



(Tel./Fax 047-55329)

St. Comgall's N.S.
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26th February 2021

Dear Parents

St. Comgall's N.S. will reopen to welcome back Junior Infants, Senior Infants, 1st and 2nd classes on Monday 1st March, 2021, as per instructions and guidance from the Department of Education. To support this phased return of our junior pupils to education at St. Comgall's, we have revised our COVID-19 Response Plan (2020) to ensure that it is in compliance with the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19 and the 'Work Safely Protocol'. Our Board of Management recognizes the very serious nature of COVID-19 and its potential to negatively impact on the lives of our school community and we are therefore fully committed to following key principles of best practice in preventing and controlling this disease.

The purpose of this letter, therefore, is to provide you with guidance on our school's phased reopening. It outlines the steps that the school community at St. Comgall's N.S. has taken and will take to do everything practical **to avoid the introduction** of COVID-19 into the school. It also highlights the steps that have and will be taken **to reduce the likelihood of the spread** within the school itself. At all times we will strive to balance the need for a **practical and sensible level of caution** with the need to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning.

As the response to COVID-19 is continually changing, guidance has been subjected to change and adaptation. Updates and additions to our COVID-19 Response Plan include guidance on ventilation, School Management checklists, checklists for cleaning and updated advice on the protocol for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases.

We thank staff, pupils and parents for your positive participation (and ongoing for senior classes) in remote schooling through Microsoft Teams during this most recent lockdown. There were and continue to be many challenges involved in engaging in remote learning. However, we have learned a lot about a learning platform that can offer virtual instruction almost full time and we appreciate its potential and will be more confident using some form of online or virtual option, digital and online content in our teaching/ learning experiences into the future.

The important step now, however, is to ensure the safe, healthy and happy return to school for both pupils and adults. Vaccination for staff and pupils is still months away. As a school community, therefore, we need not only to understand the virus, but also to understand and work through some new steps and guidelines that will essentially help us create a normal school routine in which we can focus on education and support our pupils. The children and staff are central to our considerations - please be assured that we will do our very best to support and reassure everyone on their return to school. Together, in partnership with you, the parents, pupils, staff and Board of Management, we will ensure that St. Comgall's N.S. is a safe environment in which we will all remain healthy and well.

Thanking you.

Catriona Donnelly (Principal)

Guidelines for a safe phased return to St. Comgall's on Monday 1st March 2021 ...

as per

'COVID-19 Response plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools' – gov.ie

Hygiene

Emphasis will continue to be placed on hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene in all classrooms through:

- familiarity with the steps for proper handwashing.
- the proper use of hand sanitisers and hand towel dispensers.
- reference to appropriate signage visible in the internal / external school environment.
- the proper use and disposal of hand tissues, supplied in all classrooms.

When and where practical, there will be adherence to the minimised sharing of educational material.

Additional cleaning arrangements will recommence both during the school day ie lunchtime, 12:30pm-1:00pm and after school.

Staff will adhere to government guidance on the wearing of graded face masks.

*I would ask all parents **to show and practise** with each child the correct etiquette for washing his/her hands and using hand tissues before he/she returns to school.*

Social Distancing

Furniture remains in place to maximise physical distancing, with seating arrangement adhering to the 1m social distancing guideline.

Each classroom in our school has and will continue to be structured as a 'Class Bubble'. Within that classroom arrangement 'Class Pods' i.e. class groupings will continue to operate. A 1m distance will be maintained between individual 'Pods' and between individuals in the pod, whenever possible and to the extent that this is practical. Senior pupils, on their return, will be expected to continue to comply with increased separation and decreased physical interaction guidelines in the classroom.

On the yard, 'Class Bubbles' will continue to be accommodated during breaks using separate play area structures to ensure that the junior and senior classes (on their return) stay apart as much as possible. Pupils will not be permitted to take part in any contact games and will have to adhere to social distancing guidelines. On returning to the classroom, all pupils will line up at 1 metre intervals, marked on the yard, and will be asked to wash/sanitise their hands before recommencing work.

*I would ask all parents to remind their child/children (particularly younger children) of the importance of maintaining social distancing ie. **no personal contact** on the yard during play time.*

Ventilation / Dress Code

The Department's guidance sets out an overall approach for schools that 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 school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance provides that good ventilation can be achieved in classrooms without causing discomfort, particularly during cold weather.

Ventilation / Dress Code contd.

To adhere, therefore, to this guidance, we are recommending that pupils, on their return to school, should wear **more layers under their uniforms / tracksuits**. Taking into consideration that pupils will be sitting in classrooms with windows partially open, you, as parents can decide on the layers of clothing best suited to ensuring your children are sufficiently warm. Should the weather be particularly cold, the wearing of school coats will be permitted.

Please ensure, that uniforms and tracksuits are washed regularly and that pupils are encouraged to change out of school clothing when they return home each day.

Return to Educational Facility Parental Declaration Form

Parents are asked to return a completed 'Return to Educational Facility Parental Declaration Form' for each child in the junior classes in advance of his / her return to school for Monday's phased reopening. Parents of children in the senior classes will be requested to do the same **once** we receive government confirmation of their return school date.

Health and Safety Risk Assessment

A template risk assessment, included in the Governments 'COVID-19 Response Plan, February 2021' has been used to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19.

Access to School and Contact Log

Arrangements for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained my prior approval, as principal.

Any entry to school will continue to require a visitor to (i) perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser and (ii) sign a 'Contact Tracing Log Form', located inside the front door. All information will be stored safely in my office, in line with Data Protection Regulations, and in case of any future COVID-19 inspection or as part of contact tracing procedures by Government officials.

The Department of Education Inspectorate may need to visit our school in a support capacity, re public health advice relating to creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

School Communication

Parents are requested to communicate with school staff **via** telephone / email / WhatsApp or Teams, until further Government guidance is received.

The School Day

School Drop Off / Collection

Please adhere to the social distancing guidelines that have been in place since September 2020.

- Encourage your child / children to adhere to physical distancing of 2m, where possible.
- The front path has been lined at 2m intervals.
- For those pupils travelling by car, we would ask that on arrival, children from each household would wait in their car until parents are sure that they can enter while maintaining adequate distance from those in front.

- Pupils emerging from the bus are asked to keep 2m apart on the path (at lines) with their siblings and only move forward when a space is free.
- On entering the school, all pupils will sanitise their hands before entering their classroom. Pupils are required to stay at their table at all times during the day.
- Pupils will be dismissed from each classroom with their siblings. They are asked to maintain a 2m social distance on the path outside.

Parents are asked **not** to congregate on the path outside the school, during morning or afternoon drop off / collection times, and to show good example to pupils at all times.

I would again remind parents **not** to park at any time in the newly marked designated bus parking space.

Classroom Equipment

As the sharing of *personal* school equipment will not be permitted, parents are asked to ensure that pupils have their own supply of pencils/ pens (senior pupils - include red pens)/ colouring pencils /sharpeners / rubbers /rulers/ mathematical equipment etc. All practical equipment used in the classroom will be washed/sanitised each day.

Homework

As pupils have worked positively and consistently on curricular work using Teams since lockdown, teachers have decided to reduce homework workload, significantly, until Easter.

School Activities

All outside agencies, i.e. Music Teacher, GAA coach will be suspended and this step will be reassessed after Easter, in accordance with government guidelines.

Know the Symptoms of COVID-19

You are advised that if your children have any of the following COVID-19 symptoms, they are **not** to attend school, you are to phone your doctor and follow HSE guidance on self-isolation.

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

Infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 can cause illness, ranging from mild to severe, and, in some cases, can be fatal. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of [cold](#) and [flu](#).

Common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above).
- a new cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties.

- loss or change in your sense of smell or taste - this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

If your child has any common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), [self-isolate](#) (stay in his/her room) and phone your family doctor straight away to see if he/she needs [a COVID-19 test](#). Other people in your household will need to [restrict their movements](#) (stay at home).

Getting an early diagnosis means, your child can get the help you need and take steps to avoid spreading the virus, if he/she has it.

For the complete list of symptoms, please refer to the HSE [Website](#).

Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19

Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. In the case of a suspected case that may arise in our school setting, a designated isolation area ie our Special Education Room has been identified within the school building. If your child or an adult displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, the school has procedures in place on 'Dealing with suspected case of COVID-19' that will be implemented. The school will adhere to all government guidelines and will ensure that all protocols are followed.

A pupil / adult awaiting collection by a parent/ family member will go to the designated 'Isolation Room' where he / she will remain with the Lead Worker Representative (LWR) or Deputy Lead Worker Representative or SNA until he/she is collected by parents or a family member. Parents, pupils and staff will be advised to follow HSE guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection.

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 and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times. School staff should be encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contract tracing purposes. Both in and out of the school setting (see section 5.1).

Phone number for HSE is 1850241850

If you or your family have any of these symptoms you must stay at home and contact your GP/HSE for further advice before returning to school. Phone number for HSE is 1850241850

Thanking you.

Mrs. C. Donnelly (Principal)