



14<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## **Update on Reopening Scoil Mochua**

Dear Parents / Guardians,

We are making good progress on the enormous task of re-opening the school safely from the 27<sup>th</sup> August. We appreciate how vital it is to communicate and keep everyone in the loop, as I am sure you have lots of questions and concerns about what school will look like once we re-open, and what safety measures will be in place. Below is an outline of the progress we have made to date, and the areas we are working on. Hopefully this will provide some answers for you and, most importantly, provide reassurance that we are following the DES and HSE guidelines and are working hard to make sure that the school will be a safe place for all children and all staff. You will also have an important part to play in all of this, so it is imperative that we all pull together in this effort.

I would like to thank the Re-opening the School Committee, who are working hard on all aspects of re-opening the school. Thanks to Therese Shortall, Paula Flanagan, Jenny Corr, Helena Burke, Richie Hannan, Claire Stewart, Colin Bulger (Safety Officer BOM), Cara Cumiskey (Parent Nominee BOM), Brian Daly (Parent Nominee BOM) and Maria Pollack (Chairperson PA). Thanks to all of the parents, and their family members, who helped out with the furniture-moving last weekend. Thanks to all the staff who have been working during the summer to get classrooms ready for the new reality. This is very much a team effort, and will continue to be. Thanks to all of you, the parents, for your offers of support. This makes such a big difference to our efforts. Knowing that you are all willing to do well, and that you are there to help us, makes this task all the more manageable.

Please note, as this is a fast-evolving situation, any of the decisions and considerations below are subject to change, depending on public health advice.

## **Arrival and Dismissal**

### **Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> and Friday 28<sup>th</sup>**

As previously communicated, only some of the classes are in on each of these days. On these days, the teachers will spend time explaining new rules and procedures, and showing the children around, pointing out the signage, the arrows on the floor, the new procedures for arriving and exiting the school that will commence the following week. The children will do a full day on these days. We will stagger the exit time, most likely from 2.30. All classes will enter and exit on those days through the usual pedestrian gate. We will issue you with detailed exiting procedures on the week of the 24<sup>th</sup> August.

## **Two Entry and Exit Points**

From Monday 31<sup>st</sup> August, we will be using two entry and exit points in the morning and at hometime. As you know, we have a gate in the Middle Yard that leads out on to the green. We use this gate for Sports Days. Thanks to Councillor Michael Coleman, who responded immediately to a request from the school, Kildare County Council have laid a path from this gate to the existing path on the green. This means that children will be able to enter the school via this gate in the morning, and some classes will also exit via this gate at home time. We are working on a plan that would see the older children exiting via the front gate, and the younger classes exiting via the green.

Our main concern at arrival and dismissal time is the congregations of parents, which is no longer safe, and the bottleneck that exists at the front gate when all of the children are exiting. As less parents meet the older children after school, we feel that the older children (with each class slightly staggered from 2.35) can exit safely through the front gate. We are asking parents who are meeting the older children to please assign a designated place, away from the gate, to meet your child.

The younger classes have plenty of space in the Middle Yard to stand back, with their teachers, and exit one class at a time via the gate onto the green. As always, the younger children will not be allowed to go until they see a parent/minder. But again, the success of this, and the safety of this, relies on parents standing back from the gate. Parents are asked to observe a distance of 2m from each other – there is plenty of space on the green to facilitate this. It would help greatly if you could let your child know where you will wait – pick a tree, or a point on the old path, and let your child know to look for you there.

We will put measures in place to help ensure that this runs smoothly and safely. We expect that it may take some time to exit all classes for the first few days, but I am confident that once the new system is up and running, the classes exiting via the gate at the green will exit quickly and safely. Please be patient while we iron out any issues, and get the children used to this new routine. We will have plenty of supervision in the morning as the children arrive, directing them to the closest door to his/her classroom. The children will very quickly adapt to this new routine. However, like all of our measures, we will be reviewing our entry and exit procedures on a daily basis, and amending as needed.

On the week of the 24<sup>th</sup>, we will issue full details on the procedure for arrival and exiting. You will know where your child will exit, and so will he/she. We are also considering siblings who usually exit together, and children who have bikes, and details on these will be in the full guidelines that we will issue.

## **Staggered arrival time in the mornings from 31<sup>st</sup> August**

Apart from Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> and Friday 28<sup>th</sup>, the plan, as mentioned last week, is to allow the children a 30-minute window of time to arrive. We are asking you to help us to make this work, as it will allow siblings to come to school at the same time, and prevent us from staggering to the extent that some

classes would be starting early every day, and some quite late. We feel that a window of time for arrival will allow the children to arrive with siblings, to socialize within their class groups or pods in their classroom, and it should prevent crowding at the gates. The success of this relies upon your cooperation, and the cooperation of the children. On approach to the school, if the entrance (at the front or at the green) is busy, children should hold back for a minute or two until the gate is clear. At the moment our plans are that children may enter through the gate that suits them (this may differ for those on bikes). Parents are not permitted to enter the school grounds and we ask that you do not come right up to the gate, thus blocking it for the children.

### **Break times**

We are still working on break times. Classes will go out to the yard, as fresh air is so important. Further details on this will issue in due course.

### **Health Expert**

We have met with a health expert with a specialism in Infectious Disease Control and promoting hygiene. He has walked around the school, giving us advice and guidance. He will visit again once our practices are up and running and he will advise us on areas for improvement. He had some great advice, which we will have to keep repeating to ourselves and to each other: Avoid rabbit holes, and concentrate on the three golden rules: Social Distancing, Hand Hygiene and Cough Etiquette. He said there is no such thing as 'zero risk', that there are many 'low risk' areas, but that ultimately, it is the three golden rules (and the R rate in the community) that will keep us all safe.

### **PPE**

A large order of PPE has been submitted to one of the government approved suppliers, and is due in the school next week. All classrooms will be equipped with adequate sanitisers, so there is no need for children to bring their own to school. If your child has an allergy to alcohol-based sanitiser gel, then please alert the class teacher.

The latest advice on primary teachers wearing masks was issued last Friday:

*"It is recommended that teachers and staff in primary schools wear a face-covering when a physical distance of 2 meters from other staff or children cannot be maintained."*

As most of our classes have 30 children, the sad reality is that teachers will be wearing masks for some, if not all, of the day. This will pose a challenge to teaching and learning, but health and safety must take priority. Teachers will be in school next week working on their class layouts, and they will make every effort to ensure that there is enough space at the top of the class to allow at least some teaching without masks. This situation is evolving and we will advise nearer the time.

### **Revised advice on pods and bubbles; Class Layout**

Last Friday evening, 7<sup>th</sup> August, the DES issued an update on physical distancing. The link is here: [file:///C:/Users/Laptop/Downloads/83424\\_1dabc66b-80ea-4af9-97de-9b1fa1acab9a%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Laptop/Downloads/83424_1dabc66b-80ea-4af9-97de-9b1fa1acab9a%20(3).pdf)

*“The creation of Pods within Class Bubbles is an additional measure rather than an absolute requirement. If it is necessary to divide a class bubble into a Pod, design the size of the Pod as small as possible as is reasonably practical in the specific classroom context. Keep a 1 metre distance between Pod within the Class Bubble, and wherever possible, between individuals within the Pod. “*

Teachers are removing all surplus furniture from classrooms next week to maximize the floor space in every room. They will make every effort to space groups out around the room, ensuring a 1m distance between groups or pods. It will not be possible to ensure 1m distance within pods. With class sizes of 30, it will not be possible in any school that I know of. However, teachers are looking at optimum ways of arranging seating with safety as the top priority. While social distancing is not deemed a requirement from Junior Infants – 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, these teachers will also remove surplus furniture and space groups out as much as possible.

### **Isolation Room**

This is under construction as we speak. It is in the new foyer. We will have agreed routes from all parts of the school to this room which we will circulate among all staff members. While none of us like the idea of having an Isolation Room in our lovely school, it is sadly a necessity. Please rest assured that we will deal with any suspected case with the utmost sensitivity and kindness, and a staff member will remain with the child at all times, reassuring and comforting. The reality is that, in our world, children display symptoms of colds on a regular basis. The vast majority of children who present with Covid-19 symptoms will not test positive for the virus. I am in no way diminishing the seriousness of this virus, but simply stating the facts. However, to ensure the safety of all concerned, if you are contacted and asked to collect your child, please do so as quickly as you can. We need to work together to ensure that our actions do not cause undue anxiety in the children. We will teach them to be careful, and to follow the 3 golden rules of Physical Distancing, Hand Hygiene and Cough Etiquette. But we must avoid any unnecessary panic in the event that a child is sent home.

For your own information, the guidelines we have at present for how to deal with a suspected case of Covid-19 are in the Covid-19 Response Plan, in Section 8, available on our website <http://www.scoilmochua.com/reopening-of-school.html>. We will update you if there are any changes to these procedures.

### **SEN**

Special Education Teachers (SETs) will continue to work in classrooms, but it will be limited to three rooms. Withdrawals will continue, but strict physical distancing will be maintained in the SEN rooms – 1m between children at all times, and 2m between teacher and children, or else the teacher will wear a mask if he/she needs to approach a child to offer support. Tables and chairs will be cleaned between groups, and the procedures and routines will be explained to parents in due course.

## **Cleaning**

We have hired a cleaner to clean high-touch areas throughout the school from 10am – 2pm every day. Her vetting application has been submitted. She will be in and out of every room, wiping the door handles, cleaning toilet seats, taps, light switches. She will complete the Covid-19 Cleaning training from the DES, and she will have a daily cleaning schedule. We will monitor and amend her schedule as the need arises. LUAS cleaning will continue to clean the school every evening, with extra duties due to Covid-19.

## **Local Schools**

The principals of all the local schools are meeting on a weekly basis to ensure that we have a unified approach to reopening. Obviously there will be differences in each school due to the different sizes, logistics, location etc., but rest assured, we are working together to ensure the safety of all of our school communities.

## **Uniforms**

As far as we know, all children will continue to wear uniforms and PE tracksuits to school. There is talk about having to wash jumpers every day, or allowing the children to wear their own clothes so that they can change daily. This topic does not feature in DES guidelines. So, as it stands now, children will be wearing uniforms. If there is any change to this, we will update you.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming the children back to school the week after next, and we are confident that we will quickly find a new normal. Our aim is that the children will revert to skipping happily in to school, and that we will find a balanced approach that protects the health and wellbeing of the children and staff, while getting back into the routine of teaching and learning, and having fun.

We will update you again at the end of next week, and will have a detailed logistics plan ready to share with you on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> August. Your ongoing support in all things school related, and especially the measures that relate to Covid-19, is greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Catherine Carragher, Principal