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MEÁN SCOIL NAOMH IOSAIF
ST. JOSEPH'S
SECONDARY SCHOOL

August 2020

Dear Parents/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. Undoubtedly, the end of the last academic year proved to be very challenging for everyone.

We are extremely grateful to our students, you as parents and our staff in making great efforts to engage so positively during school closure.

Our school Covid-19 Response Plan is available on our school website. However, we would like to update you on **our plans for returning safely to school** this year. For now, this is to provide you with some insight into what to expect, based on the plan outlined. The plan is fluid and will continue to be adapted based on parent/teachers/students input, and based on government guidelines, (which may change as situation evolves).

Returning to Work:

The school officially re-opens for staff on Friday, August 28th, and for students on Tuesday, September 1st.

All staff will have completed online Covid-19 Health & Safety training protocols before returning to work.

All students, on their return to school will have an induction session on COVID Health & Safety protocols to help them get to know the new procedures which have been put in place for the safety of staff and students.

Students should have their **own face coverings** on them at all times.

Students arriving by bus will enter the building first, usually arriving around 8:30am. Students **who live locally or who are dropped off by car, are to arrive no earlier than 8.50am** to stagger entry to the building. **Students traveling home by bus will leave the building 5 minutes earlier** than the remainder of the student cohort, again to stagger the numbers exiting the building.

A **one-way system** will apply both on entering and exiting the school, and along the corridors. Students are to enter by the secretary's, (Zena's), office and will exit via the upper yard double doors in the new wing of the school. (NOTE: at end of day extra emergency exits will be opened to allow safe departure of full student cohort).

It is essential that we have **your correct contact details**. In the event of a medical concern, we must be able to contact you immediately. Please check your VSWare account, (and/or with Zena in the school office), to ensure all details are correct.

It is also **essential that you visit the school website and Facebook page for updates, as well as checking your emails regularly**. We will communicate with you to alert you if there are any Covid-19 concerns.

Students should NOT come to school if they feel unwell / display any of the Covid-19 symptoms, (cough, temperature, loss of smell / taste, shortness of breath).

If you have travelled from a country not on the current Green List, your son/daughter must self-isolate for a period of 2 weeks and must not come to school.

First Year Students:

On Tuesday, September 1st, **First Year Students will only need to bring:**

- a pencil case with pens, pencils etc., and a notebook or copy.
- a mask/face- covering. (Please note that these must be appropriate for school setting and no scarves or bandanas are allowed)
- a healthy snack for break time as the canteen and shop will not operate for the foreseeable future.

Students will get a tour of the school, meet their new classmates and learn how the school day works and what their subjects are about. They will get their new timetables and their school journal which explains how the school runs.

The various other Year Groups will return in the following order:

September 1st and 2nd: 1st Years only
September 3rd and 4th: 6th Years return

September 7 th :	3 rd Years return
September 8 th :	5 th Years return
September 9 th :	2 nd Years return
September 10 th :	TY return

THE SCHOOL WILL CONTACT YOU IN EARLY SEPTEMBER IF THERE ARE TO BE ANY ADDITIONAL CHANGES TO OUR USUAL ROUTINE - WE WILL FOLLOW NATIONAL ADVICE.

Covid-19 Safety Precautions:

We are preparing the school so we can follow all of the necessary safety procedures as outlined by the Department of Education and the HSE. These include:

We have **displayed HSE guidelines and Covid-19 Safety Signage across the school**, (classrooms, toilet blocks, common areas), to educate students on how to ‘Stop the Spread’ of Covid-19;

We have markings at various locations to remind everyone about keeping your distance from others.

Cleaning schedules have been increased.

Classrooms will be set up with desks at a minimum of 1 metre distance. This means a maximum of 24 students will be possible in most classrooms. Depending on certain subjects and the numbers of the students in the class, students may be able to sit further apart from each other. As a result, all year groups will be divided into three classes.

All 1st, 2nd and TY students will stay in base classes as often as possible and teachers will move to them, reducing the need for students to mingle on the corridors. They may need to move for some of their option subjects, (Woodwork, Art, Home Economics, Science, MTW, etc.), and some students may need to move for Maths, Irish and English. However, **the movement for these students and for the 3rd, 5th and 6th year students will be kept to a minimum, with students being allocated a seat beside someone from their base class and always within the same small section of the school.**

3rd, 5th & 6th Years will be assigned a designated desk which will be wiped down before and after use in each class they attend. They must use this same desk every time they are in that particular classroom, to support contact tracing efforts, if needed. **Classroom desks and chairs will be sanitised at least once every day.**

Homework will be given out by teachers online and must be submitted by students back to teacher online as no copies will be passed back and forth. This will be done using Office 365 (Teams). **All teachers will be trained on Microsoft Teams** and they will use this tool to manage homework assignments. **Students will also be trained on MS Teams** when they return to school. (Note: there are also free tutorials online). Should we go into full lockdown again, teachers will deliver their weekly timetable via MS Teams so students can attend school virtually according to their timetable. To facilitate any student who may have to stay home due to illness/self-isolating, teachers will post weekly topics/work online for students to follow.

Students will be asked to wear suitable PE attire, (navy, black or grey tracksuit bottoms and T-shirt/hoodie with appropriate runners), on the day they are timetabled to have PE. Please note that these days are NOT non-uniform days and non-PE clothing is unacceptable.

Teachers will not touch student journals for notes etc. All notes will be on our electronic system (VSWare) which parents have access to. We encourage you to check this daily to see any positive notes or notes of concern that your son/daughter may have.

Robust procedures are now in place to respond to a suspected case of Covid-19. We have created a **Covid Isolation Room** in case anyone displays symptoms while in school. In such cases, students will be brought to this space where they can safely isolate until they can be collected following consultation with medical practitioners. An Isolation room has been set up in the MTW corridor. A back up isolation room is also set up in the Wheelchair toilet area in the front building, (as a reserve).

There will be **no shop or canteen available.** (Students must bring packed lunch).

The old basketball court has been repurposed to create a new assembly hall. Year groups will be assigned a segregated area for their **breaks**, (e.g: 5th and 6th years will take their breaks in the new assembly hall area), to reduce the numbers of students mingling with each other. They will also be allocated a place outside to get fresh air.

Extra **supervision** will be employed at all break times to ensure social distancing and Health & Safety protocols are being upheld by all students.

Students will not have access to their lockers. We will do our best to minimise the number of books students will need to bring to/from school each day, and teachers will advise on this in the first weeks of teaching.

Parents/Guardians and other visitors are no longer allowed into any part of the school building without a prior appointment.

No cars other than staff cars, are to enter past the school gate.

Classrooms will have **plenty of hand sanitiser** and antibacterial wipes. Hand sanitiser will be positioned throughout the school at all touch-points and on walls of corridors.

Students will be allocated a specific **toilet** to use and will be only allowed into the toilets in small groups to ensure social distancing. It is asked that students minimize their toilet breaks. Toilet breaks will be strictly one person at a time.

Face masks are compulsory and must be worn at all times, when 2 metre distancing cannot be maintained. The recommendation is that face masks are preferable to visors as a safer option.

Students should have their own labelled water bottle and have it filled coming from home. We will not be able to fill water bottles or give out drinks from staffrooms.

Students should not leave any of their belongings in school overnight.

There can be **no sharing of books or equipment** in classrooms.

While these measures have been put in place, we must remember at all times that nothing works better than ensuring students **take personal responsibility** to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. This means ensuring they maintain safe distances from other people, cough/sneeze into their elbow or tissue which is disposed safely, wearing a face-covering when social distancing is not possible, washing hands with hot water and soap and continuing to sanitise their hands.

We will check-in constantly with students to ensure they are doing well and feeling safe.

Code of Conduct:

Our **Code of Conduct is currently flexible enough to enable us to deal with instances of non-compliance** of mask wearing, failure to follow instructions from a member of staff, and unacceptable behaviour. To complement this, the following regulations will also apply:

- All students must wear a face mask, (plain colours; no logo or offensive slogans), in class. Face masks will not need to be worn when students are exercising, eating or drinking or in the yard. Additional information regarding face coverings is available from the HSE website.
- Masks must be worn on the corridor, coming into the school building and transferring from class to class.
- Students must not share any items, for example: pens, rulers, calculators, books, water bottles, etc.
- Hand sanitisers should only be used for the purpose intended. Any student caught using the hand sanitisers in an inappropriate manner will face a serious sanction.
- Social distancing, hand hygiene and good respiratory etiquette should be observed by all students. (Good respiratory etiquette means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze.)
- Where students have an elective subject (e.g. options) they should move quickly into their new class and should be seated with members of their base class cohort, observing as much physical distance as possible.
- Physical distancing between the teacher and class should be observed.
- No student should attend school if unwell or any members of their household are unwell with symptoms consistent with Covid-19.
- Any student who develops symptoms of Covid-19 at school should bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly.
- Any behaviour deemed to be inappropriate or disrespectful with regards to any member of the school community and Covid-19 Guidelines may incur a serious sanction, in line with the school's Code of Behaviour. (E.g: Any student caught spitting or coughing at another member of the school community will face a serious sanction, in line with the school's Code of Behaviour).

- Students who may not be able to wear masks for medical reasons will be considered on a case by case basis.

We realise that many of these measures sound daunting, but we will do everything we can to help you through this process. If we continue to work together we can make this challenging time that bit easier. Please communicate with us as often as you need – email is the most effective way of getting in touch with us.

As students have missed several months of life at school, it is totally understandable that it will take some time to adjust to returning to school-life in the new reality we find ourselves. 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, 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/>

There are also a range of useful resources for the new 1st year students. 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

There is a comprehensive range of documentation available at gov.ie/backtoschool, if parents would like to view the relevant information on 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 may also send text messages and emails to share information and updates with you promptly and regularly.

Thank you for your continued support. Looking forward to welcoming your son/daughter back and to a great year ahead.

Kind regards,

John O’Donovan (Principal).