



St. Colman's Primary School
and
All Saints' Nursery Unit
(Annaclone)

Banbridge,
Co. Down
BT32 5LS

Progress Through Partnership, Leading To Excellence



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Friday 26th June 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the summer term draws to a close I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your continued support over the school year and especially in the last few months. It has been great to keep in touch with you via the website, dojo, google classroom, social media, emails, phone calls and most recently home visits. We have loved seeing the excellent work which the children have completed, along with their voice messages, videos and photos.

School reports are being posted on Monday 29/06. We know you have all been working hard to manage the home learning and fully appreciate that this has been a challenge for so many families. We understand that most of you have worries about your child's progress but we want to reassure you that everyone is in the same situation, both in our school and in every school across the north. Our focus on strong home/school communication and effective learning partnerships during this time, has better placed us to continue your child's learning journey come the autumn re-start.

Along with the report, you will find notification of your child's teacher for next year. If you do not receive a copy of the report or need to update the school with a new postal address, please contact me ASAP on koneill344@c2kni.net

Autumn 2020 and The Re-opening

"The journey back to normality for the education system will not be one where schools operate on a business as usual basis from day one and will require flexibility and guidance ..."

(DE Education Restart Guidance)

Below you will find the outcomes of a meeting held earlier this week between a large number of principals representing primary schools from Newry and the surrounding areas. This group of principals worked closely together to discuss the implications of the recent DE publication 'Northern Ireland Re-opening School Guidance: New School Day' published Friday 19th June, with the aim of ensuring a consistency of approach between our local schools. This document alone has not provided the clarity needed, so it was hugely important for schools to come



together and discuss the implications of re-opening and the unique needs in each of our different contexts.

At all times within our discussions the pastoral care of our pupils, staff and indeed the parent body has been paramount. As a school we will be taking a “safety first” approach and opening our school on an incremental basis. The speed at which we do this will be determined by what the R number is in August and on the latest advice and guidance that we have received from the Department of Education.

Based on current guidance we would be unable to accommodate 25 – 30 pupils in all of our classrooms at a distance of 1 metre. As a result, we are currently undertaking to try and do the following (subject to no change in guidance between now and the school reopening):

Split the classes into *two groups*; each group will get up to 2 full days in school and 3 days of home learning. Once groups are established there will be no opportunity to move between them. Keeping children in ‘protective bubbles’ is a means of decreasing interactions between groups of children until further easing measures are introduced. Social distancing should be observed between staff and the membership of these groups should be maintained as much as possible.

There will be extremely limited interaction between pupils in other bubbles – this will mean that there will be changes to playtimes and where children eat their dinners/lunches (in compliance with DE guidance). Detailed arrangements, including which cohort/‘bubble’ your family belongs to, along with starting/finishing times etc. will follow once there is more certainty. At this point we do not wish to overwhelm you with information only for it to change and possibly change again.

A number of important decisions were made to help us move forward during the continuing uncertainty and are listed below.

Newry Area Primary Principal’s (NAPP) Agreed Release

- Schools in our area will reopen on **Monday 24th August** for an induction week which will focus on helping our pupils settle back into the new school day and adapted environment. Your child(ren) will attend for part of the week and specific dates and times will be provided by your child(ren)’s school in due course. This initial week will be morning sessions only with children returning home for lunch.
- The initial focus will be on the pastoral needs of our pupils, their health and wellbeing and the enhancement of a ‘reconnect’ between pupil and school, helping our pupils settle back into the new school day and the changes to their school environment.
- Various options for re-opening are being discussed and explored. Schools will communicate with you their most viable options based on their physical



capacity, pupil numbers and availability of staff. However, principals are acutely aware that the situation may change significantly over the summer, if for instance, social distancing requirements are removed altogether, resulting in options being amended and revised.

- Arrangements regarding staggered pupil arrivals and collections may be necessary and details will be communicated to you on an individual school basis. All parents will be required to remain outside the school buildings, unless specifically requested to enter.
- Pupils are asked to wear a fresh school uniform every day. This may alternate between formal uniform and their school tracksuit. Please encourage your child to change out of their uniform immediately on their arrival home.
- School bags or other items from home should not be brought into school. Packed lunches should be in disposable packaging.
- There will, initially, be no breakfast club/afterschool clubs – this is an area that will be kept under constant review. Children must only arrive at school at their start time.
- No guidance has yet been issued to schools regarding **Nursery provision, transport or school meals**. Details will follow as soon as they are known.
- Please continue to reinforce the practice of thorough and regular handwashing, appropriate social distancing, along with **'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it'**. Our school will further reinforce these practices by having a clear policy and procedures in place when your child returns.
- In line with our safety first approach, children who are ill must not be sent to school; if a child arrives at school and is ill you will be asked to take the child home.
- Our school will continue to furnish you with updated information. It is essential that you access and follow school communications e.g. website, school app etc. Please ensure that you regularly access the platforms employed by your child(ren)'s school.
- The local Principals group will continue to meet over the summer to explore how the needs of our pupils will be met and yet remain compliant with Department of Education and Public Health Authority Guidance.

Please be aware that this information is subject to change in light of evolving DE Guidance.

In St. Colman's Primary School and All Saint's Nursery Unit our stated aim and target is a full return, for all of our children. However, if I was to open the school tomorrow, under the current levels of guidance this sadly would not be possible. The beginning of September is still 8 weeks away, and I hope that as guidance changes and evolves, that it will permit for a full return in the autumn term, with an



induction week for all children at the end of August. We are committed to the full return of pupils in both the school and the nursery unit. Once the DE/PHA guidance allows for this, we will implement this measure at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst the COVID 19 situation is inconvenient and extremely stressful for everyone involved and has created a situation where we don't know exactly how next year is going to look. We want ask you to consider the opportunity of potential growth for your child. Growth in confidence and developing resilience towards their learning and life. In addition, the most important thing in your child's life is the attitude of the adults around them and this means you! By embracing the opportunities and looking for the silver lining, we can give our children a gift to last a lifetime. The opportunities of a blended learning approach and the fact that children's experience can be enriched through it, isn't necessarily a bad thing for your child's learning and development.

Your support is more appreciated than I have the words for – and on behalf of all of us at St. Colman's Primary School and All Saints' Nursery Unit, we greatly value the messages, positivity and feedback which we have received. It is a source of great pride to lead this school in normal circumstances. In the current climate, it has been both humbling and inspiring to see the ways in which students, parents and staff are taking steps to turn a deeply worrying situation into a demonstration of hope, optimism and care for others.

We look forward to welcoming our pupils back to our schools in a safe and ready environment. School staff have been working hard to prepare the school environment and curriculum for next year. One thing we know for sure, is that this next year school will be a very different place for all of us. Working together as a community will help us all get through it.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin O'Neill

Principal

