



Dear Parents / Carers,

10th June 2020

Apologies for not being in touch much over the past while, but I have been unwell and had to, reluctantly, take time to recover.

I know that many of you are wondering what the plans are for reopening schools for the next academic year. At present, we have more questions than answers, but are working hard to push for information. Please be reassured that every Principal in every school across NI has been asking the Education Minister and Department of Education for detailed guidance to help us prepare for the safe return of all our pupils.

Ideally we would like to open our doors and welcome you all back as normal, but this will not happen initially. I recently took part in a webinar session with the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Education Minister, Peter Weir, and want to share with you what I know to date.

Please be aware that the information outlined below is still being discussed and debated, and has not yet been adopted as official guidance.

Going forward the following options are being considered:

1. Schools reopen in late August (possibly 17th August) for three year groups initially – Year 7/ Year 12 & Year 14. They will then open for other classes in September.
2. Schools will reopen to pupils in a part time manner for blended learning – this means a combination of attending school for face to face lessons, and remote learning at home.
3. Days/times have yet to be confirmed. Many models are being talked about, e.g. Pupils split in a class split into two cohorts
 - Cohort 1 would attend school Monday and Tuesday and take part in remote learning Wednesday-Friday.
 - Cohort 2 would attend school Thursday and Friday and take part in remote learning Monday-Wednesday.
 - Another suggestion has been one week in and one week at home.
4. Number of pupils in school at any one time has yet to be confirmed. We are still waiting for guidance as to whether we have to follow WHO of 1 metre for social distancing or PHA 2 metre guidance. The Minister did, however acknowledge that all schools across NI had classrooms of different sizes, based on age of build and old/new classrooms etc. The size of the classroom space will dictate the number of pupils.

5. I have impressed on the Minister the importance of NI Executive discussing how the workplace will offer flexibility for parents to return to work part time; if that is all they can manage.
6. We may have to prioritise key worker children in the first instance. We are unsure if this means they get priority every day. Again as soon as we know we will confirm, but want to ensure arrangements are as fair as possible to all families.
7. Vulnerable families will also have to be prioritised.
8. Free School Meals – myself and many other principals have called for FSM payments to be made available over the summer months due to hardship for some families. No confirmation as yet. If you feel you will meet the criteria for FSM due to furlough or job loss, please make sure you apply before September.
9. Curriculum on return – We have already begun preparation whilst we await guidance from CCEA on the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We will be prioritising mental health and wellbeing/literacy and numeracy.
10. Uniform – normal uniform is required for return to school including PE uniform. Play and physical activity will be a priority.
11. As a school we will ensure as far as possible, that siblings from one family are accommodated on the same days.

I am sorry this doesn't provide the clear detail that you need. All I can say is that we are fighting on behalf of your children to ensure a safe return to school. I was going to hold off until nearer the end of June to communicate in the hope that we will have more detail rather than speculating. However, I felt it was important to let families have some sort of update.

The summer term is usually full of much excitement. So many things to celebrate. Sports day achievements, leavers assembly, Nursery graduation and tea party, school trips to name but a few. We are devastated that we will finish the year in such an empty way. Schools are vibrant, happy, busy places full of chat, play and hope for the future but they are nothing without the children there. We look forward to those days returning in some form or another.

I plan to ring every family for a pastoral care check in and chat with the children. I had started the calls, but had to put them on hold due to feeling unwell. I look forward to chatting to you all soon.

Thank you so much for your patience.

Kind Regards



Heather Watson
Principal