17th August 2020

Dear Parent / Guardian,

We look forward to seeing all our students returning to Our Lady of Mercy on Monday 31st August 2020. It is the responsibility of the while school community to keep COVID-19 out of our school and to this end we all need to work together to ensure there is a calm, smooth and ordered return to school for our students, as far as is possible. Please read this letter and keep for future reference. A more detailed letter explaining protocols and arrangements for the acceptance of the children into the school and exit from the school, will be sent to all parents and guardians on Wednesday 19th August. All such arrangements are subject to review based on the emerging information and health guidance made available to schools from the Department of Education and Skills and the public health authorities.

**RE: Physical Distancing and Safe School Attendance**

We are currently working on upgrading our procedures and routines within the school to ensure that there is as much Physical Distancing as is possible in our building. We will apply physical distancing in a practical and sensible way, recognising that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue.

**Physical Distancing will be achieved in two ways: -**

***Increasing Separation*.** This will be achieved by re-configuring the classrooms to maximise physical distancing. Each class will be referred to as a bubble and we will ensure that there is as little contact as possible between children in different bubbles. Within the bubbles, children will be organised into pods. A pod is a group of children (normally 6) who will sit together and who will stay in their pod while in the bubble, or classroom.

***Decreasing Interaction***. This will be achieved by decreasing the potential for children from different bubbles to interact. There will be marked routes for various bubbles to enter and exit the school and to access their classrooms. We will make these routines enjoyable activities for the children, emphasising safety at all times.

While all children will be welcome back to school, we would remind parents that, where children are displaying colds, coughs or flu like symptoms, they should not be sent to school. Children who display such symptoms in school will be isolated and parents asked to collect them from the school.

Children who have travelled from countries not on the Green List should not attend school during the 14-day self-isolation period

Further information on COVID-19 symptoms in children is available at: -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/if-your-child-has-symptoms.html>

***Arrival and dismissal.*** To facilitate social distancing and minimise the assembly of large groups of people we have put in place the following protocols:

**Classes 1st - 6th will start the school day at 8.20 am and finish at 2 pm.**

**Classes Junior and |Senior Infants will start school at 8.35 am and finish at 1.15 pm (the same as previous years)**

* A more detailed plan/map of where the children will enter the school, line up etc will be sent out on Wednesday to all parents and guardians.
* Children unfortunately will not be able to play in the school yard prior to the school day as heretofore.
* Parents of pupils from 1st to 6th class will drop their children **at the school gate** or **designated point of entry** as will be explained in follow up letter.
* Only parents of junior and senior infants and children with special requirements will be allowed into the school grounds, initially.
* No adults, other than staff members, should enter the school building.
* Messages for teachers can be sent by email to ourladyofmercyoffice@gmail.com or by phoning the school office.

**Further advice and information on all aspects of the return to school will be addressed in a follow up letter on Wednesday.**

**Information for all our incoming junior infants will be issued on Wednesday also.**

**Hand washing and cough sneeze etiquette**

Teachers will make children aware of the proper hygiene procedures regarding hand washing and etiquette related to sneezing, coughing or spitting. Children will regularly wash their hands and sanitise during the school day. We would be grateful if you could also emphasise safe behaviour in this regard to your children at home as part of the preparation for returning to school.

**Changed circumstances and the return to school**

The reopening of schools during this pandemic poses’ challenges for the whole school community and certain protocols and procedures may change over time. Our aim remains to re-open the school in an orderly safe manner, while reassuring the children and making them feel comfortable, safe and relaxed with their friends in the new school environment. This will be achieved by all of us working towards this common goal.

Le meas,

Siobhán Hanly

 Príomhoide