



Ballyclare Secondary School

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Ballyclare
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Principal: Mrs K O Bell BA Adv Cert Ed PQH

19th August 2020

Dear parent/carer,

As we approach the end of August, it is time for Ballyclare Secondary School to reopen and it is very important that we do this safely and well. We are very much looking forward to welcoming our pupils back to school and particularly welcoming those in year 8 who are joining us for the first time.

I would like to thank all parents and carers for your support over these past very challenging months. I fully appreciate that many of you have been balancing working from home, your family commitments and supporting your children's learning.

Over the past weeks we have worked hard to ensure that when our school opens it is a Covid-Safe, welcoming and supportive environment. The prolonged absence from school will have affected not only on pupils' educational development but also their emotional wellbeing. It is therefore important that they feel that school is a safe place to be.

I appreciate that there may be excitement about coming back to school there may also be considerable anxiety around returning to school and we may all express that in different ways. It is important that pupils and parents feel supported as we return to school. I would like to thank you for your patience as we awaited confirmation from DE of how schools would return.

In all our planning and preparation, we have adhered to the guidance provided by The Department of Education and I have enclosed a copy of a letter from Mr P Weir, MLA, Minister of Education. I would encourage you to read through this letter as it provides important information about the reopening of schools.

I have also enclosed a booklet called "Keeping Safe- Restarting School" which provides all the relevant information regarding our school. Please read this carefully as much of the information is to ensure the health and safety of the entire school community. It is vitally important that you note the information regarding to COVID-19 and I would emphasise that **you do not send your child to school if they are in any way unwell but particularly if they have any of the symptoms of COVID -19. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring a safe return to school.**

I would draw your attention to a number of key points:

1. **Start Dates** – school will reopen on **Monday 24th August 2020** and this will be for **Years 12 and 14 only**. Other year groups will start on a phased return as follows:
 - **Thursday 27th and Friday 28th August 2020 – Year 8 – (half days)**
 - **Tuesday 1st September 2020 – Year 13 (full day)**



- **Wednesday 2nd September 2020 – Year 11 (full day)**
- **Thursday 3rd September 2020 – Year 10 (full day)**
- **Friday 4th September 2020 – Year 9 (full day)**

On Monday 7th September 2020, all pupils in school.

2. **Start Time** – School will be open for pupils at **8.30 am**. **Please do not send children to school before this time. Children must not go to local shops on their way to school.** When pupils arrive, they will move directly to registration classes.
3. **Drop off** – **A strict one-way system will be in operation** for morning drop off. Cars will enter from Doagh Road, you can leave your child off at the Pupil Entrance and exit through the playground and onto Avondale Drive. It is essential for the safety of all staff and pupils that you drive with extreme caution as you go across the playground as pupils will be moving to class.
4. **School Uniform** – Pupils are required to wear full school uniform.
5. **Physical Education Kit** - The guidance from DE states that pupils can take part in PE lessons but changing rooms are not to be used. To facilitate PE lessons pupils can wear their PE Kit to school **only on the days when they are timetabled for PE**. Pupils must wear the **school PE Kit** and a **tracksuit must also be worn**. Pupils must wear either the school tracksuit or plain navy/black tracksuit bottoms and top. Pupils are **not permitted** to wear branded football tops. Pupils who do not wear PE kit will not be permitted to take part in PE lessons. We are not permitted to lend items of kit to pupils.
6. **Face Coverings** - The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering may reduce the spread of coronavirus droplets in certain circumstances, helping to protect others while also providing some protection to the wearer. Because face coverings are mainly intended to protect others, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) they're not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing." (New School Day, DE)
Pupils who wish to use face coverings during the routine school day may do so and whilst not mandatory, we would encourage pupils to wear face coverings. (Please read carefully the section in the booklet on wearing face coverings on public transport.)
7. **School bags, pencil cases and equipment** – Pupils are **not required** to have school bags. All pupils will be provided with a **plastic folder**, which is washable. Pupils will be able to carry all essential equipment in their folder including pencil cases, calculator and pupil planners. It is vitally important that all children are prepared for school and have their own supply of pens, pencils, ruler, calculator, highlighter pens, sharpener, eraser and the basic equipment for the school day. Staff are not permitted to share equipment with pupils.
8. **Social Distancing** – Whilst the decision has been taken to relax social distancing between pupils, staff will be required to maintain a social distance of 2 metres from other members of staff and from pupils.
9. **"Protective bubbles"** – Years 8 to 10 will be organised into small groups ('protective bubbles') with consistent membership i.e. same pupils in the bubble each day. 'Bubbles' are based on whole classes, facilitating the safe return of pupils to school on a full time basis. (Please be aware that some changes have been made to class groups to facilitate this.) Keeping pupils in 'protective bubbles' is a means of

decreasing interactions between pupils. Pupils will be in 'protective bubbles' which will cover all aspects of the school day including designated teaching areas and staggered times for break and lunch time.

For Years 11 to 14 there is no requirement for protective bubbles and pupils will follow as far as possible their normal timetable.

10. **School Meals** - The school canteen will be open from 1st September 2020, however, the selection of food may be limited for the month of September. Lunch times will be staggered and pupils in years 8 to 10 will have lunch in their "protective bubbles".

A packed lunch will be required for all pupils in Years 12 and 14 returning to school on 24th August 2020.

We are also operating an onsite lunch policy for all pupils.

11. There will be no extracurricular programme during September 2020; this will be reviewed when additional information is received.

12. **Pupil Behaviour** - The school Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy has been adapted to address COVID-19 related incidents.

The adapted policy allows sanctions up to and including exclusion for pupils:

- who fail to follow instructions relating to health and safety protocols, including the following of the one way system in school
- who wilfully refuse to adhere to arrangements of social distancing and
- who deliberately cough or spit at pupils or staff, putting them at risk.

This policy will be followed and implemented robustly, as a means of protecting the health and safety of the entire school community.

I am very aware that families have been affected in different ways during the past few months and this will have been an unsettling time for all our pupils. On their return to school pupils will be supported emotionally in a number of ways throughout the school day, from planned teaching activities to bespoke support as and when needed.

Please let staff in school know if your family has been affected directly by the pandemic and we will work together with parents/carers in order to try to help and support all pupils through these uncertain times.

I would like to thank you for the support you have provided to your children over the past months and look forward to your continued support of our school as we start a new year. Please remember that whilst we are reopening this does not mean a return to "business as usual". We are still operating in a pandemic, everyone will have a role to play in ensuring that hygiene, and public health guidance are followed to allow a safe return to school.

Yours sincerely

Mrs. K. Bell

Mrs K Bell
Principal