



St. Mary's Primary School

20 Cloughcor Road, Ballymagorry, Strabane, Co. Tyrone. BT82 0BE.

Telephone No: 028 7184 1237

Principal: Mrs A Devine

17th March 2020

Ref: Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dear Parent/ Person with Parental Responsibility,

Given the current situation and as a result of the letter issued to all schools by Mr Weir (Minister of Education) on 16th March we have been instructed that:

“The Department will continue to follow the expert medical and scientific advice from the Chief Medical Officer, Public Health Agency and the UK Government Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) Schools will continue to stay open until such time as this scientific advice changes.”

In the letter Mr Weir goes on to state:

“ It appears likely that at some point in the future I will have to close schools.....This is not a step to be taken lightly and without due consideration to the significant consequences”

We used the one Staff Training Day available to us on Monday 16th March to prepare Staff for the possibility of a future school closure. Hence, as a result of this decision we have to open our school to our pupils and staff as directed by Mr Weir on Wednesday 18th March.

It is our aim at St Mary's to provide a safe environment for your son/daughter. We wish to advise you of the steps we have taken to ensure the health and well-being of pupils and staff from the effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Due to the ongoing situation we are finding ourselves in, I wish to communicate with you further information at this stage following on from the school text messages I have sent out to you. We, at St. Mary's P.S. Cloughcor, continue to follow the guidance as directed by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI), the Public Health Authority (PHA) and the Education Authority (EA).

We await the outcomes and information dissemination as a result of further planned meetings being had with DENI, EA, PHA and communication will be through our school website, the school's text messaging service and school Facebook page.

We have been following the advice of the Public Health Agency on handwashing and cleaning since we returned to school from our Half Term Break. Teaching staff have been asked to ensure pupils wash their hands regularly during the school day and all classrooms have been issued with hand wash to use. Pupils will be asked to wash hands on entry to school, before break, before lunch and after any physical exercise.

All staff are working to minimise the spread of any infection by teaching and helping our pupils (without frightening them) to wash their hands effectively whilst maintaining hygiene in all areas of the school



environment. As advice is regularly updated, we are monitoring the situation and will ensure we follow all directions from the Public Health Agency (PHA) www.publichealth.hscni.net .

Posters from PHA have been on display at our front Reception and on side entrances for over two weeks now and staff have been given the Public Health website address to read and to update their understanding of the virus.

In order to minimise further risk within school, we are attempting to limit contact with the general population and visitors will be asked to use the hand gel on arrival and our school will be restricted to essential visitors only. To that end, all school trips/outings/shared education trips, Sacrament of Confirmation have been cancelled. I have provided hand gel at our front Reception and Staff Room areas to minimise risk.

We have decided not to hold whole school assemblies. Pupils are asked to go straight to their classes each morning at 8.45am where their class teachers will be in the room. Pupils will be further educated on “Catch it, bin it, kill it” and as a school we will actively promote social distancing as far as is reasonably possible.

If you have recently returned from any holiday, I am advising your child/children should remain at home for at least seven days. Please follow the PHA Guidelines.

I would ask and this is following recent guidance from PHA that if your son/daughter develops cold/flu like symptoms which includes-

a fever of 37.8 and above and/or
a recent onset of a continuous cough

that he/she remains at home. Please contact your GP for advice or the NHS Helpline on 111 for Coronavirus advice and inform our school. If your child presents with these symptoms during the school day we will be contacting you and asking you to collect your child from school. You must also inform us immediately if your child is being tested for Coronavirus.

As a parent, I fully understand the fear you are experiencing at present. However, you must decide what is in the best interests of your child as you alone know your own home situations. If your child/children have any medical concerns or conditions which render them vulnerable, then you should decide, in line with medical advice, whether to send them to school. If you choose not to send your child(ren) to school in favour of self-isolation, pupils will be given an absence mark which will reflect this course of action by parents in these unprecedented circumstances. We understand your decision and appreciate your position in this matter. As the Department of Education sends out further updates on the COVID-19 we will also let you know.

I am sure that all parents/carers will understand that we take these measures in order to ensure that we can protect, to the best of our ability, the pupils in our school environment.

As a precautionary measure (where applicable) web addresses will be made available for your child to access from home in the event of school closure via our temporary school website and I will publish further correspondence via this route. We used Monday 16th March to begin the process of preparing packs for your child and once completed I will notify Parents via text message as to when you can collect the packs from our school Reception.

I will keep you informed by text message, Facebook and our website stmaryspsclooughcor.com.

Thank you for your ongoing support during this difficult time. I ask in the midst of the confusion we are all facing that we pray for the safety and health of those most vulnerable during these trying times.

Yours Sincerely,



Andrea Devine

Mrs Andrea Devine
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

