

Convent of Mercy N.S.,
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049 9522992
info@comns.ie

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We look forward to welcoming students and staff back to school after what has been a very long and unusual break. The Convent of Mercy N.S. appreciates your support as we try to safely reopen the school building.

We are satisfied that we have control measures in place to ensure that this will be a safe re-opening. It will take some time for all of us to get used to the “new circumstances” as we become familiar with the new routines and procedures designed to keep everyone safe and to prevent the spread of the virus. This will be achieved by all of us working towards this common goal. There will, undoubtedly, be some unforeseen challenges and we will deal with these as they arise.

We would like to thank you for your co-operation in making preparations to date and look forward to working with you as we assist the children to adapt to the necessary changes. We are also conscious of the fact that our pupils have not been in school since March and that they are looking forward to coming back to school to meet their friends again. We are aware that our new pupils are beginning a school year at a challenging time and we have made plans to ensure that their arrival will be as free from stress as possible.

The Board of Management and the School Leadership Team have been working to ensure a safe return to school for all pupils and staff in two weeks’ time. We have now finalised our plans and include them in this communication.

Please find in these documents a comprehensive outline of how we hope to provide for the safe return to school of all students and staff. It is extremely important that you read all the information that is being provided to you.

If after reading all the information you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the school by email; info@comns.ie

Le Meas

Alan Traynor,
Chairperson BoM

Celine Clarke,
Principal

Return to School Protocols

Underlying Principles

- The school has a responsibility to make every effort to ensure the safety, health and well-being of all members of our school community – children, parents and staff. This plan has been formulated to better ensure that the school can exercise that duty of care.
- Assuming it is in keeping with public health advice and guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills, it is preferable for all children to return to school for all five days of the school week and for a full school day (**see special arrangements for Junior Infants below**) . This plan has been formulated to achieve that aim.
- It is not possible to eliminate the risk of infection. However, with the co-operation of all members of our school community, it is possible to minimise the risk of the virus being introduced to school and the consequent risk of its spread.
- As well as co-operation, the flexibility and goodwill of all will be required to ensure the plan can be implemented.
- In our efforts to keep everyone safe, the school community will need to apply a common sense approach and a balanced approach doing everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school.

Assumptions

The school will re-open for all classes on Tuesday 1st September with the exception of Junior Infant Group 2(see starting back dates for each class page 3)

Changes to Classroom and School Layout and to School Routines

The DES guidelines recognise that a common-sense approach is needed in our Primary schools. To that end, every effort will be made to limit interaction within classrooms, to limit contact between class groups and to limit the sharing of common facilities.

The children and their teachers will work in Class Bubbles. A Class Bubble is a grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as is possible. The aim of the system within the school is that class groupings mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until the children go home at the end of the school day.

Junior Infant to Second Class

It is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors so there is no requirement for children from Junior Infants to Second Class to maintain a physical distance within their bubble. We will however seat the children in pods where possible.

Third Class to Sixth Class

Children from Third Class to Sixth Class will be arranged in Pods within their Class Bubbles with a maximum of 6 pupils per Pod. As far as possible, each Pod will be 1 metre distance from the next Pod. All unnecessary furniture has been removed from all the classrooms to create as much space as possible.

Hand sanitiser will be available at all entry and exit points and in all class and support rooms.

Drop off and Collection Arrangements

We would ask all parents to familiarise themselves with the following drop-off and collection routines for the safe delivery and collection of pupils from school. Please be patient as we endeavour to embed these necessary precautionary and protective practices at the beginning of the school year.

It is imperative that

- adults do not come within 2m of each other
- parents do not try to have meetings with members of staff at the top gate at drop-off and collection times – meetings between parents and teachers can only take place by prior arrangement. (This may have to be more restrictive depending on guidance - it is quite possible that the recommendation will be for remote meetings/telephonic communications.)
- all parents adhere to the drop-off and collection plans as outlined below

The following are the arrangements for school drop off, **in alphabetical order**, to facilitate siblings arriving together. All children are to be dropped off at the top gate where they will be met at the top gate by members of staff who will direct them to their classrooms. All the children will go straight to their classrooms where their class teacher will be waiting for them.

Drop off Plan

Group 1 – 9.10am Children with Surnames A-F

Group 2 – 9.20am Children with Surnames G-M

Group 3 – 9.30am Children with Surnames N-Z

Any children arriving by bus will be directed straight into their classrooms from 9.10am

Collection Plan

All classes from Junior Infants to 6th Class will now be brought to the top gate at collection times. Again we ask parents to remain outside the gate and to keep a 2m distance from others at all times. The following are the collection times for each class:

Junior Infants 2pm

Senior Infants 2.10pm

1st & 2nd Class 2.50pm

3rd – 6th Class 3pm

Entrance & Exit Points for Specific Classes

- Junior Infants will enter and exit via the main front door.
- Senior Infants and 2nd class will enter and exit via the side door.
- 1st and 3rd& 4th will be in the prefab classrooms on the hill and will enter and exit via the outside stairs
- 5th and 6th will enter and exit via the new side door facing the Astro turf

Starting Back Dates for each class

It has been decided to bring all the children back together on Tuesday 1st September, however, **for the first week Junior Infants will not come to school until 10am (see specific arrangements below).** This will allow the rest of the children to arrive and settle into their new classrooms and to adapt to the changes to our morning routine. The Junior Infant children will then be able to arrive by themselves affording them a better opportunity to adapt to their new surroundings more easily. **As always the Junior Infants will finish school at 12.20pm each day for the first two weeks to help them transition more easily**

For the first week only Junior Infants will be split into two groups, alphabetically

Group 1 Surnames A-L will begin school on Tuesday 1st September (on this day Group 2 should not attend school)

Group 2 Surnames M-Z will begin school on Wednesday 2nd September (on this day group 1 should not attend school)

Both groups will attend on Thursday 3rd & Friday 4th (Further details to follow)

Arrival at school

- Each group should aim to arrive at the school at their appointed start time
- It is imperative that adults do not come within 2 metres of each other.
- The children will be welcomed into the school by the staff and the new routine for handwashing/sanitising will be explained to them.
- We ask for co-operation with these times as it will mean that the numbers congregating at drop off and collection at any one time will be minimised.
- The class teacher will invite the children to enter the building via their designated entrance point at the appropriate time. Children **should not** arrive to the school before their appointed time as the gate will not open until 9:10am. Children or adults should not congregate outside the school gate before this time.
- **No adults, other than staff members, should enter the school grounds.**
- Messages/notes for teachers can be sent by email to the class teacher's email address or in more urgent cases by phoning the school office.
- This routine may be subject to change if it is deemed not to comply satisfactorily with the Health and Safety Guidelines issued by the Department of Health, Department of Education and NPHET.

Collection of Children during the School Day

Arrangements must be made in advance if it is necessary to collect a child from school, unless the reason for collection is unforeseen.

If an adult has to collect a child during the course of the school day, the following arrangements will apply

- When the adult arrives at the school, they should alert the office by phone (049 9522992) that they have arrived
- The child will be brought from their class to the adult by a member of staff
- The teacher will record the time and date of collection
- No adult should enter the school grounds unless invited to do so

Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

Pupils should not attend school if displaying ANY symptoms of Covid-19. If a pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while in the building, the following are the procedures that will be implemented:

- Parents/guardians will be contacted immediately
- The child's temperature will be taken with a non-contact thermometer.
- The child will be accompanied to the designated isolation area via the isolation route by a member of staff. The staff member will remain at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic child and will also make sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from the symptomatic child at all times
- A mask will be provided for the child presenting with symptoms.
- An assessment will be made as to whether the child who is displaying symptoms can immediately be brought home by parents and call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home
- The school will facilitate the child presenting with symptoms to remain in isolation, if they cannot immediately go home, and will assist them by calling their GP.
- The child presenting with symptoms should be advised to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and to put the tissue in the waste bag provided
- If the child is well enough to go home, the school will arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible, and advise them to inform their GP by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used
- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, the school will contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick child is a Covid-19 suspect.
- Arrangements will be made for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved.

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.

Children who should not attend school

If your child is in one of the following categories, they should not attend school –

- Children who have been diagnosed with Covid-19
- Children who have been in close contact with a person who has been diagnosed with Covid-19
- Children who have a suspected case of Covid-19 and the outcome of the test is pending
- Children who have been in contact with a person who has a suspected case of Covid-19 and the outcome of the test is pending
- Children with underlying health conditions who have been directed by a medical professional not to attend school
- Children who have returned home after travelling abroad and must self-isolate for a period of 14 days
- Children who are generally unwell
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Children who have travelled from countries not on the Green List should not attend school during the 14-day self-isolation period. The “Green List” will be regularly reviewed and may change, and all families should be aware that whatever restricted movement requirements are in place on their date of return will apply to them.

Supporting the Learning of Children who cannot attend school

If a child is not able to attend school for an extended period of time, the class teacher (and/or the special education teacher, where relevant) will provide suggested activities to support the child’s learning at home and this will be shared with parents.

Impact of a Suspected or Confirmed Case of Covid-19 in a Class

If the school is notified that a person in your child’s class has a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19

- The parents of all children in the class will be notified
- Public health advice will be sought and followed

Cleaning/Disinfecting rooms where a pupil/staff member with suspected COVID-19 was present

- The room will be cleaned as soon as is practicably possible
- Once the room is vacated the room should not be reused until the room has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry.
- When disinfection is required it is always as well as cleaning.
- Person assigned to cleaning should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning and should wear gloves and a plastic apron.
- The environment and furniture will be cleaned using disposable cleaning cloths and a household detergent followed by disinfection with a chlorine based product.
- Special attention will be paid to frequently touched surfaces, the back of chairs, door handles and any surfaces that are visibly soiled by bodily fluids.
- Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be reused.
- If a pupil or staff diagnosed with COVID-19 spent time in a communal area or if they have used the toilet/bathroom facilities, then these areas should be cleaned with household

detergent followed by a disinfectant (as outlined in the HPSC interim Health advice) as soon as is practically possible.

Personal Equipment

- Children from 1st to 6th Class must bring their own pens, pencils, colours, rubbers, etc., to school in their own pencil case to avoid the sharing of equipment. Children should have a pencil case for home and one for school where possible.
- In a change to the stationery list, the older children are no longer required to bring a basket for their classroom. An alternative item will be provided for by the class teacher.
- It is further requested that all items have the child's name on them for ease of identification.
- For children in Junior and Senior Infants, the school will provide a pouch or container which will hold each child's pencils, crayons, etc., and which will be labelled with their name. This will remain in school for the child's use each day.

Shared Equipment

By necessity, some classroom equipment needs to be shared including tablets, laptops and the equipment used for structured activities and play in Infant classrooms. Cleaning of such shared equipment with wipes or other cleaning products will take place at regular intervals to minimise the risk of the spread of infection.

Equipment in the junior classes will also be assigned to certain groups for certain periods of time and will then be cleaned and disinfected before moving it on to the next group. Reading books will be assigned to a child for a certain period of time, when they are returned they will be disinfected and will not be made available to any other children for at least a 72-hour period.

Play dough or modelling clay will not be shared. Each child in the junior class will receive their own pot to play with when it comes to their turn on the rota.

Yard Supervision and break times

A rota will be organised based on Class Bubbles and the SETs allocated to those classes

Each yard will be divided and each class must stay in their part of the yard for each break of that school day. There will be staggered breaks allowing for a maximum of three class bubbles on yard at any one time. The children will remain in their class bubbles in their designated yard space during break times. The Astro Turf will also be used to reduce the numbers on the front yard at any one time. There will be a rota drawn up for the Astro turf each week.

Yard –	2 classes
Astro-turf	1 class

Yards will be supervised by class teachers, learning support teachers and SNA's.

Unless the weather is really bad, it is expected that we will go outside for fresh air every day. It is very important that the children dress appropriately and have a coat/hat etc. with them at school.

Special Education

In keeping with our Special Education policy, learning support will be provided by a blended approach of in-class support and withdrawal. The provision of support will be organised to ensure our support teachers will work within the confines of assigned bubbles.

- Where a support teacher is working alongside a class teacher in a classroom, both teachers must be mindful of maintaining social distance from one another.

- Where children from 3rd to 6th Class receive support in one of the SET rooms, social distancing of 1 metre will be maintained between each child in the group.
- The tables and chairs in SET rooms will be wiped clean and disinfected in between different groups attending.

PPE

Staff who are attending to particular care needs or who are administering first aid will wear appropriate PPE including gloves and face masks. It is recommended that teachers wear face coverings, when a physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.

School Uniform

Our normal school uniform policy will apply. For now, school uniform will be worn on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and the tracksuit uniform will be worn on Tuesdays and Thursdays. (**For the first day of school we ask that all children wear their full school uniform**) This may change over time. However, the school uniform should be taken off straight after school and should not be worn into shops, after school activities etc. Regular washing of the uniform should take place especially if it is visibly soiled.

Teacher Absence and Substitution

In the event that a teacher is unable to attend school, every effort will be made to secure a substitute teacher for the class. If a substitute teacher is not available, it **is not appropriate** for the class to be divided into groups and accommodated in other classes. In such circumstances, it may not be possible for the class to attend on that day. If that is the case, as much notice as possible will be given to parents.

Curriculum Guidance

The initial focus will be on establishing safe and secure learning environments, supporting the well-being of all and preparing collaboratively for teaching and learning in a way that enables all pupils to progress and flourish in the 2020/2021 school year. Teachers will be alert to where the pupils are at and time will be taken to assess pupil's needs, to re-teach, revise and consolidate previous learning before introducing new learning. Teachers may find it useful to work with the curriculum content, objectives and learning outcomes from the previous class level for at least the month of September in order to ensure the pupils are ready to commence new learning.

During the initial weeks of the first term greater time and attention will be given to areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Physical Education(PE), Language and Mathematics. Gradually schools will work towards more typical curriculum plans.

For further reading, please refer to:

www.gov.ie Reopening Our Primary and Special Schools

PE

Weather permitting, PE will take place outdoors (children should bring coats/rain jackets to school) and use of equipment will be confined to the sets that have been distributed to class groupings.

Additional Points to Note:

- There will be a need for increased ventilation in the classrooms, therefore windows will be open at all times in the classroom. It may be necessary for some children to wear an additional layer to school especially during the colder months. All children will go outside at all breaks except in the case of very bad weather, children should bring coats/rain jackets to school with them.
- Visits from personnel such as school officials, to the school are on an appointment only basis and a 2-metre distance will be observed. Details of all visitors will be entered in a contact tracing form.
- Meetings between parents and teachers can only take place by prior arrangement and will probably be over the phone initially. All communication including day to day information must be communicated to the class teacher via their school email address. These will be issued before school reopens.
- At present, there is no requirement for children to wear face masks/coverings, however if, as a parent/guardian you are more at ease seeing your child wearing a face covering then for the time being we are happy for your child to do so. However, if the child chooses to remove the face covering it will not be the responsibility of the teachers to insist that it be replaced.
- Staff will at all times be expected to maintain a distance of 2 metres from each other, there will be a cap on the number of adults in the staff room, hand sanitisers will also be installed at the entry to the staff room.
- Extra sinks have been installed in the main building and the newer prefabs have sinks already in place.
- The school has been deep cleaned by our cleaner over the last couple of weeks.
- Comprehensive plans will be put in place in the event of a situation where a school may be faced with a closure (in whole or part) for a period during which the curriculum will need to be delivered remotely.

The Logistics Plan will be reviewed regularly and may be subject to change if deemed necessary by school management