

Outdoor lessons and smaller classes: how Italy's schools will change when they reopen in September ^[1]

Author:

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EXCERPTS

Italy's schools are to reopen on September 14th, the government has announced, with "at least a billion euros" in funding to implement new safety measures.

The government on Friday reached an agreement with Italy's regional and local authorities on reopening schools in September, after they were closed in March due to the coronavirus crisis.

A first draft of the new guidelines was rejected by regional authorities and the national association of headteachers, who asked for clearer instructions and more financial aid.

"We are allocating one billion euros for extra investments in schools to make them more modern, safe and inclusive," announced Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte at a press conference on June 26.

"The funding "must allow us to start again in September in complete safety," he said.

Conte and Lucia Azzolina, the education minister, announced new guidelines to be put in place when schools reopen, which include seating pupils one metre apart, classes being divided into smaller learning groups, and staggered arrival times for students.

Schools are also asked to open for lessons on Saturdays, though many Italian schools do this already.

Distance learning, which was used at all levels during lockdown, would only be an option for high school students in the new academic year, said education minister Azzolina.

"We also want to take school out of school; we'll take students to cinemas, theatres, and museums, and make sure that they breathe culture. We can also take the little ones to the park, when the weather allows, for lessons," she said.

"We are giving clear but flexible solutions," said Azzolina, adding: "For safety you need space, we can't go back to chicken coop classes."

The €1 billion in funding is intended to cover, among other things, the employment of 50,000 extra teachers and temporary school staff.

"Schools have never seen this much money," she said, adding that teachers would receive a bonus in July of between €80 and €100, in what she described as a "recognition they deserve, because the salaries of Italian teachers are among the lowest of Europe."

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