

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Department of

Education

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To schools and education settings

I know that this year has been a very stressful time for education settings, schools, pupils and parents.

Today, the Executive has announced that schools and other education settings will have the half-term holiday break extended from 19 to 30 October.

Education settings will be closed to all pupils during these two weeks including for vulnerable children and children of key workers. Schools and other settings will reopen on Monday, 2 November.

The Department of Education is asking schools to use two of their existing Optional Days with the remainder of the additional time off through the use of automatically allocated Exceptional Closure Days.

I am aware that some schools have planned shorter half terms so may require more than three exceptional closures. The attached [circular](#) provides further information.

Schools are closed to all pupils. Principals should only bring staff into school during optional and exceptional closure days where they are unable to work from home. As this is an extension of the half-term break, it is not intended to be used for remote learning.

All school staff will be paid as normal including support staff and any substitute teacher who was booked to work during this extended half-term.

During the week beginning 19 October direct payments will be made to pupils in receipt of Free School Meals.

Generic youth services will close during this period with targeted provision of youth services continuing for those young people deemed 'at risk' as directed by the Education Authority.

This decision is a small part of a much wider package of societal response, and I want to emphasise that schools remain a safe environment for children and staff.

I want to thank principals, teachers and staff for their dedication and commitment to keeping their settings a safe and welcoming place for children and young people to learn and develop.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Weir". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**PETER WEIR MLA
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**