

# St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School



## Covid-19 School Response Plan

August 2020

(updated in December 2021)



3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021

Dear Members of the School Community of St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School,

Welcome to our COVID School Response Plan.

This document was first drawn up in consultation with staff members and parents and was ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020. This plan has been updated since then in line with additions prescribed by the Department of Education and Skills.

It is a living document which will be regularly reviewed and updated when necessary.

Please take the time to read this document and to familiarise yourselves with the measures taken in St. Joseph's to ensure the safe and orderly return of all pupils and staff.

Kind regards,

Corona H. McDermott (Chairperson, Board of Management) Date: 01-12-21

Corona McDermott

Ann Murphy (Principal) Date: 1/12/21

Ann Murphy

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
1. St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School: COVID-19 Policy .....	5
2. Planning and Preparing for Return to School .....	6
3. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW) .....	6
4. Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative.....	6
5. Safety Statement and Risk Assessment .....	7
6. General advice to prevent the spread of the virus .....	7
7. Managing the risk of spread of COVID-19 .....	8
8. Control Measures.....	10
9. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19.....	12
10. Staff Duties.....	13
11. Covid related absence management .....	14
12. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme .....	14

## Introduction

This *Covid-19 Response Plan* is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School.

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's '*Return to Work Safely Protocol*', the Department of Education and Skills plan for school reopening and to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment. The plan incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

It is important that the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the re-opening of school facilities comply with the protocol to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued by NPHE continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address may also change.

The response plan will support the sustainable re-opening of our school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the children in the school.

In line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and continued return to work, and re-opening of our schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents.

This document aims to provide details of:

1. **COVID-19 School Policy**
2. **Planning and Preparing for Return to School**
  - a. **School Building**
  - b. **Signage**
3. **Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**
4. **Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative(s)**
5. **Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**
6. **General advice to prevent the spread of the virus**
  - a. **Wash your Hands Frequently**
  - b. **Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitiser**
  - c. **Avoid Touching your Eyes, Nose and Mouth**
  - d. **Physical Distancing**
  - e. **Practise Respiratory Hygiene**
  - f. **Do**
  - g. **Do Not**
  - h. **People at Very High Risk (Extremely Vulnerable)**
7. **Managing the Risk of Spread of Covid-19**
8. **Control Measures**
  - a. **Return to Work Form**
  - b. **Induction Training**
  - c. **Induction Training – On-line Video**
  - d. **Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**
  - e. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
  - f. **Wearing of Gloves**
  - g. **Cleaning**
  - h. **Access to the School Building / Contact Log**
  - i. **First Aid / Emergency Procedure**
9. **Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**
10. **Staff Duties**
11. **Covid related absence management**
12. **Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The assistance and cooperation of all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this document. However, should errors or omissions be identified, please notify us so that appropriate measures can be taken to rectify same.

**Note:** The plan is a live working document and may be reviewed and amended to take into account new guidance from [www.Gov.ie](http://www.Gov.ie), [www.dbei.ie](http://www.dbei.ie), [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie), [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie), [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie); [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie);

## 1. St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School's COVID-19 Policy

This COVID-19 policy outlines our commitment as a school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management and brought to the attention of staff, pupils, parents and others.

### COVID 19 Policy Statement

St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID-19 Response Plan. The BOM and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan
- inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education and Skills
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education and Skills advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s) Evania Holian, Clare Smith, Irene Brady

**Signed:** Corona McDermott

**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021

## 2. Planning and Preparing for Return to School

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff. The return to work must be done safely and in strict adherence to the advice and instructions of public health authorities and the Government.

Details for the re-opening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

### a. School Buildings

Before re-opening schools in the new school year, schools are reminded to check the following:

- Does the water system need flushing at outlets following low usage to prevent Legionella disease;
- Has school equipment and mechanical ventilation been checked for signs of deterioration or damage before being used again;
- Have bin collections and other essential services resumed

### b. Signage

Schools will be required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene. The following is a link to the dedicated area of the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website where there are a number of posters, including those appropriate for primary school pupils, located. Irish versions are also available here

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/> Schools can download the posters and display in prominent areas such as offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilets. Schools do not need to do this now as the posters may be updated during the summer and further information will issue on signage closer to planned re-opening.

## 3. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (School) [RTW(s)]** form, which is available electronically or from the Principal.

A RTW form should only be completed **at least three days** prior to any proposed date of return to the workplace.

On receipt of the completed form the Principal will provide: details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff prior to the return to the workplace and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

**Note: Induction Training for staff will be developed by the Department in consultation with stakeholders and made available for all schools and staff**

## 4. Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and the School Leadership.

The Return to Work Safely protocol provides for an agreed procedure between management and staff to appoint a Lead Worker Representative to carry out a specific role.

The role of the worker representative) is to ensure that Covid-19 measures are adhered to in the workplace as follows

- Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19.
- Promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice.
- Assist with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Make representations on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 Response Plan and control measures or the adherence to such control measures by staff, parents/guardians, contractors or visitors, he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

Names of Lead Worker representatives:	Contact details
Evania Holian	Room 13
Clare Smith	Room 30
Irene Brady	Secretary's Office

All staff, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

## 5. Safety Statement and Risk Assessment

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. IPPN has commissioned an independent Policy Statement and Risk Assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in school settings.

It is important that schools review their emergency procedures involving, fire safety, first aid, accidents and dangerous occurrences to consider any new risks that arise due to the COVID-19 School Response Plan. Any changes to the schools existing emergency procedures should be documented.

Schools should also review their existing risk assessments to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the school's current risk assessments should also be documented.

## 6. General advice to prevent the spread of the virus

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

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a school is to minimise the risk of introduction of the disease into the school setting in the first place.

This can be achieved through the following measures:

- Promote awareness of COVID-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have symptoms of COVID-19 or other acute infectious diseases not to attend school, to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation.
- Advise staff and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as contact of a person with COVID-19 not to attend schools and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
- Ensure that staff and pupils know what to do if they develop symptoms at school.
- Everyone entering the school building should be required to perform hand hygiene with hand sanitiser.
- Visitors to school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point.

Staff and (parents of) pupils are advised not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:

- If they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19
- If they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
- If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff and parents are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel

Staff and (parents of) pupils are advised to co-operate with public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and to follow any public health advice in the event of a case or outbreak in the school

Staff, parents, pupils and visitors should at all times adhere to the up to date advice and instructions of the public health authorities in relation to protecting oneself and others against the risk posed by the Covid-19 virus.

Updated advice from the HSE is available on its website – <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

The Department of Education and Skills will ensure all updated advice is circulated to schools. The BOM of St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School will arrange for this advice to be circulated to staff, pupils and visitors in a timely manner.

## 7. Managing the risk of spread of COVID-19

### a. *Wash your Hands Frequently*

Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-19.

Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing:

For advice from HSE on how to wash your hands the following link will be helpful:

<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

### b. *Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitisers*

Hand hygiene can also be achieved by the use of a hand sanitiser (when hands are clean).

Hand sanitisers are more readily deployed in school settings to avoid disruption to teaching and learning and to avoid congestion of staff and pupils waiting to use handwashing facilities.

They will be available at entry and exit points and in each classroom.

Hands should be washed after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Alcohol-based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame.



Staff and pupils should wash their hands / use hand sanitiser when entering and exiting vehicles and when entering and exiting school buildings

*c. Avoid Touching Eyes, Nose and Mouth*

Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth.

*d. Physical Distancing*

Physical distancing is recommended to reduce the spread of infection in the workplace.

**Note: Guidance on the physical distancing requirements will be informed by public health advice for schools and will be updated.**

*e. Practise respiratory hygiene*

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash / sanitise your hands.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

Good hygiene practices and washing your hands properly and regularly can help stop the spread of the virus. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff adhere to this advice and adopt the following practices as strictly as possible.

*f. Do*

- Wash your hands properly and often
- Wash your hands after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

*g. Do not*

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- Share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups, cutlery, etc.

Alcohol based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame

*h. People at Very High Risk (Extremely Vulnerable):*

Current public health guidelines have identified groups who are defined as being at very high risk. The HSE has set out these groups, which include people who:

The list of people in very high risk groups include people who:

- are over 70 years of age - even if you're fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer

- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- have a condition that means you have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition and you are pregnant

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Staff who are in this group should self-declare on the Return to Work form if they believe that they are at very high risk. Details of the leave arrangements that will apply will be updated by the Department of Education and Skills.

If the Board/Principal is unsure whether or not staff fall into the very high-risk category, advice will be sought from the Occupational Health Service.

## 8. Control Measures

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors as far as possible within the school.

These control measures are outlined in this document (See Appendix 1 for more detail)

The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

It is critical that staff, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements.

*Staff, in particular, should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.*

The following control measures have been put in place:

### a. Return to Work Form

Staff will be required to complete a RTW form at least three days prior to any return to the school facility (see section 2 above). The purpose of the RTW form is to get confirmation from staff that, to the best of his/her knowledge, he/she has no symptoms of Covid-19 and is not self-isolating or cocooning or awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test.

### b. Induction Training

All staff will undertake and complete Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building in September 2020. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health
- Covid-19 symptoms
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school
- Outline of the Covid-19 response plan

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities.

If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the Covid-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal.

**c. *Induction Training for Return to School***

The Department has prepared short induction training for schools operating the summer provision this year. It is intended that this training will be updated and become more comprehensive to cover all aspects of the return to school safely protocols. The Induction training for the Summer Provision may be of interest in the context of the kind of training which staff will need to undertake is available at the following link.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Services/summerprovision/summer-education-programme-2020.html#SchoolBased>

**d. *Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette***

It is crucial that all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors are familiar with, and adopt, good hand and respiratory hygiene practices.

Guidance documentation and Information posters will be available at various locations within the school facility. Information posters will be prominently displayed at appropriate locations within the school facility including offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilet areas. Such are intended to inform but also remind everyone about the importance of hygiene in preventing the spread of Covid-19 virus and protecting health and safety.

Handwashing facilities and/or hand sanitisers are available at multiple locations within the school facility and should be available in each classroom.

**e. *Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)***

Appropriate PPE will be available for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid. This will be updated in line with advice from the HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre)

Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

Staff have been advised that masks must be worn at all times on the school premises. Staff have been advised that visors may be worn in addition to a face mask but not as a substitute.

Medical grade masks in the EN 16483 category will be provided for all school staff.

***Wearing of Gloves:***

The use of disposable gloves in the school setting by pupils or staff is not appropriate. It does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves. Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene. Disposable gloves will be used in situations involving intimate care and when dealing with a suspected case of COVID-19.

**f. *Cleaning***

Arrangements for more regular and thorough cleaning of areas and surfaces within the school will be made.

Regular and thorough cleaning of communal areas and frequently touched surfaces shall be conducted, in particular, toilets, door handles and kitchens. Cleaning will be performed regularly and whenever facilities or surfaces are visibly dirty.

All staff will have access to cleaning products and will be required to maintain cleanliness of their own work area. Under no circumstances should these cleaning materials be removed from the building.

Staff should thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day.

There will be regular collection of used waste disposal bags from offices and other areas within the school facility.

Staff must use and clean their own equipment and utensils (cup, cutlery, plate etc.).

*g. Access to the school building /contact log*

Access to the school facility will be in line with agreed school procedures.

Arrangement for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents/guardians will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities should be maintained. The school should maintain a log of staff and students contacts. [Click here to download a copy of the Contact Tracking Log](#)

*h. First Aid/emergency procedure*

The standard First Aid/Emergency procedure shall continue to apply in St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School.

In an emergency or in case of a serious incident, call for an ambulance or the fire brigade on 112/999

Contact the principal or nearest first aider giving details of location and type of medical incident.

*j. Ventilation*

Windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (assuming not in use) and also at the end of each day) and partially open when classrooms are in use.

Carbon Dioxide monitors are used on a rotational basis in classrooms to ensure that good ventilation is in place.

## 9. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19. The following outlines how St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of the school day.

Our designated Isolation Space is Prefab no. 20. This space can safely accommodate three suspected cases at one time.

**If a pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at work in St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School the following are the procedures to be implemented:**

A rota is established which involves each SET and the Principal taking responsibility for dealing with suspected cases on one day per fortnight.

The teacher of the child who is unwell contacts the office

Either the Secretary or the Principal will contact parents / guardians immediately

Either the Secretary or the Principal will contact the person on duty

The person on duty will put on gloves and an apron, will be wearing a mask and will bring another mask for the child who is unwell.

The person on duty will collect the child who is unwell and bring him / her to the hall \*

The person on duty will wait in the prefab with the door open until the child is collected, keeping a distance of at least 2 metres from the suspected case

The parent / guardian who collects the child will be given a letter with HSE advice to be followed.

The person on duty will turn upside down the chair on which the child sat and will then remove apron, gloves and mask and these will be double bagged and placed in the bin in the hall.

The person on duty will sanitise hands and put on a fresh mask.

The person on duty will fill out the form Record of Suspected COVID Case and this will be returned to the office for filing

The area in which the child sat will be cleaned (usually by Aneta)

*\* If the child is too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect.*

**If a staff member displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at work in St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School the following are the procedures to be implemented:**

The staff member who becomes unwell while at work contacts the office.

The staff member is advised to go home.

If the staff member is not well enough to transport themselves, he / she is accompanied to the Isolation Space to wait to be collected by a family member.

The staff member is advised to contact his / her GP for advice.

The Isolation Space used by the staff member will be cleaned.

Assessment of incidences of suspected case will form part of determining follow-up actions.

The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff confidentiality is essential at all times.

School staff are encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contact tracing purposes both in and out of the school setting.

## 10. Staff Duties

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. In order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Adhere to the School Covid-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined. The co-operation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of Covid-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play**

- Co-ordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of Covid-19 and monitor their own wellbeing
- Self-isolate and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of Covid-19
- Not return or attend school if they have symptoms of Covid-19 under any circumstances.
- Not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
  - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
  - if they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel
- Co-operate with any public health personnel and their school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in the school
- Undergo any COVID-19 testing that may be required in the school as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health
- If they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work
- Must inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to Covid-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace
- Must complete Covid-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

## 11. Covid related absence management

The management of a Covid-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with DES.

## 12. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme

### Information updated in this section

The Board of Management aims to protect and support the health and wellbeing of all staff (physical, mental, spiritual etc.) both at work, whether in the school facility or at home and outside of work. The Board of Management is mindful that the support and promotion of staff health and wellbeing is particularly important in the current context where the Covid-19 pandemic has caused considerable challenges for, and disruption to, people's personal, family and social lives as well as their work arrangements.

The Board of Management aims to foster a culture and work environment that support healthy behaviours and staff wellbeing and shall continue to make health and wellbeing tools and guidance available to staff as well as organising suitable support programmes, initiatives and events.

These are challenging times for everyone. Should a staff member experience any stress or anxiety in respect of work or work arrangements, he/she should feel free to speak to the principal.

**Freephone Helpline 1800 411 057 or text 'Hi' to 087 369 0010 to avail of EAS support on SMS & WhatsApp**

## Employee Assistance Service (EAS)

Following the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) tendering process, [Spectrum.Life](#) was awarded the new EAS contract from 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2020. The service for these employees is known as 'Wellbeing Together: Folláine le Chéile'. See [Information Note TTC 004/2020](#). See also, [Information Note TTC 009/2020](#) which extends the EAS to all school staff.

The EAS provides advice to employees on a range of issues including wellbeing, legal, financial, bereavement, conflict, mediation etc. The EAS also provides advice and support to managers and delivers interventions to help them deal with health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

Where appropriate, short-term counselling is available to employees and their family members. A family member includes a spouse, civil partner or dependent, where the family member can be described as a person over the age of 18 and residing at the family home. In addition, online cognitive behavioural therapy is also provided to employees.

A bespoke wellbeing portal and app is available offering a host of online services with access to live chats, videos, podcasts and blogs on topics around mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition. The platform is available via Web, iOS App or Android App.

As part of the EAS, a Mental Health Promotion Manager is also available to develop and deliver evidence based mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Spectrum.Life also provides a series of webinars and presentations to promote wellbeing in schools.

### How do I access the EAS?

The EAS is accessible through the dedicated **Free-phone Confidential Helpline** at **1800 411 057** and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Alternatively, text 'Hi' to 087 369 0010 to avail of EAS support on SMS & WhatsApp.

Employees can access the Spectrum.Life wellbeing portal as follows:

- Sign Up link at: <https://wellbeingtogether.spectrum.life/login?org=yVIIU17>
- Organisation code will be pre-populated. If not, organisation code is yVIIU17
- Log in thereafter at: <https://wellbeingtogether.spectrum.life/login>
- Access the Wellbeing Webinar Calendar via the online portal at: <https://wellbeingtogether.spectrum.life/personal/my-company>
- Access the weekly Wellbeing Live Events at: <https://wellbeing.spectrum.life/wellbeing-series-2020/>

## **Appendix 1**

### **Details on Control Measures taken in St. Joseph's Mercy Primary School in response to the Risk Assessment undertaken by the Board of Management:**

We will continue to promote awareness of COVID-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors.

#### **Symptoms of COVID-19:**

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

**Staff members and parents of pupils who have symptoms of COVID-19 have been advised not to attend school, to phone their GP and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation.**

**Staff members and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as a contact of a person with COVID-19 have been advised not to attend school and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement**

**Staff members and parents of pupils who have travelled to areas outside of the 'Green List' have been advised not to return to school until fourteen days after their return to Ireland.**

**A dedicated area has been set up on the school website under 'Arrangements for the Re-Opening of our School'. We will use this area to impart information to parents on the various measures taken in response to COVID-19.**

#### **Arrivals:**

Children will no longer assemble in the front yard at arrival time in the morning as was previously the practice. Class teachers will be in classrooms at 9am and children will go directly to their classrooms upon arrival. SETs will assist with the prompt direction of children to their classrooms. In our communication with parents, we have asked parents not to send their child to school before 9am. If a child does arrive before 9am, he / she will be asked to stand in the colonnade on one of the marked points all of which are one metre apart.



Two entry points (Brews Hill gate and Railway Street gate 1) and two exit points (Leighsbrook Lane gate and Railway Street gate 2) have been identified and communicated to all parents. This is to ensure a one-way system on the school grounds.

Parents have been informed that the school can only facilitate essential visitors. Visitors (including parents) may only enter the school premises by arrangement at least one day in advance of the visit. A detailed contact log will be kept of visitors to the school premises.

Parents / Minders have been asked to drop children at the gates of the school and not to come onto the school premises with the exception of bringing Junior / Senior Infants to the gate at the front entrance to the playing yard.

**The avenue gate will be closed to all cars from 9am every morning.**

**All other pedestrian entry points will be closed from 9.30am and will be re-opened at 1.40pm.**

**Break Times:**

**First Break and First Lunch for Junior Infants – 4<sup>th</sup> Classes (10.45am – 10.55am, 12.40pm – 1pm)**

**Second Break and Second Lunch for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Classes (11.05am – 11.15am, 1.10pm – 1.30pm)**

Break times will be staggered to safely accommodate all classes during their time in the yard. The yards have been marked out so that each class plays within their own area as a class bubble. Classes will line up within this marked area in their pods at the end of break-times and will be collected from these areas by their teachers. All yard markings were refreshed by the caretaker prior to the phased re-opening of the school in Spring 2021.

A second staffroom has been set up so that teachers can physically distance during their break-times.

The main staffroom is used by Class Teachers and SETs of Junior Infants to Second Classes.

The Parents' Room is used by Class Teachers and SETs of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Classes (for first break and first lunch)

The Parents' Room is used by Class Teachers and SETs of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Classes (for second break and second lunch)

## Dismissals:

A staggered approach to dismissals has been taken as follows:

2pm	Junior Infants	(exit through Leighsbrook Lane gate)
	Senior Infants	(exit through Railway Street Gate 2)
2.40pm	First Classes	(exit through Leighsbrook Lane gate)
	Second Classes	(exit through Railway Street Gate 2)
2.50pm	Third Classes	(exit through Leighsbrook Lane gate)
	Fourth Classes	(exit through Railway Street Gate 2)
3pm	Fifth Classes	(exit through Railway Street Gate 2)
	Sixth Classes	(exit through Railway Street Gate 2)

Meath County Council have agreed not to issue tickets to parents who park on the Fair Green between 2.35pm to 3.05pm from Monday to Friday. The usual 15 minutes grace will be given to parents collecting Junior and Senior Infants. This will help to relieve congestion at the school gates. Parents have been asked to arrange a meeting place away from the school for senior pupils.

- Hand sanitiser dispensers have been wall-mounted in every classroom and at entry and exit points of the school premises. Soap dispensers and paper towel dispensers have been mounted beside all classroom sinks.
- A hand-held hand sanitiser and medical grade masks have been made available to all members of staff with the phased re-opening of the school in Spring 2021. All staff members are required to wear masks at all times while on the school premises.
- Staff members have been reminded that they must stay on school premises for the duration of the school day.

- An isolation area has been set up to accommodate a pupil / staff member who presents as a suspected COVID case while on the school premises.
- Sinks have been installed in fourteen classrooms, thus ensuring the provision of handwashing facilities in every classroom in the school.
- Classrooms and common areas have been thoroughly cleaned in preparation for the re-opening of the school.
- Additional cleaning hours (five hours per day) have been secured to allow for regular cleaning and sanitation of common areas, handrails, door knobs and handles, toilets, basins, etc. Additional cleaning hours (three hours) have been secured to allow for daily cleaning of tables and chairs in classrooms. This is in addition to the six hours of after-school cleaning which had been provided prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Classrooms have been laid out in a way that is in-keeping with public health advice. Each class bubble has been divided into pods and there is a distance of one metre between pods.
- A plastic box with a lid has been purchased so that each child can keep their belongings stored safely at their own desk. In the event of sudden closure, this box would be taken home.
- Floor markings, posters and other signage have been displayed throughout the school environment.
- An aide was employed for five days to help with the logistics of arranging classrooms in advance of re-opening in September 2020.
- Regular meetings with the Board of Management, Parents' Association, In-School Management Team and full Staff have been held via Zoom throughout the summer and prior to phased re-opening in Spring 2021 ensuring that all stakeholders have been involved in the drawing up of our COVID Response Plan.
- Parents have been reminded regularly via the website and Text a Parent service that they must wear masks at all times on the school premises and at the school gates and that they should exercise physical distancing on the school premises.
- All staff were communicated with and asked to review the role of Lead Worker Representative and Deputy Lead Worker Representative and asked to volunteer for these roles if interested. We have appointed Denise Kilcoyne as Lead Worker Representative and we have appointed two Assistant Lead Worker Representatives – Irene Brady and Clare Smith. Staff members should communicate COVID-related issues as follows:
  - staff members on downstairs corridor to Irene Brady
  - staff members on upstairs corridor to Evania Holian
  - staff members in prefabs to Clare Smith

- Ann Murphy and Evania Holian will meet regularly with the LWR and the Assistant LWRs to discuss issues raised by staff members and will bring those issues to the attention of the Board of Management.
- All members of staff are to complete online Induction Training before their return to work in September 2020.
- All staff members will complete and return a COVID-19 'Return to Work' form at least three days before their return to work.

**Antigen Testing:**

The Antigen Testing Plan for schools commenced on Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

The following is a letter which was issued to parents in advance.

We very much appreciate when parents alert us to a positive COVID 19 test result in a pupil although we recognise that this is not a requirement.



25 November 2021

Dear Parent,

This is an update on plans to provide for the use of antigen testing in certain circumstances in children who are asymptomatic and part of a classroom pod, where there is a confirmed case of COVID-19.

**The most important way to protect against any onward spread of infection is that if your child has any symptoms of COVID-19, including a new cough, shortness of breath, high temperature, sore throat, they should self-isolate at home and you should book a COVID-19 PCR test for them. PCR tests can be booked here:**

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/testing/get-tested/>

**Children who have symptoms should not use antigen tests, they should stay at home and organise a PCR test for Covid-19. If a parent/guardian has any concerns about their child they should contact their GP, as per normal.**

From 29 November 2021, if a parent or guardian receives a positive (detected) PCR COVID-19 test result for their child, we are asking that they contact their child's school principal immediately to let them know.

The principal will then tell this parent/guardian, that they will be contacting the parents of the other children in their child's pod, to give them details of how they can order free antigen tests for their children using a Freephone number. The principal is requested not to share any personal information relating to any other child with parents.

Antigen tests are potentially an extra measure to help protect against transmission of COVID-19 (coronavirus). You do the tests yourself at home. The test sample does not have to go to a lab. You usually get your results in 15 minutes.

If just one pod is involved, only the children in this pod will be offered antigen tests. If there are two pods with separate confirmed cases of COVID-19, then parents or guardians of children in the whole class will be contacted and provided with the information on how they can request antigen tests.

You will need to provide your child's name and home address together with the school's roll number, which will be provided by the school when contacting the Freephone number to order the test.



We continue to ask that you remind your children of the importance of these measures to stop spread of infection.

Yours faithfully

Deirdre Shanley  
Assistant Secretary

The Board of Management adopts the following guidance from the Department of Education on the recommendation to wear masks for all pupils from third classes to sixth classes. This recommendation will be implemented from 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021 and until further notice. This is an additional measure to ensure the safety of everyone in our school community and we appreciate the support and co-operation of everyone involved.



## Face coverings in Primary schools

NPHE has recommended the wearing of face masks/coverings by children aged nine years and above on public transport, in retail and other indoor public settings as already required for children aged 13 years and over. They have also recommended that this is introduced for children in 3rd class and above in primary schools. They have advised that this measure is being introduced on a temporary basis and is subject to review in mid-February 2022.

### Guidance on face masks/coverings in Primary schools

Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

#### Wearing of face masks/coverings

Pupils from third class and up in primary schools are required to wear a face mask/covering. The exemptions to this are set out below.

#### Face masks/coverings

Face masks/coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face mask/covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Face masks/coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

Face masks/coverings must not contain any slogans/logos/images that may cause upset or be deemed offensive to any member of the school community.

#### Visors

Face masks/coverings are more effective than visors. In the limited circumstances where a face mask/covering cannot be worn clear visors must be considered.

#### Exemptions

**A medical certificate to certify that a person falls into a category listed below must be provided to the school on behalf of, any person (pupil) who claims that they are covered by the exemptions below:**

- any pupil with difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions
- any pupil who is unable to remove the cloth face-covering or visor without assistance
- any pupil who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the cloth face covering or visor, for example pupils with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

**Schools will be best placed to identify those children whose complex needs are such that the wearing of face covering may not be possible for them, and to discuss this with parents as required. In such circumstances a school may not require medical certification to provide an exemption to the wearing of face coverings. In other circumstances where a medical certificate is not provided that person (staff or pupil) will be refused entry to the school.**

#### Directions for effective use of face masks/coverings

- Information should be provided by schools on the proper use, removal, and washing of face coverings. Advice on how to use face coverings properly can be found [here](#).

- All pupils should be reminded not to touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.
- Face masks/coverings should be stored in a designated space, for example, in an individually labelled container or bag.
- Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.
- Face masks/coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe.

#### **Pupils using school transport**

Pupils from 3<sup>rd</sup> class and up on the primary transport scheme are required to wear face masks/coverings subject to the exemptions above.

#### **Mixed classes in single rooms**

Where there are mixed classes, e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class in a single classroom, schools should note that only children in 3<sup>rd</sup> class and above, are required to wear face masks. As per previous advice, however, parents of other children who would prefer that their children wear a face mask are not precluded from doing this.

#### **Provision of face masks**

Parents should be advised that they obtain face masks for their children which fit properly and are comfortable for the child to wear. In the event that a child forgets, loses or damages their masks during the course of the school day, then the school should have a sufficient supply to replace the mask for the child in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day or where required on an ongoing basis.

## Exemptions as outlined by the Department of Education:

A medical certificate to certify that a person falls into a category listed below must be provided to the school on behalf of any person (pupil) who claims that they are covered by the exemptions below:

- any pupil with difficulty breathing or other relevant medical conditions
- any pupil who is unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance
- any pupil who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the cloth face covering, for example pupils with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

## How to use face coverings: A guide for parents and children 3rd to 6th class



Coronavirus  
COVID-19  
National  
Programme

Children in 3rd to 6th class are required to wear masks in primary school



You should arrive at school with your own face covering



Always clean your hands before and after wearing a face covering

### Check your fit

Make sure mask fabric covering is comfortable for you to wear

Make sure it is easy to fit and covers your nose and mouth

Ensure the face covering fits under your chin



Tighten the loops so it's snug around your face, without gaps

Don't touch or fidget with the face covering while it's on

### You should not

Wear your face covering below the nose

Leave your chin exposed

Wear it loosely with gaps on the sides

Push it under your chin to rest on your nose



### Always follow these steps

Wash your hands before and after handling your face covering

Change your face covering if it is dirty, wet or damaged

Carry unused face coverings in a sealable clean waterproof bag, like a ziplock

Carry a second bag to put used face coverings in

Wash cloth face coverings on the highest temperature for cloth



### Safe removal and disposing of mask

Use the ties or ear loops to take the face coverings off

Do not touch the front when you take it off

Don't forget to clean your hands and keep social distance

Always dispose of single-use masks properly in a bin





01 December 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The ongoing efforts by parents and children to adhere to the public health advice during this pandemic has been fundamental to our work to drive down the incidence of COVID-19 in the community.

Our priority continues to be to minimise risk and protect as many people as possible from severe illness. As you are aware, the National Public Health Emergency Team monitors incidence of COVID-19 in all age cohorts and environments on an ongoing basis.

In a very short period of time, we have seen a significant and rapid deterioration in the epidemiological situation, and a resultant very high incidence in the as-yet-unvaccinated 5 – 11-year-old age group. This is a cause for some concern.

Schools are at the heart of our communities and they play a fundamental role in the social lives and wellbeing of our children; this is particularly true for children who have special educational needs, are disadvantaged or who may have been disproportionately impacted by school closures during the pandemic. It is therefore imperative that we move quickly as soon as we notice a significant change in incidence.

In addition to the **general public health advice to reduce discretionary social contact** and for at least the **next two weeks**, the following events and activities should be avoided:

- Indoor birthday parties and play dates – these should take place outdoors and should be kept small
- Sleepovers
- Indoor community gatherings involving children including communions, confirmations, nativity and other seasonal events

Further to this, parents should:

- **Not let children attend school or creche if they have any symptoms of COVID-19.** Help them to isolate at home and arrange a PCR test straight away.
- Reduce their own contacts. This means **work from home** unless it is essential to attend the workplace in person, it also means making difficult decisions to **avoid indoor social gatherings**.
- Meet others outdoors where possible.
- Wear a mask if you cannot keep a distance from others.
- Ensure that your child wears a mask if it is recommended for them.
- If anyone in your household is symptomatic, they should isolate and get a PCR test. You should not use or rely on the results of an antigen test if you have symptoms

An Roinn Sláinte  
Department of Health  
Office of the Chief Medical Officer

- If your child is a close contact of a case in school, you may be asked to use antigen tests, supplied by the HSE, as an additional tool. If any stage your child develops symptoms of COVID-19 or an antigen test is 'positive' they should be isolated at home and parents should arrange a PCR test for them.
- One in five young adults are not yet vaccinated, please consider vaccination for any older children in your household not yet protected

I am keenly aware that these measures are not what any of us want to hear, particularly at this time of year. I know this is an additional burden at what has been a very difficult time for all of us, particularly those of us with young families.

That being said, parents have a key role to play in reducing transmission within and between households. At this time of year, young children often display respiratory symptoms, and we know that it gets increasingly difficult to isolate and arrange PCR tests repeatedly. But this remains an essential measure to protect families and the wider community.

When incidence of disease is as high as it at the moment across the country, it means that the force of infection is pushed down through the unvaccinated population and into our unvaccinated young children. While we know that most in this age group will experience a very mild form of this disease if they pick it up, for a small few, they may become severely ill. I am hopeful that if we all make a concerted effort to follow these measures for at least the next two weeks, we can make a real difference to incidence of disease in this cohort and in the wider public.

NPHET has recommended, on a temporary basis, the wearing of face masks for children:

- Aged 9 years and over on public transport, in retail and other indoor public settings as currently required for those aged 13 and over, with exemptions as appropriate; and
- In third class and above in primary school (guidance will issue to schools from the Department of Education on this).

This measure will be subject to review by NPHET in mid-February 2022.

I would also like to note that vaccines are doing an excellent job of preventing severe illness and disease in those who are fully vaccinated. This is really good news, and I welcome the European Medicines Agency (EMA) authorisation of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for primary school going children (5-11 years). We anticipate receiving further advice from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) in the near future.

Many thanks for your continued effort to keep our schools and our wider communities safe.

Yours Sincerely,



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Dr Tony Holohan  
Chief Medical Officer

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