiences for pupils and staff in your schools. In 2019/20, the last full year of the project, over 65,000 pupils and 6,000 teachers had benefitted from their involvement in SESP and I understand that the relationships built through Shared Education have helped schools work through the current Covid-19 situation and I know that you will continue to support one another in the times to come.

We are all in uncharted territory and certainly not where any of us expected to be towards the end of the 2019/20 academic year. The safety and well-being of all of our pupils, teachers, school staff and colleagues must take precedence going forward and we hope that you will understand and support the decision taken.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Al Chambers." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**ALISON CHAMBERS**