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# Covid Response Plan Reviewed February 2021

## 1. Introduction

This response plan was ratified by the Board of Management of St Joseph's NS at a meeting of the Board of Management. It adheres strictly to the Department of Education & Skill's 'Roadmap for the Full Return to School'.

The Minister for Education has published "*The Roadmap for the Full Return to School*" on the 27th July. It sets out what the operation of schools will look like and the range of supports which will be available in a COVID-19 context.

It has been developed in line with public health advice issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and in compliance with the "Return to Work Safely Protocols" developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work. This document sets out the School COVID-19 Response Plan, including a COVID-19 policy, lead worker representative and process to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19.

The purpose of this document is to provide clear and helpful guidance for the safe operation through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in our school. It provides key messages to minimise the risk of COVID-19 for staff, pupils, families and the wider community while recognising the importance of education for the health and wellbeing of pupils and society as a whole.

This document focuses on the practical steps which can be taken in our school to minimise the risk of the introduction of infection into schools while recognising that no interpersonal activity is without risk of transmission of infection at any time. The documentation and templates in this booklet are supported by the public health advice provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) for the safe reopening of schools and educational facilities.

One of the key challenges is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning. This document identifies the steps our school can take to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of

COVID-19 into the school and the steps that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the spread within the school itself.

## **2. What is a School COVID-19 Response Plan?**

A Covid-19 Response Plan is designed to support the staff and Board of Management in putting measures in place that aim to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's *'Return to Work Safely Protocol'*, the Department of Education plan for school reopening and to prevent the introduction and spread of Covid-19 in the school environment.

It is important that the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities complies with the public health advice and guidance documents prepared by the Department. Doing so minimises the risk to pupils, staff and others. The response plan supports the sustainable reopening of St Joseph's NS where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the pupils in the school. The COVID-19 response plan is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice as appropriate for primary schools.

The assistance and cooperation of all staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

## **3. School COVID-19 Policy Statement**

A COVID-19 policy statement outlines the commitment of the school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the chairperson of the Board of Management and school Principal and brought to the attention of the staff, pupils, parents and others. Schools must have a COVID-19 policy in place prior to the reopening of schools for the 2020/21 school year. The School COVID-19 policy can be found at Appendix 1 on the hard copy of this document.

**\*Covid 19 Policy Statement was revised prior to return to school February 2021.  
(Attached)**

## **4. Planning and Preparing for Return to School**

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff. The return to the workplace must be done safely and in strict adherence to the public health advice and any guidance issued by the Department of Education.

Details for the safe reopening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

St. Joseph's NS has processes in place to include the following:

- a. Arrangements to keep up to date with public health advice, changes to any Government plans for the safe reopening of society and Department of Education updates;
- b. Arrangements to pass on this information in a timely manner to staff, pupils, parents and others as required;
- c. Ensured that staff have reviewed the training materials provided by the Department of Education **(details at Section 4.1)**;
- d. Provided staff with access to the Return to Work (RTW) form **(details at Section 4.2)**;
- e. Identified a Lead Worker Representative, Deputy Lead Worker Representative and Assistant Lead Worker Representative **(details at Section 4.3)**;
- f. Displayed posters and other signage to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19 **(details at Section 4.4)**;
- g. Made the necessary changes to the school or classroom layout as required to support physical distancing **(details at Section 4.5)**;
- h. Removed unnecessary clutter to facilitate ongoing cleaning of the school taking into account the importance of having educational materials to create a stimulating learning environment;
- i. Updated the health and safety risk assessment **(details at Section 4.6)**;
- j. Made necessary arrangements to limit access to the school to necessary visitors and maintain records of contacts to the school **(details at Section 4.7)**;
- k. Reviewed the school buildings to check the following:
  - i. Does the water system need flushing at outlets following low usage to prevent Legionella disease;
  - ii. Has school equipment and mechanical ventilation been checked for signs of deterioration or damage before being used again;
  - iii. Have bin collections and other essential services resumed

#### **4.1. Induction Training**

All staff will undertake and complete Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health;
- Covid-19 symptoms;
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school;
- Outline of the Covid-19 response plan.

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and will be updated with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities. If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the Covid-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal, who is supported in this role by the Board of Management.

#### **4.2. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW)** form, which is available from the principal. A copy is attached also at Appendix 2 in the hardcopy of this document.

**\*Return to Work form was revised prior to School reopening in February 2021.**

RTW form should be completed and returned **3 days** before returning to work.

**\*Updated advice states that the RTW form does not have to be filled in 3 days in advance. (February 2021)**

A RTW form should be completed and returned to the school before returning to work after any absence.

The Principal will also provide details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

There are some school staff who may be unable to return to school. Current public health guidelines have identified these people as being in groups who are defined as being at **very high risk**. This will be updated in line with public health advice.

### **People at very high risk (extremely vulnerable):**

The list of people in very high-risk groups include people who:

- are over 70 years of age - even if fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- have severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- have a condition that means they have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition and are pregnant

\*Updated information states that members of staff may avail of COVID 19 Leave, subject to Medmark assessment, if they fall into any of the following three categories:

1. Pregnancy
2. Over 60 years of age
3. Fall into the High Risk Category.

### **4.3. Lead Worker Representative**

The Protocol provides for the appointment of a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) in each workplace. The LWR will work in collaboration with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19 and monitor adherence to those measures and to be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID-19 in the workplace.

This section sets out how the provisions will operate in schools. The process for the appointment of the lead worker representative in schools has been agreed centrally between the Department of Education and the education partners.

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and school management.

Strong communication and a shared collaborative approach is key to protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Adherence to the Return to Work Protocol will only be achieved if everyone has a shared responsibility in implementing the measures contained within the Protocol in their place of work.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 Response Plan, control measures or the adherence to such measures by staff, pupils or others he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the Principal/Board of Management.

#### **Role of the Lead Worker Representative**

In summary, the role of the LWR is to:

- Represent all staff in the workplace regardless of role, and be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts;
- Work collaboratively with school management to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19;
- Keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice;
- Assist school management with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace in line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol and current public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Conduct regular reviews of safety measures;
- Report any issues of concern immediately to school management and keep records of such issues and actions taken to rectify them;
- Consult with the school management on the school's COVID-19 Response Plan in the event of someone developing COVID-19 while in school including the location of an isolation area and a safe route to that area;
- Following any incident, assess with the school management any follow up action that is required;
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace;

- Make representations to school management on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

St. Joseph's NS as a school with fewer than 30 staff, is obliged to appoint a Lead Worker Representative and a Deputy Lead Worker Representative.

The role of the Deputy LWR will be to:

- assist the LWR in their duties as set out above; and
- deputise as LWR where the LWR Representative is absent

The names and email contact details of the LWR will be posted in various places in the school.

**Name(s) of lead worker representative:**

Barry Murphy

All staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

Full details of the arrangements which will apply for the LWR in primary and special schools is set out at Appendix 3 in the hard copy of this document.

#### **4.4. Signage**

The Board of Management has arranged for the display of signage throughout the school outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID- 19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene as is required by the 'Return to Work Safely Protocols'.

#### **4.5. Health and Safety Risk Assessment**

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. The risk assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in our school setting is attached at Appendix 4.

**\*Risk Assessment was reviewed prior to school reopening in February 2021.**

#### **First Aid/Emergency Procedure**

The school will strive to identify additional fire evacuation lines to achieve the 2m physical distancing between class bubbles. Fire Drills will continue to be carried out each term as usual.

#### **4.6. Access to School and Contact Log**

Only HSE, Gardaí, Department of Education and their related agency staff and persons deemed by the Principal to be integral to the maintenance and repair and management of the school, and only then through prior appointment, will be admitted to the school.

In exceptional circumstances and only where business cannot be transacted remotely or online or by post, may a parent visit the school office. In such circumstances a face covering must be worn. There is no exception to this requirement.

Arrangements for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal. The Department of Education Inspectorate may also need to visit schools and centres for education to support them as appropriate in the implementation of public health advice relating to creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities will be maintained as a supplementary procedure to the school's existing visitor procedures.

All staff members must enter/exit the building at the designated doors.

All members of staff must sign in and sign out of the Staff Member Covid 19 logbook using their own pen.

All school records and data will be maintained and processed in compliance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Acts. The responsibility for compliance with the legislation rests with each school in their role as data controller.

## **5. Control Measures - To Prevent Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 in Schools**

One of the key messages to manage the risks of COVID-19 is to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school. If infection is not introduced it cannot be spread. The risk of spreading the infection once introduced exists in all interpersonal interactions; student-student, staff member-staff member and staff member-student and must be managed in all settings.

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents and visitors as far as possible within the school. The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

It is critical that staff, pupils, parents and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements.

*Staff should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.*

The Board of Management of St. Joseph's NS will take the following additional measures to mitigate against the risk of the introduction of the virus to the school;

Promote awareness of COVID-19 symptoms:

- a. Advise staff and pupils that have symptoms not to attend school, to phone their doctor and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation;
- b. Advise staff and pupils not to attend school if they have been identified by the HSE as a contact for person with COVID-19 and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement;
- c. Advise staff and pupils that if they develop symptoms at school to bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly;

- d. Ensure that staff and pupils know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school;
- e. Recommend to all staff to download and use the Covid Tracking App;
- f. Everyone entering the school building needs to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser;
- g. Visitors to the school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point;
- h. Physical distancing (of 2m) should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

**\*Additional Measures from February 2021:**

- i. **Advise staff and pupils to self-isolate or restrict their movements at home if they display any symptoms or signs of COVID 19 and contact their family doctor to arrange a test.**
- j. **Advise staff and pupils not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:**
  - **If they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID 19.**
  - **If they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus.**
  - **If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.**
  - **Advise staff and pupils to cooperate with any public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice in the even of a case or outbreak in the school.**

## **5.1. The Symptoms of COVID-19**

If a pupil is ill, they should not attend school.

**A pupil must not be sent to school** he/she has any one of the following symptoms;

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste
- Or is they have tested positive for COVID 19 or have been a close contact of someone who has tested positive with COVID 19, in which case the advice of your family GP should be sought.

## **5.2. Respiratory Hygiene**

The Board of Management and school staff of St. Joseph's NS are striving to keep our school free from Covid-19 so that our school can sustain teaching and learning and avoid closures as a result of an outbreak in our school.

A pupil sent to school with any of these symptoms risks not just the teaching and learning in our school, but the lives of our pupils and staff, some of whom are vulnerable or live with vulnerable people.

All persons in St. Joseph's NS should follow good respiratory hygiene. This requires covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow, in the event of a sudden sneeze or cough.

A used tissue should be disposed of immediately into a bin.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

### 5.3. Hand Hygiene

There are hand sanitiser stations at the entrance to every classroom and throughout the school. Pupils and staff must sanitize hands;

Pupils and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- Before they leave their home
- On arrival at school;
- Before eating or drinking;
- After using the toilet;
- After playing outdoors;
- When their hands are physically dirty;
- When they cough or sneeze.

Use of hand hygiene facilities including wash hand basins will be managed so as to avoid congregation of people waiting to use wash hand basins and hand sanitisers.

There is a requirement for access to hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Hand sanitiser dispensers will be deployed at exit and entry points of the school building and all classrooms, and care will be taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risks of falls.

Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand towels are provided in all toilets, kitchens and any food preparation areas.

Hand washing facilities will be maintained in good condition and supplies of soap and towels will be topped up regularly to encourage everyone to use them.

Hand sanitiser is suitable for use for hand hygiene when hands are not visibly soiled (look clean).

**\*Alcohol based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame. (Revised February 2021)**

### 5.4. Physical Distancing

Physical distancing can be usefully applied in primary and special school settings allowing for some flexibility when needed. **It must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue.** Physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. Care will be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times.

**It is also recognised that it is not always possible for staff to maintain physical distance from pupils and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so** where this could have a detrimental impact on the pupil i.e. if a child sustains an injury and requires first aid.

The focus will be in avoiding physical contact unless necessary which may include;

- First Aid Treatment
- If a child is emotionally upset
- One to one teaching by class teacher or Supplementary Education Support Teacher

**However, where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1m distance and where possible 2m from pupils.**

**They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down.**

Physical distancing falls into two categories:

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing interaction

### **Increasing separation**

The guidance documents provided by the Department of Education on optimal school layout and referenced at **Section 4.5** above has been used by St. Joseph's NS to increase separation to the greatest degree possible

Where required, our school has;

1. Reconfigured class spaces and classrooms to maximise physical distancing
2. Utilised and reconfigured all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing.

**All teacher's desks are, where possible, at least 1m from pupil desks.**

### **Decreasing interaction**

The extent to which decreasing interaction is possible in a primary school depends on the school setting and a common-sense approach is required recognising the limits to which this can be achieved between pupils.

A distance of 1m will be maintained between desks or between individual pupils, where possible. **The Department of Education & Skills has recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore, achieving this recommendation in the first four years of primary or special schools, is not a pre-requisite to re-opening.**

Where possible, workstations will be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces which are shared.

Within each class bubble there will be **Pods of a maximum of 4-6 children** established in all classrooms. In circumstances where available space restrictions and class number factors require it, the Principal may sanction a Pod of 3 or 5 persons.

Within each Pod there is still 1m physical distancing between individual Pods within the Class Bubble and between individuals in the pod, whenever possible.

Generally speaking, the objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as the latter will not always be possible.

The aim of the system within the school is that class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measure, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble.

Where possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will not be possible at all times.

## **Shared Devices/Utensils**

### **Keyboards and tablets**

The contact surface of these devices will be cleaned regularly and hand hygiene encouraged.

Pupils will be reminded not to share personal items with others in the class.

## **Physical Distancing outside of the classroom and within the school**

### **Staff room**

The Board of Management strives to support, within the confines of the public health advice, the good staff morale and healthy social atmosphere and relationships which is enjoyed by the staff in St. Joseph's NS. The Board recognises the effect good staff morale and social relationships have on creating and sustaining a healthy workplace and also on the teaching and learning in our school.

To this end, the Board is keen to keep the Staffroom operational albeit in a limited form but to also support and sustain good relationships that exist amongst our staff through facilitating small groups of staff to 'lunch' together within the social distance requirements.

### **Seating area**

Physical distancing of 2 m will apply in the staffroom. There will be a limited number of spaces for lunch available for seating in the staffroom. Staff must only sit in the designated areas.

### **Lunch in Classroom**

Staff members may also take their lunch in their classroom.

### **Sanitisation & Safety**

Staff members are required to sanitise their hands entering and exiting the staffroom.

Each staff member is responsible for sanitising the table and seat and area where they eat, immediately afterwards in the staffroom or the classroom in which they are eating.

Particular care should be taken to ensure no hot-water and or edible hazards exist in the classroom which may pose a risk to children when they arrive back into the classroom.

### **Kettles/Microwaves/Fridges**

Kettles/Microwaves and refrigeration facilities will be available in the staffroom. Staff should wipe down kettles, microwave door and fridge handles after each use.

### **Other Utensils**

Staff are required to bring, use and clean their own equipment and utensils. (cup, cutlery, plate etc.) Staff are required to tidy up their seating area after use. Use disinfectant spray to clean down all surfaces after their use.

**\*Following a risk assessment of staffroom facilities, it was decided that the staffroom be moved to the school hall. Two sets of equipment has been provided and two seating areas established. Red and Blue pod staff members must use the designated seating areas and the designated equipment.**

### **Corridors and Stairwells**

Briefly passing someone in a hall is very unlikely to contribute significantly to the spread of infection if people do not have physical contact and avoid informal group discussions.

All persons, staff and pupils, should walk on the immediate left at all times whilst walking in the corridors.

Classes must stand back and wait for a class to pass or walk on and must maintain their class bubble by not intermingling with other classes in the corridor. Class teachers can control this through ensuring the usual protocols are followed pertaining to a class teacher leading their class at all times when moving throughout the school.

Classes and/or individual pupils are not permitted to leave their classroom unless for a timetabled event, e.g. PE Lesson, Supplementary Education Support lesson.

### **Yard/Supervision**

The Department of Education advises that public health officials state that the risk of transmission from contact with outside surfaces or play areas is low.

Yard times will be split to ease congestion on the yard and allow for class bubbles to maintain a distance from other class bubbles.

**It is not possible to maintain physical distancing when pupils in primary play together outdoors, but in so far as practical it is helpful to keep to consistent groups.**

Children will perform hand hygiene before and after outdoor activities.

Yard equipment will not be shared beyond a class bubble and will be sanitised after each use.

### **\*Ventilation: (Revised February 2021)**

The Department has published guidance setting out the practical steps for good ventilation in accordance with public health advice “Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools”. The guidance sets out an overall approach for schools that windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (ie during break and lunchtimes) and also at the end of each 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.

## **5.5. Use of PPE in Schools**

PPE will not be required to be worn within schools according to current occupational and public health guidance. However, for a limited number of staff, PPE will need to be used occasionally or constantly due to the nature of certain work activities or work areas. This might include roles such as:

- Assisting with intimate care needs
- Where a suspected case of COVID-19 is identified while the school is in operation
- Where staff are particularly vulnerable to infection but are not on the list of those categorised as people in very high-risk groups or may be living with those who are in the very high-risk category.

Appropriate PPE will be available for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid. Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment, they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

### **Masks**

**Cloth face coverings are not suitable for children under the age of 13 and anyone who:**

- Has trouble breathing;
- Is unconscious or incapacitated;
- Is unable to remove it without help;
- Has special needs or may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering.

For staff, face coverings are required.

The use of a visor as an alternative may be considered where there is a concern regarding prolonged close contact and exposure to fluid/respiratory droplets.

**\*Following updated advice, visors will no longer be in use in the school unless used with a mask. (October 2020)**

St. Joseph's NS will provide all staff with disposable masks and a visor.

### **Gloves**

The use of disposable gloves in the school by pupils or staff is not generally appropriate but may be necessary for intimate care settings. Routine use does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves.

Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene.

## **6. Impact of COVID-19 on certain school activities**

The school will follow the advice of the Department of Education & Skills regarding certain schools' activities in advance of school reopening.

The Board acknowledge the challenges and concerns identified by the Department of Education & Skills in some areas;

### **Choir/Music Performance**

Choir and music classes/performances have been suspended pending a review by the Board of Management

### **Sport Activities**

St. Joseph's NS will refer to the HPSC guidance on Return to Sport. GAA Education programme to take place in an outdoor setting only.

### **Shared Equipment**

All toys will be cleaned on a regular basis, some will require weekly cleaning and some daily. This will remove dust and dirt that can harbour germs.

If cloth or soft toys are used, they should be machine washable.

Jigsaws, puzzles and toys that young pupils and pupils with supplementary educational needs may be inclined to put into their mouths should be capable of being washed and disinfected.

All play equipment will be checked by the class teacher for signs of damage for example breaks or cracks. If they cannot be repaired or cleaned, they will be discarded.

Clean toys and equipment will be stored in a clean container or clean cupboard.

At this time soft modelling materials and play dough where used should be for individual use only.

#### **Cleaning Procedure for Toys**

1. Wash the toy in warm soapy water, using a brush to get into crevices.
2. Rinse the toy in clean water.
3. Thoroughly dry the toy.
4. Some hard-plastic toys may be suitable for cleaning in the dishwasher.
5. Toys that cannot be immersed in water that is electronic or wind up should be wiped with a damp cloth and dried.
6. In some situations, toys/equipment may need to be disinfected following cleaning for example: toys/equipment that pupils place in their mouths. Toys/equipment that have been soiled or toys where a case of COVID-19 has been identified.
7. If disinfection is required: A chlorine releasing disinfectant should be used diluted to a concentration of 1,000ppm available chlorine. The item should be rinsed and dried thoroughly.

#### **Art**

Each pupil should have their own set of colouring pencils and/or markers and should not share with other pupils in their class.

#### **Electronics**

Shared electronic devices such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards will be cleaned between use.

#### **Shared Sports Equipment**

Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between uses by different people.

#### **Pencil Cases**

Children are asked to provide a school pencil case that will remain in school at all times. Details of items needed in their school pencil case – See class teachers

## **7. Hygiene and Cleaning in Schools**

St Joseph's NS has arranged for enhanced cleaning of the school. All school settings are cleaned at least once per day.

St. Joseph's NS will comply with specific advice in relation to school cleaning as set by the HPSC. This advice is to support schools to prevent COVID-19 infections and the enhanced cleaning required in the event of a suspected cases of COVID-19.

Cleaning of the school will be covered in the Covid-19 induction training for all school and cleaning staff.

## **8. Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19**

Staff or pupils of St. Joseph's NS should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. The following outlines how our school will deal with a suspected case that may arise in a school setting.

**\*School staff should be encouraged to download the HSE COVID Tracker app to assist Public Health for contact tracing purposes both in and out of the school setting.  
(Revised February 2021)**

A designated isolation area has been identified within the school building.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school the following are the procedures to be implemented:

1. If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately;
2. We will Isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2m away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2m from the symptomatic person at all times;
3. The isolation area we have identified is the Comms Room. Isolation area 2 is the area outside the hall.
4. Remember that the virus is spread by droplets and is not airborne so physical separation is enough to reduce the risk of spread to others even if they are in the same room;
5. If it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2m a staff member caring for a pupil should wear a face covering or mask. Gloves and a disposable apron will be worn as an additional precaution.
6. Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms if one is available. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises;
7. Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents who will call their doctor and continue self- isolation at home.
8. Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided;
9. If the person is well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used;
10. If a pupil with suspected case of Covid-19 has a sibling attending the school, arrangements will be made for him/her go home as well:
11. If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect;
12. Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery;
13. Arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved.
14. 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.

## **9. Special Educational Needs/Care Needs**

### **Additional considerations for those with Supplementary Educational Needs/Care Needs**

For children with supplementary educational needs and/or care needs maintaining physical distancing in many instances will not be practical or appropriate to implement. The focus should therefore be on emphasising that parents/guardians should have a heightened awareness of signs, symptoms or changes in baseline which suggests illness/COVID-19 infection and where symptoms are present children should not attend school. Similarly, staff should be aware of their responsibility not to attend work if they develop signs or symptoms of respiratory illness.

### **Hand hygiene**

Children who are unable to wash their hands by themselves should be assisted to clean their hands using soap and water or a hand sanitiser (if their hands are visibly clean) as outlined previously.

### **Equipment**

Some children may have care needs (physical or behavioural) which requires the use of aids and appliances and/or medical equipment for example toileting aids, moving and handling equipment, respiratory equipment. Where cleaning of aids and appliances is carried out in the school it is recommended that a cleaning schedule is provided, detailing when and how the equipment is cleaned and the cleaning products to be used in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.

The following points can guide the development of such cleaning schedule:

- a. Equipment used to deliver care should be visibly clean;
- b. Care equipment should be cleaned in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions. Cleaning is generally achieved using a general-purpose detergent and warm water.
- c. Equipment that is used on different children must be cleaned and, if required, disinfected immediately after use and before use by another child e.g. toileting aids
- d. If equipment is soiled with body fluids:
  - o First clean thoroughly with detergent and water
  - o Then disinfect by wiping with a freshly prepared solution of disinfectant
  - o Rinse with water and dry.

## **10. Staff Duties**

The staff of St. Joseph's NS have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play. In this regard and in order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Adhere to the School COVID-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined.
- b. Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
- c. Must inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace.
- d. Must complete COVID-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school.
- e. Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices.
- f. Coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- g. Make themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.
- h. Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of COVID-19.
- i. Not return to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances.
- j. If they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
- k. Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

**\* Additional Measures as of February 2021**

- l. **Not return to or attend school in the event of the following:**
  - if they live with someone who had symptoms of the virus.
  - if they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such circumstances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
- m. **Cooperate with any public health personnel and their school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in their school.**
- n. **Undergo any COVID 19 testing that may be required in their school as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health.**

## **11. COVID-19 Related Absence Management**

The management of a COVID-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with the Department of Education. (circular 0049/2020)

**\*Updated information on COVID 19 leave for the following three categories of staff members circulated to staff in a timely fashion before return to school in February 2021**

**1. Pregnant Member of staff**

**2. Member of staff over the age of 60**

**3. Member of staff of any age in the High Risk category.**

**(To apply for COVID 19 leave, staff must be assessed by Medmark. Staff members will be supported in this process if necessary.)**

## **12. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. Support for school staff wellbeing will be provided by Department Support Services including the PDST and CSL, as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team.

An Occupational Health Strategy is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum Life under the logo of *'Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile'*.

Under the EAS, employees have a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc. Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home). A bespoke wellbeing portal and app which offers access to podcasts and blogs on topics around wellbeing and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition is also available. In addition, online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. As part of the services provided by Spectrum Life a Mental Health Promotion Manager is available to develop and deliver evidence based mental health and wellbeing initiatives to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy and to increase engagement with the service. They will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote staff wellbeing in schools as schools reopen and during the upcoming school year.

## Appendix 1:

*St Joseph's NS  
Hacketstown,  
Co. Carlow  
059 – 6471199  
Roll No: 17127S  
htownns@gmail.com*



## **COVID -19 Policy Statement (Revised Feb '21)**

St Joseph's NS, Hacketstown is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our students. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID-19 Response Plan. The BOM/ETB and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
- provide up to date information to our staff and students on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan in relation to summer provision
- inform all staff and students of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the public health guidance and direction of the Department of Education
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and students engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and students to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s), who will be supported in line with the agreement between the Department and education partners.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2:**

*St Joseph's NS  
Hacketstown,  
Co. Carlow  
059 – 6471199  
Roll No: 17127S  
htownns@gmail.com*



**Return to Work Form (Revised)**

This form must be completed by staff in advance of returning to work.

If the answer is Yes to any of the below questions, you are advised to seek medical advice before returning to work.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Principal: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Questions	YES	NO
1.	Do you have symptoms of cough, fever, high temperature, difficulty breathing, loss or change in your sense of smell or taste now or in the past 14 days?		
2.	Have you been diagnosed with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection in the last 14 days?		
3	Are you awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test?		
4	In the past 14 days, have you been in contact with a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19?		
5	Have you been advised by a doctor to self-isolate at this time?		
6	Have you been advised to restrict your movements at this time?		

7	Have you been advised to cocoon at this time? Note: if you're at very high risk (extremely vulnerable) from COVID-19 you may be advised to cocoon.		
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I confirm, to the best of my knowledge that I have no symptoms of COVID-19, am not self-isolating or awaiting results of a COVID-19 test and have not been advised to restrict my movements.

Please note: The school is collecting this sensitive personal data for the purposes of maintaining safety within the workplace in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The legal basis for collecting this data is based on vital public health interests and maintaining occupational health and this data will be held securely in line with our retention policy.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_