

11th March 2021

Dear 5th Year parents/guardians and students.

We hope that despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 you and your families are keeping well. We are very much looking forward to welcoming our 5th Year students back to school this Monday, 15th March.

We would like to thank you for your support and cooperation throughout the most recent period of remote learning. Our young people have displayed such exceptional adaptability, positivity and innovation when faced with lock-down and remote learning and that we know they will adapt back into our school based COVID routines and measures with the same spirit and resilience.

COVID Measures

Our COVID Response Plan & Policy has been updated and is available on our website or through our school app. The update includes a small number of amendments as advised by the Dept of Education.

Our practical day-to-day COVID measures are of most importance to our students as they return. These are attached. In essence they remain the same as before Christmas with a few small additions.

There are two main changes for our 5th Year students returning on Monday.

- (1) A 'Return to Educational Facility Parental Declaration Form' **MUST** be completed for each 5th Year student before their return to school on Monday 15th March and on returning to the school setting after any other absence thereafter. This declaration is available on our school app under the "Consent Form" tab in the main menu. Please complete at your earliest convenience, but no later than 8am on Monday morning.
- (2) Students are **NOT allowed to leave the premises** once they arrive into the school building each morning (including break and lunchtime). Given the greater transmissibility of the current strain of COVID-19 it is important that students are supervised at all times while in our care. Supervision of students when they are off-site during the school day can be extremely challenging. Food and snacks will be available from the school canteen or students can bring a packed lunch from home. We will keep this measure under review in the first number of weeks and will adjust it when we are confident that it is safe to do so.

We would like to remind students and parents that in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of each member of our school community breaches of COVID procedures/measures will be considered breaches of our Code of Behaviour and sanctioned accordingly.

As our students return, we will monitor, review, and adjust our measures as required. We ask for your patience and understanding as we continue to work through these issues and plan for our re-opening.

Supporting Each Other

We know that for some students returning to school in the current climate may be somewhat daunting. Please know that the Board of Management and our staff will continue to work hard to ensure our systems and measures are implemented in a way that keeps our school community as safe as possible.

Please do not hesitate to make contact through the school office if we can help your son/daughter in any way when they return to school. We thank you in advance for your support and cooperation in ensuring our school community can return to a safe and positive learning environment with confidence.

Yours sincerely,



Kerry Harkin
Principal



Sean Costelloe
Deputy Principal

COVID Measures - March 2021

Return to School

Students **MUST NOT ATTEND SCHOOL** if they have any of the **symptoms of COVID-19**.

These are:

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

Those experiencing symptoms should phone their doctor and follow Public Health guidance on self-isolation.

If you are in any doubt of whether or not to send your son/daughter to school, please err on the side of caution.

We know that preventing the spread of the virus relies not just on our behaviour in any one place; it is how we behave all of the time. We expect all members of our school community to practice social distancing and COVID etiquette both in and outside of school. We will have significant measures in place to help stop the spread of COVID on-site, but of course the ideal scenario is to prevent COVID-19 coming into the school in the first place. **Please discuss with your young person the importance of their actions and activities outside of school being COVID compliant.**

We will talk through the measures, COVID Hygiene and social distancing again with students during the first day back to school

Please encourage your son/daughter to take the measures seriously, but also to not worry or be overly anxious. We understand that these systems and measures can be challenging at times and we will endeavor to be supportive and understanding.

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Facemasks & COVID Hygiene

DES recommended that “teachers, staff and students attending post primary schools wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2m from other staff or students cannot be maintained”.

- Since it is virtually impossible for 2m social distancing to happen in a school setting **all students** will be **required to wear facemasks throughout the school day**. Social distancing referred to in these measures will be at a minimum of 1m, as permitted by DES once facemasks are worn.
- Students should **wear their own reusable facemask**, but disposable masks will be available for those who may forget their own facemask. We expect the design of students’ facemasks to be respectful and school appropriate.
- We understand that this will be challenging at first, but we will help and support students as much as possible.

Students will be required to **sanitise their hands** on entering the building and when entering and exiting each classroom, lunch areas and bathrooms.

- Hand sanitiser dispensers are installed at each entrance to the school and outside each classroom and bathroom. However, students are encouraged to bring their own small bottle of hand sanitiser if possible.
- Sanitiser wipes will be available in each classroom. Students and teachers will be required to sanitise their desks and the back of their chair before they leave the classroom. Students who wish to do so can also sanitise their workspace on entering the room.
- Teachers will supervise the sanitising of hands at the start of each lesson and of desks/chairs at the end of each lesson.
- Teachers will also discuss the COVID measures, etiquette and good practice during the first day back at school.

Uniform

- Our school **uniform** requirement remains **unchanged** and **all students must wear** their **full school uniform** each day. DES have confirmed that public health advice **does not** require students to have a fresh uniform each day.
- As windows will be open for much of the school day and the weather may still be cold, students will be permitted to wear additional layers. We ask that students would initially wear additional layers under their uniform and then if they are still cold they may wear additional layers over their uniform. **Please note that additional layers do not replace the school uniform which should be worn in full at all times.**
- PE – On days that students are timetabled for PE they should wear the following to school.
 - ✓ School polo-shirt
 - ✓ Black, navy or dark grey tracksuit pants
 - ✓ **School jumper** – Student are asked to bring a sports hoodie/sweatshirt in their bag to wear during PE if outside.

Lockers & Books

- Use of **student lockers will not be permitted** for 5th Years for the time being. We had successfully introduced the use of lockers for our 6th Year students before Christmas and are currently monitoring this in relation to the increased transmissibility of the current strain of COVID-19. As COVID restrictions ease we will review this decision for other year groups.
- Since lockers are not available to students they will be required to **carry their schoolbag** with them at all times **when not in class** as was the case in the first term. Where students have been assigned a base classroom, and they are in that room both before and after lunch, they may be allowed to leave their bag in the classroom. However, students who choose to do this will then not be able to access their bag until the end of the break/lunch period.
- Students should **leave all textbooks, folders and hardback copies at home.**
- Each student will **only** be required to bring the following to school each day.
 - ✓ Student journal
 - ✓ Pencil case (pens, pencils, math set) *NB. a glue stick & scissors maybe useful as these items can no longer be shared.*
 - ✓ One **A4 softback copybook** for **each subject.**

On days where students have specific subjects, they may also be required to bring the following:

- ✓ PE - A sports hoodie, sweatshirt on their PE day.
- ✓ Novel for English
- ✓ Art/TG sets and sketch pad

This list will be reviewed as the term progresses.

- These measures should significantly reduce the weight of school bags and will allow students to keep their bags with them at all times. Students **MUST NOT** leave their school bags unattended in corridors or lunch areas.

Smart Phones /Devices

- Since we are not in a position to provide lockers for the moment, **we strongly recommend that students leave their mobile phones at home.**
- However, if parents feel it is absolutely necessary, the phone must be switched off and placed in the student's school bag before they arrive in school until they leave the premises at the end of the day. Please note that the school cannot accept responsibility for any valuables, including smart phones/devices, lost or damaged on school property.
- Our Code of Behaviour states that **students are not permitted to use their phones/smart devices (including smart watches) at any time during the school day** and/or on the school premises (including break, lunch, before and after school).

In the interest of health and safety we request your assistance in ensuring students who **need to contact parents/guardians** during the school day do so **through the school office** and **not via their own phones.** Likewise, we request that **parents/guardians** who need to contact students during the school day do so **through the school office** and **not directly through the student's mobile phone.**

Break, Lunch, Before/After School

- Students can arrive at school as normal in the mornings. Classes will commence at 9am.
- Once students arrive in school each morning, they **are not be permitted to leave** the premises until the end of the school day.
- Students are required to social distance at all times while on the school premises, including on their way into the school each morning.
- Students/parents must not congregate or gather in groups on the school grounds. When students arrive in school they should go to their designated lunch area where they can sit socially distanced until school commences.
- Students **will NOT be allowed to leave the premises at break and lunch**. Given the greater transmissibility of the current strain of COVID it is important that students are supervised at all times while in our care. Supervision of students when they are off-site during the school day can be extremely challenging. We will keep this measure under review in the first number of weeks and will adjust it when we are confident that it is safe to do so.
- Lunch areas have been assigned to each year group to provide additional socially distanced seating. Students will be asked to sanitise their lunch area with wipes at the end of break/lunch.
- **Last class will finish at 3.50pm** each day (1.10pm on Wednesdays) as per previous arrangements.
 - Students who travel home by bus will leave at 3.50pm.
 - Students who walk home will leave at 3.55pm
 - Students who are collected by car will leave at 4pm.

In the interest of equality each lesson will end at 3.50pm and teaching will not continue after this time in order to ensure those who are required to leave at 3.50pm are not disadvantaged.

Students will remain in classrooms as indicated above on a supervision only basis until 4pm.

- Additional supervision will be in place before school, at break, lunch and after school as well as in the corridors during class change over.

Corridors

- Students will be required to 'Walk on the left' and in single file on corridors and stairs in order to ensure movement around the school is as swift and uncongested as possible. Our students are used to the 'Walk on the left' practice as it has been in place on stairs and in corridors for several years.
- Students are also encouraged to use the nearest set of stairs to their classroom when changing class, at break/lunch, and the end of the day.

Classrooms

- In line with DES guidelines, most of our classrooms will be able to facilitate a max of 24 students. Class groups of between 25-30 will be allocated one of our larger classrooms. All students, regardless of what size room they are in, will be seated a minimum of 1m apart.
- As well as students and teachers sanitising desks and chairs at the end of each lesson, each area of the school will be sanitised every evening in line the DES COVID Cleaning requirements.

Seating Plans

- Seating plans will be in place in each room. As far as is possible seating plans will remain the same each time students are in a particular room.
- Where students are in mixed option groups, they will be seated with others from their class group as far as possible.

Water

- Unfortunately, COVID restrictions mean we are not in a position to allow students to re-fill their water bottles in school. We recommend that students bring a larger bottle sufficient for the day.

School Office

- As far as is possible parental queries, issues and concerns will be addressed **over the phone** in order to reduce the number of contacts entering the school environment, but appointments for a meeting can be organised if absolutely necessary.
- All parents and visitors **must** have an **appointment** arranged prior to arriving on -site. **If you do not have an appointment, we respectfully ask that you do not enter the school building** (other than to collect your son/daughter if leaving early as outlined below).

Please know that this is not how we prefer to operate our school but given the current circumstances it is the safest policy.

- Parents who have forms that require signing/school-stamped are asked to send these in with their son/daughter who can leave the form into the school office before school and collect at the end of the day. Alternatively, forms can be posted to the school.
- Student Sign In /Sign Out - As per our normal rules we still require a parent/guardian to be present at the school office to collect a student leaving early.

Please ensure that you have submitted a 'Permission to Leave Early' form via the school app in advance of coming to the school. This will alert us to your intended time of arrival to collect your son/daughter.

We ask you to remind your son/daughter that they must report to the school office if they arrive late or if they are leaving school early.

Communication

- We know that returning to school under such circumstances can be difficult for both students and parents. We will endeavor to keep you informed of changes and/or additions to these measures and other COVID related issues on a regular basis via our school app. Please ensure you have the app notifications and automatic updates switched on.
- Please do not hesitate to contact the school office if we can help your son/daughter in any way with their return to school.