Date: 30th June 2020

Dear Parents,

**Re: School Update**

It has been a very difficult time for us all. I wanted to express my support and provide as much clarity and as many answers as possible for you. I appreciate fully how concerned you may feel with so much going on. We have been working hard on preparing our school and we are very excited at welcoming our pupils back through our doors. So here are our plans and hopefully they will give you some reassurance for the forthcoming weeks.

**School dates:**

* School will welcome back our current 14 P7 pupils on **Friday 14th August** for a full day in school and finish the day with a wonderful celebration with their families in school.
* Confirmation will be in August. Date TBC. Holy Communion looks like a September date. TBC
* **School restarts on Monday 24th August for ALL pupils P1-P7.** Currently only next year’s P7s are due to return in NI, but I wish to see all pupils back on Monday 24th to make a positive start to the new year.
* **All children will attend school full time.** We have made use of the wonderful space we have in school such as the newly renovated mobile and computer suite. If social distancing is still in place come September then we can accommodate everyone, every day. The best place for our children is in school. I will do whatever it takes to make sure all our pupils have room to learn.
* I have uploaded school dates on our website for the whole school year which, all being well, will be free from any more lockdowns.

**Provision:**

Our plan is to get **ALL** our pupils back on **Monday 24th August**. Social distancing may or may not be in place.

**Scenario/Plan A:** there is no social distancing. All children are safe to return. We can get children settled into school routine and their classes.

**Scenario/Plan B:** social distancing is still in place. If so we will create 6 classrooms as we have the space to socially distance, so there will be:

Primary 1 (18) - Primary 2 (14) - Primary 3 (19) - Primary 4 (19) - Primary 5 (12) - Primary 6/7 (21)

**This would only be a temporary measure, and under constant review by myself and our Board of Governors, in the hope that the DE would fund such a move as it would require extra teachers and staff which is well beyond the limitations of our school budget. When we get into Sept/Oct we will be better placed to decide which way forward from there.**

**What is important is that we can get all children safely back for August/September whether scenario A or B.**

So to be clear, Plan A has 4 classes and Plan B has 6 classes. What is vitally important to me is that we give our children the very best start. I know you’ll agree and wish to see your child access a full school week.

I have informed our Board of Governors with regards this matter and they are fully supportive to welcome all our pupils back asap and give them every opportunity to settle back into a good school routine. Again, moving to a 6 class scenario is a luxury our school can’t sustain without funding. If we received backing from DE then that would give us more room to manoeuvre.

**Social Distancing:**

Currently there is social distancing in place. Should this still be in place come August/September then our school will encourage and promote this. We will have staggered breaks, lunches, arrivals and finishes to accommodate this, which we will inform you of if necessary closer to the time. While we will make every effort to do so, we cannot guarantee that all children will keep their distance. Children will forget themselves, but hopefully it will be safe for pupils to mix soon. I would also stress that, as it stands, no visitors/parents will be permitted in school. This goes against the grain, as we take pride in being a very welcoming school, particularly to parents, but we need to make adjustments as it currently stands.

**Hygiene Measures:**

All children/staff will be required to wash their hands/use hand sanitisers on entering the school and regularly throughout the day and good personal hygiene practices will be actively encouraged.

Extra cleaning and sanitising will be prioritised, and we will have stringent hygiene measures and reactive strategies in place following guidance from EA and Public Health Agency.

**Curriculum:**

Without doubt, our number 1 concern will be to support pupils emotionally upon their return. We will make every effort to ensure our pupils enjoy school once again and feel safe and happy to express themselves and share their thoughts.

Then comes their learning. There will need to be good revision and consolidation of previous learning to build up confidence where needed and we are relishing that opportunity. The curriculum may be delivered in a different way. It is difficult to say now but rest assured every effort will be made to maximise learning. Homework may take a different format. Remote learning may well become the norm and the school is looking into staff training in August so we can better utilise this way of working.

A big development that I wish to share is that I am very keen to encourage as much music as possible in the forthcoming years. I think music, particularly in the current climate, is a great way to express yourself and promote self-confidence. I am working with the EA Music service and all being well, next year’s P4s will start a full year of music and learn to play the violin or viola. Each child will get their own instrument for the year and have weekly lessons. This will build pupils’ understanding of music and the thinking is that it will build year on year. There is no cost to parents I might add. The school will fund this.

There will be weekly tin whistle lessons for all P5-P7 pupils as well and I am working on a fantastic project for our P1-3 pupils as well. I have a vision for our school being a lot more musical. While I have absolutely no musical talent of any kind, I fully appreciate how valuable and healthy it is for all children to experience as much music as possible in primary school. As the years progress, we will be able to build on our prior learning and the sky is the limit.

**School Meals:**

In Darkley we are having full dinners, with choice, in the school hall. I would encourage as many pupils as possible to take school dinners as it promotes my desire to see our school meals provision reinstated as soon as possible. If social distancing is still an issue, we can have 2 sittings. It is not a problem. As far as I know the price of a school meal is still £2.60. Septembers Menu is on our school website now.

**School Renovation:**

Our school has begun a huge transformation. Over the summer there will be a great deal of work done to the outside of the building. On the children’s return, they will see a very different building, but the same happy faces welcoming them.

**Breakfast Club:**

There will be Breakfast Club as normal @ 8pm every morning. Again £1 a day.

**Minding Club:**

There will be Minding Club as normal 2pm-3pm for our P1 and P2 pupils. Again £1 per day.

**Afterschool Clubs:**

I hope to run afterschool clubs, but we will want to tread carefully and sensibly back into school routine. I hope to build up our provision as time moves on. I know our pupils love the clubs, as do I, so we will do all we can.

**School Bus:**

I would encourage all families to register for their free bus pass if they are entitled to it. Whether you use it or not I still would encourage you to complete the straightforward form because I do not want to lose this valuable service. We depend so much on it and the EA pay Ulsterbus a lot of money each year. I think it is as much as £800 per child. If we do not register and avail of it then we could run the risk of losing it which would be devastating for our school, so please do take the time to register. Information can be found at: <http://www.eani.org.uk/i-want-to/apply-for-school-transport/> or phone School Transport on 03002007824.

**Uniform**

Pupils will wear their full school uniform as normal:

* P1,P2, P3:

Round neck jumper with crest, blue polo shirt with crest and soft navy bottoms/pinafore/skirt.

Footwear is also an important part of school uniform. We expect to see black shoes. Pure black runners are also an option and go well with the soft navy bottoms. They are popular, **but they must be totally black. They must have a black sole and absolutely no other colour visible.**

* P4-P7:

Round neck jumper with crest, blue polo shirt with crest and **formal navy** trousers/pinafore/skirt.

Again footwear is so important. From P4-P7 pupils must wear proper black shoes.

***I must stress that black runners or ankle boots are not acceptable.*** We expect our P4-P7 pupils to set the best example with regards uniform.

I would encourage parents to shop in Brenda’s or Mc Elvanna’s. The variation in colour and quality from online shops and stores varies significantly and we want all our pupils looking smart and uniform.

Please ensure all uniform items are clearly labelled with your child’s name, particularly jumpers. It is very difficult and time consuming to trace jumpers throughout the day without names.

**Primary 1 Induction:**

Our Primary 1 Induction will take place on **Wednesday 19th August at 10am**. We will welcome parents and our new P1 children to school and after a short presentation, pupils will spend some time in their new class. Parents will avail of a relaxing cup of tea/coffee in the hall before collecting their child from the classroom.

**School Bags/Pencil Cases**

At this moment in time schools are not allowing school bags or pencil cases into school. I very much hope that come August there will be a change in this and of course if there is, then this will be scrapped. Children love a new school bag and pencil case. Hopefully this is only temporary. Pupils will be provided with their own writing material in school.

**Primary 7 End of Year Celebration and Transition Workshop:**

We will have an amazing end of year celebration for our 14 spectacular Primary 7s on **Friday 14th August at 3pm in school.** The P7s will be in school that day. We are organising a transition workshop with REIM for yourselves and the pupils. It will go a long way in preparing our pupils (and you) for the weeks ahead of them. I will be in touch in the next few days to finalise arrangements. With luck we can welcome parents and families into school to share our sincere appreciation for our Primary 7s. We are looking forward to it immensely and I’m sure it will be a wonderful occasion.

I would like to finish by wishing you all a lovely summer. Thank you for all your support, not just through this lockdown period but all through the year. It is greatly appreciated and makes all the difference to our school. All our staff miss each and every pupil enormously and we look forward to the day we open our doors and welcome everyone back safely. What an occasion that will be. Until then, I hope everyone enjoys the next few weeks.

Yours sincerely

Ciaran Monaghan