

Opening Our Schools 21/22: Covid-19 Communications



Communication to Parents/Guardians - August 2021

19/08/21

Dear Parents and Guardians

We hope you and your child/children are safe and well and that you are all looking forward to the start of the new school year at the end of August.

The Department of Education have published revised plans, yesterday Wednesday 19th August, which set out what the operation of schools will look like for 2021/2022 and the range of supports which will be available in a COVID-19 context from the commencement of the new academic year.

The plans have been developed in line with public health advice issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and in compliance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work. All schools are required to implement a School COVID-19 Response Plan, including a:

- COVID-19 Policy Statement
- Lead Worker Representative (LWR)
- Procedure in 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 Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board Senior Management and have had regular meetings online throughout the summer to prepare for this coming academic year.

Key Messages for all Stakeholders (students, staff and parents / guardians)

1. Everyone needs to continue to play his/her part to minimise the risk of COVID-19 for staff, students, families and the wider community while recognising the importance of education for the health and wellbeing of students and society as a whole.
2. Everyone must make every effort to minimise the risk of infection.
3. Everyone needs to reduce the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 within the school itself if an outbreak in the school is detected.

Ventilation and CO2 monitors

Managing ventilation is just one of a suite of public health measures in place to keep our school safe. Updated guidance for schools on Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools was provided at the end of May following the work of an expert group that carefully considered the role of ventilation in managing COVID-19.

- We will have windows and doors open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. Cross ventilation will be in place in so far as possible.

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- We will deploy Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) monitors which can play a part in providing a useful general indication that areas/rooms may not be adequately ventilated. They can enable occupants to become familiar with the impacts of activities, outdoor weather and window openings on levels of good ventilation.

Classrooms will be colder this year again, and students may be advised to wear jackets from time to time. We will monitor the use of heating in the school building to ensure that ventilation is maximised.

An important reminder on 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 without delay.

Respiratory Hygiene

Good respiratory hygiene is essential in managing this pandemic. This means covering one's mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Everyone should use tissue immediately and dispose of used tissue safely into a nearby bin.

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 on why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands.
- We will promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the school on how to wash hands. Everyone should follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing.
- Hand sanitiser dispensers will be deployed more at exit and entry points of the school and classrooms.
- Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities are provided in all toilets and kitchens.

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

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We have arranged all of the necessary PPE supplies for use in our school from the day it opens for students.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing will be applied in so far as is possible and in a practical way to facilitate the learning environment. We will make all efforts to achieve this by increasing separation by utilising and reconfiguring all available space in the school. Other measures that have been taken include efforts to maximise physical distancing, reviewing timetables, staggered break times and decreasing interaction.

Coming to and from school

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 are required to be made in advance through the school office.

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 Masks for Students

We are requesting that all students have their own supply of plain coloured face masks, which can be disposable or washable. Face masks are widely available and advice about the types of facemasks we recommend can be found via the HSE link below and on our website. We request that students refrain from wearing face masks that depict any imagery on them so as not to cause offence to others. Face masks will not need to be worn when students are exercising, eating or drinking or in the yard.

Students will also be able to remove face masks in classes where there is adequate social distancing while eating. Additional information regarding face coverings is available from the HSE website - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>

The Department of Education has directed that staff and students, at post-primary level, are required to wear a facemask. Referencing exemptions, the Department of Education states that in circumstances where a medical certificate is not furnished, a person/s (staff or student) will be refused entry to the school.

Students are expected to comply with the standards of behaviour set out in the Code of Behaviour policy or as directed by the school to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19. The COVID-19 control measures are consistent with current advice from the HSE, the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Foreign Affairs and, as such, may be subject to change. Students and parents/guardians will be notified of any changes to the control measures.

Students are expected to comply with all directions from school staff in relation to the school's COVID-19 control measures. Any failure or refusal to comply with this policy or to follow instructions of school staff should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.



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 to maintain physical distancing while waiting for transport
- 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 respiratory etiquette 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.
- Busses will operate at 50%, pending ongoing review.

Contacting/visiting the school

Access to the school by parents and guardians will continue to be restricted for the foreseeable future. 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. If you wish to call the school, please contact the school office for an appointment.

Parent Teacher Meetings

Unfortunately, we will not be permitted to have any Parent Teacher Meetings for the foreseeable future. We will be in touch with you soon with regards to alternative arrangements for reporting to you on your child's/children's' progress. Please don't hesitate to contact the school by email/phone to make contact with your child's Tutor/Year head if you need to speak to a member of staff.

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

You, as parents/guardians can help with the adjustment children will be making in getting back into the routine of attending school. You can encourage your child/children to change their routines and habits between now and the start of the school year by going to bed a little earlier, preparing uniform, schoolbag, school books etc. are all helpful in preparing students for the return to school-life. There is an excellent range of supports available on www.loveparenting.ie specifically for parents to help with this. These resources have been created specifically for parents to use with their children and cover these areas;

- Having the chats
- Routines
- Managing your child's anxiety
- Parent Self-Care
- Maintaining Routines

<https://loveparenting.ie/back-to-school-resources/>

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New First Year Students

Step Up To Secondary School is a fantastic resource developed by Planet Youth and their partners. It has a number of resource pages for parents and students. Each resource page has a number of topics to browse through. Some topics have additional information such as advice, videos or extra research. You can access this site here - www.stepup.ie

Supporting the wellbeing of students

We will continue to prioritise the wellbeing of our school community as we as a school, appreciate that we are living through exceptional times which impacts on the wellbeing of everyone in different ways and at different times. People have been naturally 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 restricting movement.

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 www.stjohnbosco.ie will be updated regularly to keep parents/guardians, students and staff briefed on returning to school. We may also 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.

Yours Sincerely

Denis O'Rourke
Principal