



Ballyclare Secondary School

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Principal: Mrs K O Bell BA Adv Cert Ed PQH

3rd February 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

I want to begin by sincerely thanking you for your understanding and support for our school during this very challenging time. As we find ourselves having to make very difficult decisions, your understanding, support and patience is something that we very much appreciate. We do not underestimate the challenges that you face in keeping your own children safe and engaged in their learning and social activities as well as managing the logistics of your own work, childcare and so on. This is so very difficult, and the only way we will get through is by continuing to work so positively together.

Managing COVID-19

New guidance has recently been released to schools. In our view, the updated guidance follows the pattern of much of the guidance received throughout this pandemic, leaving us in the most difficult position with very little meaningful support from the wider system.

Staff Sickness and Unavailability of Substitute Teachers

The rates of staff sickness continue to be very high across all of our school sectors and it is expected to continue for some time. Like most schools, we do not have the internal capacity to offset staff absence and have had to look for substitute staff externally. This is, however, almost impossible, given the serious shortage of available substitutes.

You might understandably ask why a classroom assistant or someone else can't supervise a class in the case that a substitute teacher cannot be found. Contractual law means that I, as the school leader, am not able to 'direct' teachers or classroom assistants to provide cover for known absences, including absence due to COVID-19.



Maintaining Provision

These circumstances mean that it is extremely difficult for us to maintain uninterrupted, in-school, on-site provision for all children, all of the time. The fact that we are spending every evening and all weekend trying to find resolutions is testament to the fact that nobody wants to see our school having to send children home. In these most challenging circumstances, there will be a level of interruption to in-school provision affecting our school. Unfortunately, at present, safe levels of staffing cannot be maintained in our school and classes must now be closed to face to face teaching and move to remote learning as detailed below:

- **Year 10 will access their learning remotely via Google Classroom on Tuesday 8th February 2022 only.**
- **Year 8 will access their learning remotely via Google Classroom on Wednesday 9th February 2022 only.**
- **Year 9 will access their learning remotely via Google Classroom on Thursday 10th February 2022 only.**

I sincerely hope that this extraordinary set of circumstances will be relatively short lived, and as we move out of this particular stage of the pandemic, circumstances in our school will return to a level of normality, for the sake of our children and school community.

Until such times, however, please continue to be patient with us as we continue to strive for the best possible solutions for our children in these circumstances. The pressures on all staff are profound and unprecedented, and we really appreciate your continued support, care and understanding.

Yours sincerely

Mrs. K. Bell.

Mrs K Bell

Principal