

Statement for Parents on returning to school – February 11th 2021

Dear Parents / Guardians,

As you will appreciate, schools are in an unprecedented situation for which there is no blueprint or recent experience on which to draw for guidance. However, we want to pay tribute to everyone in our school community for the enormous efforts made to ensure the safety of all within the school and wider society.

Over the past 11 months, we have learnt of the additional risks to physical health and welfare caused by Covid-19. The fear that schools will become a vector for infection and endangering pupils and staff is a constant strain and worry for us all. In considering the reopening of school buildings and grounds, it must be remembered that a 'one size fits all' approach to how schools can deal with or manage this current experience is inappropriate, given the various factors and circumstances in which each school finds itself.

We must remember at all times that the situation in relation to this pandemic is constantly evolving and that the Hospital School BoM will continue to review and update plans, particularly in relation to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of pupils and staff, in line with public health and Department of Education (DE) guidance during this crisis. Indeed, much significant work has been done to date to ensure that any identified risks within the school have been managed in a practical and real way. Supports and resources have been put in place to help alleviate the concerns of staff, pupils and parents.

We wish to reassure you that we will listen to, and seek to resolve any safety issues that may arise or cause anxiety. Parents who have safety concerns should discuss the matter with the Principal.

We would like to acknowledge and express our appreciation, and that of the entire Hospital School BoM, for the considerable extra work and personal sacrifices made by all of our parents and staff in order to maintain a degree of teaching and learning during this time. This dedication has also been in evidence in adhering to the extra safety measures while the school was open prior to Christmas. We have no doubt, that this compliance will enable us to re-open the school when it is safe to do so again.

Public health informs us that 'schools are safe' and the evidence does show that transmission in schools, both to children and adults, has been very low compared to other settings. However, there can be no absolute guarantee that schools can be totally Covid safe in relation to the spread of the virus within schools. The Hospital School BoM will continue to work to make our school as safe as possible through the stringent implementation of infection control measures and by putting key safety measures in place to deal with the identified concerns and eliminate transmission risks where possible. Such measures include:

1. All relevant policies and practices are in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in line with the Government's "Work Safely Protocol". Our Covid-19 Response Plan and risk assessment are our commitment to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff, pupils and others who visit our school. The results of the risk assessment and any new or enhanced safety measures to be implemented have been shared with staff
2. A pre-return-to-work form has been completed by all staff in advance of returning to work
3. Staff and pupils who are feeling unwell have a moral imperative to stay at home

4. The concerns and needs of vulnerable and at-risk staff will be managed in line with approved policy and procedures
5. Staff are being provided with all necessary PPE and protective clothing in accordance with identified Covid-19 exposure risks and in line with public health advice
6. Where possible, teachers and SNA staff stay with the same bubble of pupils
7. There is adequate Covid-19 signage and floor stickers on display throughout the school. Visible signage is in place that identifies general cleaning protocols, processes, and practices
8. Appropriate social distancing is maintained and necessary controls are in place to reduce transmission risks (face masks, screens in office areas to facilitate safe interaction with the public, visitors restricted, staggered breaks, etc.). Appropriate dispersion measures are used at all entrances and exits
9. Assigned and clearly identified drop-off and collection points have been allocated for parents/guardians and ward/hospital staff.
10. The school maintains a log of contacts to facilitate contact tracing
11. Specific procedures are in place for the reception of goods and deliveries
12. Digital tools and communication systems are used as an alternative to face-to-face meetings
13. There is a system in place to keep staff, pupils and parents up-to-date with the latest public health advice and the Hospital School BoM has taken swift action to implement all recommended public health measures as they are updated. Regular and transparent briefings/communications are provided to staff and parents
14. Appropriate cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures are in place. There is also a cleaning schedule of any surfaces or equipment that is shared or used regularly by staff and pupils
15. There is a plan in place as to what needs to be done if a staff member or pupil develops Covid symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) while at school. All staff and pupils are aware of the relevant steps and procedures
16. Staff and pupil safety is a priority at all times and anyone who expresses a safety concern is listened to with empathy and understanding. Health and wellbeing are at the centre of our decision making.

The Hospital School BoM will continue to communicate regularly with staff and parents and we request that you keep yourself updated with all communications, giving the ever- changing nature of this pandemic. Each of us needs to take personal responsibility for our actions in relation to Covid-19 and we must all work together to ensure the safety of every child and adult in our school community.

While there is undoubtedly a long road ahead, there is hope that better times are imaginable with the availability of vaccines and the roll out of an inoculation programme. In the meantime, should you have any questions, suggestions or queries in relation to the reopening of the school, please feel free to contact the Principal or Chairperson directly.

Yours sincerely,

Sa. Siobhán Cochrane

Chairperson, BoM

Mary Chambers

Principal