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Remarks by the Education Minister of Ireland on the measures taken for the reopening of schools. A roadmap has been identified to ensure that the challenge to take children back to schools is met.

Dear Friends, one of the most difficult decisions this government took regarded our schools. The closure of schools on March 12th was a moment when everyone understood the dramatic nature of the pandemic which has claimed the lives of 2,320 people on our island in only five months.

For the rest of the school term teachers, students and their families worked as hard as possible - showing incredible resourcefulness and resilience. However, the harsh reality is that on every level, personal, social and educational, remote learning is not enough. Equally, in terms of basic fairness we have to understand that many schools and families cannot keep up.

There is simply no substitute for students learning within schools in the presence of their peers and their teachers. This is why the development of a comprehensive plan to reopen our schools and to keep them open has been a core priority for this government .

Reopening our schools represents an unprecedented policy and logistical challenge. This challenge can only be met by a wide range of measures which will begin to be implemented in the coming days. It will be backed by substantial resources and investment of up to €400m.

As an education Minister, I have led an inclusive and detailed process of consultation and the examination of different options. This has included consideration of international experiences, though the fact is that every country is facing unique challenges.

Our schools are at the heart of our communities and reopening them is a critical step in the journey of recovering from the worst impact of the pandemic.

The measures which we are announcing today are the product of intensive work over the past month. It is a comprehensive range of measures backed by major new resources. The combination of extra staff, extra funding, clear guidance and new supports will help every school to adapt to its own needs.