

OUR LADY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL
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 Principal: Mr Tomás Mc Kee



18th August, 2020

Reference: Beginning of School Year 2020/21

Dear Parents/Guardians

I write to you regarding the Department of Education's (DENI) recent guidance in relation to schools opening for all children.

I hope that you are all keeping well and have had a well-deserved break over the summer period. I would like to thank all the parents who completed our end of year survey. We were obviously very pleased with the many positive responses that we received and I on behalf of all staff would like to thank you for your kind comments. We also will take cognisance of some of the suggestions that were made in the survey and we will do all that we can to get Breakfast and 123 Clubs up and running as soon as possible. We will have a blended learning approach to homework so that in the event of a school closure we would be able to interact with children and parents via the seesaw app and possible Zoom/Microsoft Teams lessons.

Following DENI's recent guidance we will be making a few minor adjustments to our proposed plan for all children returning to full time education. Next week, *week beginning 24th August*, children will attend school on specific dates to assist with their transition back to school. P7 children will attend school every day with other classes coming in for one, two or three days. Only some R/P1 and P7 children will attend school on Friday 28th August. The dates for children returning to school are as follows:

Dates	Monday 24 th August	Tuesday 25 th August	Wednesday 26 th August	Thursday 27 th August	Friday 28 th August
Classes	P7	P5, P6 & P7	P3, P4, P5, P6 & P7 (P1 group 1)	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 & P7 (P1 group 2)	P7 (R/P1 group 3) <i>Please note the change</i>

All P2-P7 children will be in school on Thursday 27th August. We will use Friday 28th August to review our current arrangements. **Dinners** will be available for all children from **Monday 24th August** although we will have a reduced menu (*Children entitled to Free School Meals will have to pay for dinners next week as parents will be in receipt of the Free School Meals payment until 31st August*). All children who have been registered with the Education Authority for 2020/21 school year will be entitled to receive Free School Meals from 1st September.

There will be no homework next week although children will be expected to wear their full school uniform. We will focus on some Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Well-being activities with the children to help them make a smooth transition back to school. School will be closed on **Monday 31st August**, due to the bank holiday. **All P2-P7 children will return to school on Tuesday 1st September** and our new Primary 1 children will begin school in small groups during the first week of September, followed by some Reception children the following week.

EA Transport will be operating from 24th August. DENI guidance encourages all children to wear facemasks while travelling on school transport. We will supply all children who travel on buses with a facemask that should be worn on the bus and washed regularly. Please contact the school if your child cannot wear a face mask for any specific reason. Thank you.

Children or staff do not have to wear face masks in school however if a staff member is assisting with intimate care or administering medication they must wear PPE. Children will not require school bags or pencil cases initially. We will supply all necessary classroom equipment and children can use their own materials at home. Children bringing in a lunch/lunch box or bottle of water should do so in a reusable bag/bottle or put them in a sturdy plastic bag. This is to reduce the chances of carrying any infections into school or back home. All materials should be clearly labelled. It is vitally important that children have their breakfast in the morning before attending school. **We will no longer be providing a fruit break for the children.** Children will be allowed to bring their own healthy snack for break time: fruit, pancake, sandwich, crackers with butter/cheese (Not permitted: jam, chocolate, Nutella, peanut butter, sugary spreads etc.). Please remember that we are a **nut free zone.**

We have put in place a variety of measures to ensure children remain in their class bubbles when they return to school so the carpark will be closed for cars to provide us with an extra play area. Staff have been given permission by O'Connell's GAC to park in their grounds and parents/carers may park in the Community Centre carpark or outside the GAA club. Please drive, park safely and be respectful of local private property. We greatly appreciate the support of the GAA club and the Community Centre committee.

Outside play areas will be coned off so that all classes can remain outside at the beginning of the school day. On wet mornings children should make their way to their classroom via the classroom external doors. On entering their classrooms children will wash their hands before engaging in learning activities. Regular hand washing will continue throughout the school day. Children will receive dinner/lunch in their classrooms and break and dinner times will be staggered. We will continue to use the play park for break times. All equipment will be sanitised before and after use. As Breakfast Club will not be running initially children will be supervised from **8.30am**. **Drop off times** in the morning will be from **8.30am to 9am (children must not be left unsupervised on school grounds)**. We would urge all parents to social distance when arriving to the school grounds and consider parking at the community centre and walking with your child(ren) down to the school. Only parents of R/P1 and P2 children should be entering school grounds. If you wish to speak to a teacher you will need to phone the school to arrange an appointment. Face masks **MUST** be worn by parents/visitors in the school building and for meetings. Teachers may request that they meet you via Zoom/Microsoft Teams to reduce face to face contact.

Collections arrangements will be as follows: **Reception** children should be collected from the main entrance at 12 noon until Halloween. After Halloween it will be 1pm. **P1** will be ready for collection **@1.55pm** from the main door; **P2 @2pm** from the rear classroom door (parents/carers will have to walk around the back of the school to collect children in P2) and P3 children will be collected from the area outside the P3 room or door if wet until 2.05pm. We would encourage all adults to be mindful of social distancing when entering schools grounds and to be respectful of the needs of others. Please walk on the left when in the school grounds and be punctual. Thank you. **At 3pm P4-7** children will be brought by their teachers to a designated area outside the school kitchen. Children can then walk to meet their parents who should wait outside the school grounds (*please don't gather in crowds*) or they should walk to an agreed meeting point or home. A note must be sent into school (*this can be done via email*) informing the school if your child/children has/have permission to walk to the Community Centre or home. P4 children will only be allowed to walk home if they are with an older sibling. **P1-P3** children are not permitted to walk home alone. Children travelling by bus will be escorted on to their bus as usual although they should be wearing a facemask. Please

ensure your child knows how they are going home. If a child is not certain if they are to get the bus we will have no other option but to keep them at school until an adult collects them.

Homework will begin from 7th September although some P7 children will receive homework on 3rd September. We will increase homework gradually over the course of September to assist children and parents with the transition back into a school routine. This could be difficult for some children and we will do all that we can to ensure they feel safe and secure in our school environment although there will be some risk with so many children returning to school. It is vitally important that children are encouraged to wash their hands regularly at home, come to school with a tissue in their pocket as we promote, 'catch it, bin it, kill it' and they know how to cough and sneeze into their elbow. There is a responsibility on us all to do all that we can to ensure that we can keep our school free of the Coronavirus to ensure we remain open for all our children.

It is vitally important that if your child(ren) displays any **symptoms of COVID19** (*continuous cough, high temperature, loss of smell/taste*) they **MUST** not attend school or travel on school transport. If a child displays COVID19 symptoms in school we will isolate the child in a designated area (child will be supervised by an adult) and contact parents. You must then follow PHA guidance. Please ensure that your contact details are up to date and you have plans in place to deal with such an event. Hopefully this does not occur but it is better to be prepared. Parents must contact the school if a member of your household tests positive for COVID19 as this will have implications for our staff, other children and their families in the class bubble. Staff members have also been given the same advice.

As referred to earlier school uniform will be compulsory for children returning to school. All children must wear plain black footwear (shoes or runners) and plain navy trousers/tracksuit bottoms or skirts/pinafores permitted in school. Girls should wear navy tights or navy knee high socks. **Children may wear plain navy shorts or blue checked summer dress with white socks in August/September** and in the third term. Tracksuit bottoms with logos and coloured trainers will not be permitted. Hair accessories should be kept to a minimum. **Please ensure that your child wears full school uniform and that all items are properly labelled.**

Application forms for free school meals, school transport and uniform grants for 2020/21 are available on the Education Authority website. Further details can be found on our school website. It is very important that you register your child(ren) for free school meals even if they take lunch as the school receives extra funding from the Department of Education for children who are eligible for free school meals.

School will be different for everyone this year and we will have to be flexible with our approaches and learn as we go forward. This is new to us all but the most important thing is that everyone is safe and well. We will endeavour to create a welcoming environment for the children but we will need your co-operation and support to assist us in helping the children return to school. Some children will be ready to come back to school and some may be anxious. RISE NI have uploaded a short video on you tube that you may find useful to prepare you and your children for their return to school. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fc981Na-SDg&t=32s>

Each class will be greeted by a member of staff from last year's class to assist their return to school and they will stay with the class for a short while in their new room.

Please contact the school if you have any further queries regarding children returning to school. Remember the days that your child(ren) will be attending school next week for their induction days and ensure that you do not send your child to school if they are displaying COVID19 symptoms or are unwell. Thank you.

Take care and all the best,

Tomás Mc Kee

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Principal