

18 August 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians

We hope that you and your family are well and that you are all looking forward to the start of the new school year. We are looking forward to having our students back to school. We are working hard here in school, behind the scenes, to get everything ready for your children's safe return to school.

We are following our instructions very carefully and we are especially mindful of members of our school community who have health issues, sensory issues and those of you who are worried about students coming home to vulnerable family members.

We wish to advise you on our plan to date, as set out below, which is applicable to all second level schools. We are also including an information sheet for quick reference.

Roadmap for the Full Return to School

We will be compliant with the *Roadmap for the Full Return to School* published by the Minister of Education on 28 July 2020. Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being a place of learning, our school is also a place of work.

Our School COVID-19 Response Plan includes the following

- COVID-19 Policy Statement
- Full implementation of the Roadmap for the Return to School
- A Lead Worker Representative (LWR) Role to assist management in implementing the plan
- Procedures for dealing with a suspected case of COVID-19

Our school Covid-19 Response Plan is near completion and will be available on our school website shortly. We have been working very closely with our patron, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board with regular management meetings online throughout the summer to prepare for this coming academic year.

Key messages for our school community.

- Everyone must play his/her part to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection for staff, students, our families and the wider community.
- We must keep in mind importance of school attendance and education for the health and wellbeing of students and society as a whole.
- We will be depending on each other to reduce the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 within the school.

Knowing the symptoms of COVID-19

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms.

They are:

- high temperature
- cough
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

If your child/children complains of any of these symptoms, please keep your child/children at home and call your GP immediately. Students who present with symptoms will need to go home.

Respiratory Hygiene

Good respiratory hygiene means covering one's mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Tissues should be binned immediately after use and hands cleaned. By following good respiratory hygiene, we protect the people around us from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

Hand Hygiene

- Staff and students will be briefed again on why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash and sanitise their hands.
- We will promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the school on how to wash hands.
- Hand sanitiser dispensers will be deployed at exit and entry points of the school and in all classrooms.
- Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities are provided in all toilets, kitchens and practical classrooms as well as two additional hand washing stations.

Frequency of Hand Hygiene

Students and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- on arrival at school
- before eating or drinking
- after using the toilet
- after petting animals
- after playing outdoors
- when their hands are physically dirty
- when they cough or sneeze

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing will be applied in as far as is possible and in a practical way to facilitate the learning environment. We have made all efforts to achieve this by rearranging all available space in the school to achieve the recommended distancing for schools in all classrooms.

Coming to and from school

All schools are encouraging students to walk or cycle to school if they can do so. Parents/guardians are required to observe and respect all social distancing protocols in relation to any contact with the school. This includes maintaining a two metre distance to other families when dropping off or collecting their children from the school and any contact with the school. All visits to the school must be advised in advance through the school office. Visitors to the school are very strictly limited. When students arrive at school, they should proceed directly to their base classroom, which will be assigned to them once they return to school. Students should not congregate in groups close to one another. Assigned entrances and exits will be given to all year groups when they return.

Face Coverings for Students

We are requesting that all students have their own supply of plain coloured face masks, which can be disposable or washable. Facemasks are widely available and advice about the types of facemasks can be found via the HSE link below and from your pharmacist. We request that students refrain from wearing facemasks that depict any imagery on them so as not to cause offence to others. Facemasks will not need to be worn when students are exercising, eating or drinking or socially distanced outdoors. Students will also be able to remove facemasks in classes where there is adequate social distancing. <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>

School Transport

The following advice has been issued by Bus Éireann:

- A student is not to use school transport if they are displaying symptoms
- Students are asked to sit in pre-assigned seating and next to a sibling or child from their class group (this should be the same child at all times)
- Students are requested to use hand sanitiser on boarding the bus
- Students should observe good respiratory hygiene at all times while waiting for and on-board transport services
- To disembark the bus one by one in an orderly fashion
- With the exception of those children who for medical or special educational needs reasons are not in a position to wear a face mask or face covering, all other students travelling on the post-primary scheme are required to wear face coverings while waiting for and on-board transport services.

Students who have been on holidays outside of Ireland

Given the current domestic and international situation, the Government has advised against travelling abroad.

All passengers who return into Ireland are required to restrict their movements to limit the potential of importing COVID-19 and infecting their families, communities and workplaces. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to accelerate internationally. There are significant risks associated with international travel. If your child/children have been abroad prior to school resuming, we would appreciate a call from you about this

Access to school

We have always had an open door policy and very much regret that access to the school by parents and guardians will be far more restricted. The advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) makes it clear that schools must restrict access to the campus outside of students and staff. Only in very exceptional circumstances should students be collected from school during the day. Appointments for students should be made outside of the school timetable if possible. Please call in advance of picking up your child.

Changes to the Code of Behaviour Policy during Covid-19

In light of the need for students to be more mindful of attending school during the current Covid-19 climate, an amendment to the Code of Behaviour Policy is required so that students will be aware of specific rules on their return to school. Changes or adjustments to this policy are made in order to be able to keep all of our students, families and staff safe. We will advise when this is completed.

How to prepare for the return to school - how can parents/guardians help.

As students have missed several months of life at school, it may take some time to adjust to returning to school-life. You, as parents/guardians can help with this adjustment by starting to encourage your child/children to change their routines and habits between now and start of the school year. Going to bed a little earlier, preparing uniform, schoolbag, schoolbooks etc. are all helpful in preparing students for the return to school-life. There is an excellent range of supports available on <https://loveparenting.ie/back-to-school-resources/> specifically for parents to help with this. These resources are specifically for parents to use with their children and cover these areas

- Having the chats
- Routines
- Managing your child's anxiety
- Parent self-care

New First Year Students

We look forward to meeting our new first years! [Step Up To Secondary School](#) is a fantastic resource developed by Planet Youth. It has a number of resource pages for parents and students. Each resource page has a number of topics to browse. www.stepup.ie

Supporting the wellbeing of students

There will be a significant emphasis on promoting the wellbeing of our school community, as part of the plan to ensure a successful return to school, as we all continue to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are living through an exceptional time that affects the wellbeing of everyone in different ways, at different times. People are worried about the risk to their physical health and that of their loved ones and have been challenged to varying degrees by the public health measures that were put in place in Ireland to control the spread of the virus, such as staying at home and school closures.

Additional Information

There is a comprehensive range of documentation available at gov.ie/backtoschool if parents would like to view the relevant information in supporting parents and students with the opening of schools for the new academic year. Our school website will be updated regularly to keep parents/guardians, students and staff briefed on returning to school. We will send text messages and emails to share information and updates with you promptly and regularly.

Thank you for your continued support of our school and we look forward to being in contact with you soon again.

Helena Keane
Principal

Damian Duggan
Deputy Principal