

Tús maith, leath na h-oibre

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Theme for School Year 2020 – 2021
“Childhood is a journey, not a race”

Principal: Richella Kelly Deputy Principal: Siobhán Finnegan McElgunn

Monday 24th August 2020

Re: Reopening of the School and Changes to some Routines

Dear Parent,

I hope this e-mail/ letter finds you well. I hope you had an enjoyable summer.

Update regarding the Reopening of the School

I'm contacting you today to update you on a few things regarding the re-opening of the school next **Tuesday 1st September**. I hope this letter will reassure you. Due to Covid 19 there will be a few changes. We cannot eliminate the risk of Covid 19, no interpersonal activity is without risk, but we can try to reduce or minimise the risk. The responsibility rests with the entire school community to keep Covid 19 out of the school. **We need your cooperation in relation to the following measures to achieve this.**

The BOM had fully adopted the *DES Covid 19 Response Plan* and had developed a *Covid 19 Policy Statement*. Both of these documents can be view on the school website under a dedicated webpage for Covid 19, www.leitrim-ns.ie/Covid19. The BOM and staff will follow DES guidelines in relation to Covid 19.

Maximise Distance/ Minimise Contact and Decluttering

Young children (Junior Infants to Second Class) are not expected to social distance. Older children, 3rd to 6th class are expected to keep a social distance of 1m away from each, where possible. Our classes are large and our classrooms are small. We will use a **common sense approach** to get as much distance as possible between pupils. All unnecessary furniture and other items have been removed from every classroom to maximise the amount of space between children in each classroom. It is still very difficult to facilitate 1m distance between pupils so the BOM have invested in Perspex screens to be placed on pupil's tables (3rd to 6th Class) to give added protection.

6th class will be the largest class in the school this year with 31 pupils. Mrs McElgunn and Mrs Keaveney swapped classrooms over the summer so 6th class will be in the largest classroom this year.

Other measures to reduce the risk of contracting and spreading Covid 19

There will be a **no handshake policy** in place. **Physical contact between pupils will be discouraged (no hugs etc)**. Pupils will be **discouraged form sharing personal items** (pencils, pens, writing materials etc) and discouraged from engaging in behaviours that involve hand to

mouth contact (putting pens and pencils in mouth). Pupils will have their own supply of necessary stationary and materials in school (e.g., pencil, crayons, scissors, glue stick etc).

Class Bubbles and Pods

From when children enter the school building in the morning until home time they will have very little to no interaction with other classes. Children will not be allowed to go into other classrooms. Break times will be staggered. When a teacher seats pupils in groups (pods) these groups or 'pods' will remain in place for a number of weeks, possibly a school term/ half term (i.e. until there is a school closure). It may take time in Junior Infants to create a 'pod' but these children are not expected to maintain social distance.

Each classroom will have a supply of **art materials**. The sharing of **PE equipment** will be reduced. A booking system will be put in place and equipment cleaned, where possible after use. **Aistear** equipment and toys will be cleaned before another pod or groups will be allowed to use them. **Play dough** will be for individual use only.

There will be no buddy reading/ jigsaws for fun/ maths for fun or any other activities where classes would have come together in the past. There will be no school assemblies this year. The school intercom system will be used for important announcements. We will not be in a position to invite parents or grandparents into the school to various events. At present there will be no Christmas Concerts, Carol Service, Induction Day or Graduation Day this year. If a vaccine for Covid 19 is developed and widely available, it may be possible for these events to take place. You will be updated over the next few weeks regarding the arrangements in place for other activities.

Staggered Entry and Exit from the School Building

Mornings: -

The BOM have decided to stagger entry and exit from the school building every morning and afternoon. **School doors will open at 9:10 a.m.** to allow pupils and families 10 minutes to enter the school building safely in a staggered manner. This should eliminate crowds of people at the school gate or on the school grounds in the morning. **The BOM do not provide morning or afternoon supervision and no child or parent should be on school grounds before school doors open.**

If you have a child in Junior or Senior Infants you may walk your child through the external Infants door. It is expected that all children from 1st to 6th class will walk into school from the school gate.

6th class pupils will walk to the side emergency exit of their new classroom.

1st class pupils will walk to the emergency exit at the back of the First Class classroom.

2nd and 5th class pupils will enter the school using the door with the railing.

3rd and 4th class pupils will enter the school using the main door.

From 9:10 a.m. children may enter the school building and walk to their classroom. The children will be told where to hang up their coat/ what to do with their coat. Once entering the school building/ classroom the children are not allowed to leave. Children will sit at their allocated seat and take out the necessary items for class. **Children will be supervised by school staff. Class will begin at 9:20 a.m. as usual.**

Home time: -

Infants 2 p.m.

Junior Infants will exit the school via the **Infant door**. **Senior Infants** will exit the school via the **Main door**. Please be on time to collect your child and please keep 2 meters away from others at collection time. There are markers painted along the diagonal white line and along outside the link corridor and First Class to assist you with this.

3 p.m.: 1st to 6th Class: Bus, car, walk

Pupils will be staggered leaving the classroom. Pupils that go home by **bus** will leave first, one by one. **Children will be instructed to leave the school building and get on the bus, without delay.** The pupils that travel by **car** will leave next and finally pupils that **walk** will leave the school in a similar way. In this way children in the same family should be leaving the school building around the same time. Even if teachers leave 10 seconds between pupils leaving the classroom all pupils will have exited the school building and school grounds in under 5 minutes.

Pupils in **First class** will exit the school via the **emergency exit at the back of the classroom**, close to the large tree on school grounds.

Pupils in **Second class** will leave via the **door with the railing.**

Pupils in **Third and Fourth class** will leave via the main door.

Pupils in **Fifth class** will leave via the **door with the railing.**

Pupils in **Sixth class** will leave via the **emergency exit at the side of their classroom.**

There should not be a large congregation of people at the school gate at 3 p.m. We have a number of markers painted along the timber fence on school grounds both inside the wall along by the wall, along by the side boundary of the school, in front of the shelter and along by the kerb. These markers are 2m apart to assist you with maintaining social distance. At 3 p.m. please enter the school grounds and stand on one of these markers to wait for and collect your child. We do not have enough to offer a marker to every family. **What arrangements are you going to put in place to collect your child at the end of the school day?** If your child is going home on the school bus, there is no need to make any additional arrangements. If your child is going to a child care facility, there is no need to make any additional activities. If your child is travelling by **car or walking** you may need to think about the following questions. Where will you park? Is your child to walk to the car? Will you wait on school grounds to collect your child? Is your child walking home? If so they must be reminded to walk home immediately. Please remind your child that 2 p.m./ 3 p.m. is not play time. It's home time. Parents and people collecting children at home time must observe and encourage social distancing. Please leave school grounds promptly. **We need your co-operation in relation to this.**

New Junior Infants

New Junior Infants and their parents will be invited into the school for 5 minutes to meet their teacher and see their classroom. Invitations have been issued for Tuesday 25th and Wednesday 26th August. Please adhere to your invitation time.

Parents/ Visitors entering the school building during the school day and Forgotten Items

All visitors to the school building, including all parents, will need to access the school building via the **main door**. You must ring the **bell** and wait for the busser to enter the school building. **All visits are by prearranged appointment.** Visitors must **sign in on a visitor's log** and **use hand sanitiser provided** inside the main door. All adults visiting the school building are asked to **wear a face covering**. All meetings with teachers and the principal will be **by appointment only**. You must **observe physical distancing of 2 meters at all times**. **You should not enter the school building if you have any symptoms of Covid 19.** We ask that you try to keep your visits to the school to a minimal and as short as possible.

Please ensure that **lunches/ homework/ school books etc in the correct school bag**. If lunch/books etc are forgotten, place the items in a plastic bag with the child's name clearly marked on the outside **and leave on a bench outside the main door**. (There will be a sign on the window to indicate which bench is to be used.) Then telephone the school to alert the secretary. The school secretary will then leave the items outside the relevant class, knock on the classroom door to alert the class teacher.

Staggered Break Times

Staff will strive to keep children in the same class bubbles during the school day. Pupils will not be allowed go into other classrooms. We will strive to keep children in the same class grouping from when they enter the school building until the leave again at 2 p.m./ 3 p.m. To achieve this **break**

times will be staggered. This is a huge commitment and undertaking by school staff. Teachers will be on yard duty every second day and in some cases every day. This will have a knock on effects for staff.

Children will need to get used to the noise of classes playing outside while they are working. Children will need to eat quickly, put on their coats, line up and walk quickly and quietly to the yard. Children will need to line up promptly when the bell rings. Children will be allowed to eat for 10 minutes before going to the yard and may bring any uneaten lunch to the yard to finish. This is common practice in the school for many years.

Four classes will be on yard for break at any one time. We have **three yards** in the school: - The 1st/ 2nd class yard at the back of the school, the Infants yard closest to the school building and the Senior Yard, close to the road with the basketball court, shelter and playing grids. **The Senior Yard will be divided into two clearly defined sections and two classes can play on this yard at break.** Classes must stay on their allocated part of this yard. There will be little or no access to the toilet during break times. Children will be informed about this next week and they will update you. On wet days children will remain in their classroom and the teachers and SNA's on yard duty will supervise the classes as per our school Supervision Policy. Children may not notice this change. Others may love the additional space they will have to play in their assigned area. This will have more of an impact on school staff than on children. This will require a lot of timetabling in the school. There will be a total of 8 member of staff (6 teachers and 2 SNA's) on yard duty any one day. We have 13 staff members that can undertake yard duty.

Signs and Symptoms of Covid 19/ Children unwell. IF UNWELL STAY AT HOME

You must be alert for the signs and symptoms of Covid 19. Please remind your child about good hand and cough hygiene and etiquette. This will be reinforced in school. **If your child is unwell you must keep your child at home.** Check your child's temperature regularly. You have been doing this prior to sporting activities. Perhaps you could consider doing this before school?

While school staff will not be checking pupils for signs and symptoms of Covid 19 on arrival at school we do **reserve the right to decline entry to a pupil who appears to have a fever or respiratory tract infection.**

If you send your child to school, it is understood that he/ she is fit for school and well enough to complete a full day in school.

If a child becomes unwell during the school day we will seek your permission to check your child's temperature using a non-contact forehead thermometer. Please see the attached consent form. Please print this form, sign it and return it to the school on or before next Tuesday, 1st September. If you do not have a scanner perhaps take a photo of the completed form and e-mail it to the school as an attachment.

Hand Hygiene/ Hand Washing/ Hand Sanitiser

Every child should wash their hands **before coming to school** and again **every afternoon when they arrive home from school.** During the school day children will be reminded to wash their hands after using the toilet and frequently during the school day but in a common sense way so as not to interfere with teaching and learning. Please note that we do not have hot or warm water in the hand basins in the school toilets or sinks. We do provide antibacterial liquid soap. Paper hand towels are provided for drying hands.

The BOM obtained quotations for the instillation of hot water in the school. Even with recent DES grants to the school we would need three times the amount of funding to install hot water. **Hand sanitiser will be provided in each classroom and inside each entry door to the school.** Children and adults will be reminded and encouraged to use this hand sanitiser regularly. If you wish you can provide a different hand sanitiser for your child.

Cleaning

In the current climate the BOM consider the cleaning of the school as important as teaching and learning and have allocated 25 hours per week, 5 hours per day to the cleaning of the school building. Pupils desks and chairs will be cleaned every evening in addition to frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, taps, toilets, light switches. Every teacher will have access to cleaning materials and will clean their desks at the start and end of every day. Bins will be emptied every evening after school. For many reasons including Garda Vetting, interruptions to teaching time and interruptions to access to toilets the BOM will not be employing a cleaner during the school day.

During the school day/ If a child develops the signs or symptoms of Covid 19

If a child becomes unwell or develops any signs or symptoms of Covid 19 during the school day, the child will be sent to the isolation area. This isolation area is located on the corridor outside Mrs McElgunn's classroom. Mrs McElgunn's classroom door will be opened to supervise the child. The child will be given a face mask. The secretary will contact you and you will be asked to collect your child from the school as soon as possible. You should then bring your child to a doctor for further advice. Your child should not return to school until he/ she is fully recovered.

Staff: IF UNWELL STAY AT HOME

If staff members are unwell they must stay at home. This may have a knock on effect on teaching and learning. For the past number of years there has been a huge shortage of substitute teachers. While the DES are setting up new supply panels for substitute teachers we don't know in advance what the demand will be for a substitute teacher on any one day so cannot know the availability of substitute teachers in advance. The DES have published guidelines on how to fill any such vacancy. A Special Education Teacher may have to be re-deployed to a mainstream classroom for a day or two. Due to the knock on effects of the principal taking a class the Admin Principal is 5th in line to take a class. **We cannot divide a class.**

Staff training. All members of school staff will complete **DES Covid 19 training prior** to the school re-opening. All staff members will **complete a Staff Pre Return to Work Form** prior to the school reopening.

Social Distancing: All school staff will be expected to observe social distancing of 2m, where possible, between each other and between other adults. Again we will take a common sense approach to this in the school as some classrooms will have and SNA based in them and at times a SET may give in class support. Movement of SNA's and SET's between classrooms will be kept to a minimal but cannot be avoided. I will need to visit classrooms from time to time.

Holidays during the school year

The BOM ask you to think twice prior to taking children on holidays during the school term. Children have already missed three months of school. If you are going abroad, you may have to self-isolate for 14 days on return. You have a duty to protect others. Below is part of an e-mail sent to the school from the DES: -

'Reminder to anyone attending school who has travelled abroad:

Government policy, which is based on official public health advice, continues to advise against non-essential travel overseas for everyone.

It is a requirement for anyone coming into Ireland, from locations other than those with a rating of 'normal precautions' ("green"), to restrict their movements for 14 days, and this includes school staff, parents and children or other students coming from abroad to attend school in Ireland. Restricting your movements means staying indoors in one location and avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.'

E-mail Address and Mobile numbers

Most of the communication between the school and home will be via e-mail or text message this year. From time to time we will need to send hard copies of documents home.

If it is of utmost importance that the school have a valid, frequently checked e-mail address for every family. If you do not have an e-mail address you will need to set one up. We also need one mobile number for our text a parent system in the school. Please make sure we have your up to date contact numbers and address.

I invite you to e-mail the school if any of your contact details have changed. We will update our system. Include your child's/ children's names and classes in the Subject bar as well as the subject of your e-mail. **When e-mailing the school create a new e-mail each time instead of replying to an e-mail.**

Please keep an eye on the school website for updates, www.leitrim-ns.ie and the school facebook page also.

There is a lot of information in this e-mail and I will break it down into sections for our school website if you need a reminder about one aspect. I will also e-mail some short video clips which may clarify things for you. I only had time for one take so please excuse any mistakes.

We are in this together and we will all work together to keep Covid 19 out of our school so that children can attend school safely.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in relation to ensuring the safety of every pupil and staff member in St. Joseph's N.S. We are in this together.

Yours sincerely,

Richella Kelly

Richella Kelly,
Principal