

Newsletter to Students and Parents from St. Colman's College re the Return to School

20th August, 2020.

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

I hope this finds you and your family safe and well.

While we are all looking forward to returning to school, this new year is tinged with a level of nervousness because of the current health situation with regard to COVID-19. Please be reassured that, in line with Government and HSE Guidelines, St. Colman's College is making every effort to minimise the risk of the introduction of COVID-19 into the school community and to manage the risk of spread of the virus.

Our approach has been developed using the Roadmap for the Full Return to School and the COVID-19 Response Plan as issued by the Department of Education & Skills. We will continuously reflect and review our approach to the full reopening of school in line with the most up-to-date guidance from the JMB, DES, HSE and NPHE.

We are currently implementing strategies and precautions as are practical and viable in our school context to minimize the risk of introducing COVID-19 into our school community and in the event of its introduction to minimize the risk of it spreading through our school community. We are applying a *common-sense* approach to the situation and trying to create as normal and positive an environment as possible to ensure that school life can continue. There will be a certain impact in some of the things we do but hopefully, if everyone plays their part and adheres to the procedures, we will get through this together.

We in St. Colman's College are committed to the full and safe reopening of our school in supporting the transition of students and staff back to the school setting and to the facilitation and promotion of teaching & learning in all contexts. The enclosed provides an update of the planning which is ongoing in preparation for the successful re-opening of the school. We look forward to your help and support in the coming months.

With kind regards,

Roy Hession

Principal

REMEMBER, if Covid-19 is kept out of our school then there is no chance of it spreading.

To minimise the risk of introduction and/or spread of Covid-19:

- we need to be familiar with **the symptoms** of Covid-19: High temperature, cough, shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, loss of smell or taste or distortion of taste.

- **Respiratory hygiene:** By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and safely into a nearby bin and sanitize your hands.

- **Hand hygiene:** Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean). Students should perform hand hygiene on arrival at school, before eating or drinking, after using the toilet, after playing outdoors, when you cough or sneeze.

- **Physical distancing:** This falls into two categories – *increasing separation / decreasing interaction*. A number of measures are being put in place to support physical distancing. These are further explained in the attached document.

- **Environmental hygiene:** awareness, use of PPE, appropriate signage, regular cleaning etc are all further explained in the attached document.

Key Points to Remember

- 1. Awareness:** First and foremost, everyone needs to help in creating awareness around this situation. Staff, students and parents need to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school. We all have responsibilities.
- 2. Access to school:** There will be a number of designated entrances and exits to/from the school in the mornings/afternoons. The specifics will be explained to students as you return to school in the first week of September. We must be constantly aware of social distancing requirements on entering and exiting the school, insofar as is possible. Students will move quickly between classes when necessary and should go directly to their next class without delay after morning break and lunch break.
- 3. Appointments:** All access to the school for non-students or parents/guardians will be strictly by appointment only. Visitors will only have access to the school if it is on essential business. Any visitors granted access to the school (including parents/guardians who are signing-out students) will have to apply hand sanitiser, complete the Contact Tracing

Log (Response Plan, Appendix 5), wear a face covering and maintain a 2m distance from staff of the school.

4. **Canteen/Lunchroom:** For the foreseeable future the College Gym will be used as our Canteen and our present lunchroom will be converted into two classrooms. We are making these changes in order to comply with the requirement to **increase separation** and **decrease interaction**, as advised in Public Health Guidelines. ***Remember, common sense must prevail at all times.*** Our morning breaks and lunch breaks will be staggered in order to reduce the numbers of students in the 'new' lunchroom at any given time. Details of these changes will be outlined when students return to school.
5. **Lunches and Water:** Students should bring a packed lunch with them to school each day so that they have enough food for the whole day. They should also bring a bottle of water with them as water taps and machines will be closed off to reduce shared contact points. The school requires that students use biodegradable bottles/reusable bottles which are available for purchase at reduced cost in the school.
6. **Classrooms:** Students will need to sanitize their hands every time they enter the school, classrooms, specialist rooms and before and after eating. They may also be required to sanitize their desk and chair at the end of each class. In this event cleaning materials will be provided.
7. **Cleaning:** All rooms in the school have been deep cleaned. A strict and regular cleaning regime has been arranged and will be operated by our cleaning company. Additional cleaning services will be deployed.
8. **Communication:** The school will keep parents/guardians and students informed of updates via text and the school website www.stcolmans.ie Communication with students via Microsoft Teams will continue.
9. **Desks:** All students will have individual desks. Students must not move desks in classrooms. All classrooms will have floor markings, it is important that desks remain in their designated places.
10. **Drop off / Collection:** Walking/cycling to school is encouraged where possible. Parents/guardians who drive their children to school are requested not to delay on the premises. The less congestion in the car park, the better for all. Students who live closest to the school are asked not to arrive in school before 8:50am.
11. **Face coverings:** In line with the guidance issued on the 7th August *'it is now mandatory that all teachers and secondary school students wear face coverings, similar to those worn in shops or on public transport, where a physical distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.'*

Students must wear **plain face coverings** without writing/motifs/prints/pictures. We would recommend reusable cloth face-coverings/masks. We are discouraging the use of disposable face masks for

environmental reasons. Face masks should be stored in zip lock bags and are not to be placed on any surfaces or shared between students. Parents/guardians/visitors must wear a face mask when entering the building.

Face-coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

Where a student requires an exemption from the requirement to wear masks/face-coverings he must notify the Principal of his concern and produce a doctor's note explaining the reasons for the exemption. Where an exemption is granted a face-visor may be required to be worn.

Please remember that all students:

- Must have reusable plain (no writing, motifs, pictures) masks/face coverings with them at school
- Must wear a reusable mask/face covering when a physical distance of 2 metres between themselves and other people is not possible. In effect this means that they must wear masks in all internal areas of the school, in classes, on the corridors etc.
- Will be advised on the correct protocols for mask wearing on their return to school
- Should not touch their face covering except to put them on and take them off.
- Should wash or sanitise their hands before putting on and after taking off the face covering
- Should ensure their face covering is washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled
- Do not wear a face covering if it is wet
- Must stay at home if unwell, masks do not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

12. Feeling unwell at home: Students should stay at home if they feel unwell and they must continue to observe the key measures to keep us all safe. Please keep the school informed of your progress in this regard.

- 13. Minimising the risk of introducing Covid 19:** Parents/Guardians are reminded that any students that have Covid 19 symptoms (high temperature, cough, shortness of breath, loss of smell or taste) or any signs of illness are not to attend school, to phone their doctor and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation. We would ask that you monitor your child's health closely and discuss it with them each morning.
- 14. Feeling unwell in school:** If a student feels unwell in school there are procedures in place to deal with this. We will contact your parents/guardians and ask them to collect you without delay. Your parent/guardian will contact your GP by phone and take directions from the GP as to how to proceed further.
- 15. Symptoms of Covid-19:** Where a student or member of staff presents in school with symptoms of Covid-19, procedures as set out in the Response Plan, Appendix 7, will be followed.
- 16. Isolation Area:** An isolation area will be provided for a student or staff member who displays Covid-19 symptoms during the school day. Parents will be notified immediately.
- 17. Hand hygiene:** Hand sanitizers will be available at all points of entry and exit and in all classrooms and specialist rooms. Students must sanitize their hands on entry to the school, on entry to each class and specialist room and before and after eating. We are recommending that students have their own small bottle of sanitizer in their bags during the school day – a good habit to develop for moving around the community outside school also.
- 18. Learning platforms:** Teachers will continue to use **Microsoft Teams** to upload classwork, resources and homework. This will facilitate access to teaching and learning for students who may not be able to return to school or who may have to remain at home if unwell or any members of their household are unwell with symptoms consistent with COVID-19. It will also ensure the continuity of teaching and learning in the event of a localized or national school closure. Students should continue to access **Teams** on their return to school.
- 19. Lockers:** Students will **not** have access to lockers, at least for the time being, to prevent congregation. Teachers will be requested to restrict use of textbooks in order to lighten the load in schoolbags. This policy will be reviewed regularly during the year.
- 20. One-way system on corridors & stairs** - There may be some one-way systems in place and students will be required to comply with these. Students will be required to proceed directly to their classrooms between classes and after breaks. They will also be required to walk on the right-hand side at all times when moving on corridors or stairs. **STAY RIGHT**
- 21. PE:** In line with current *HSE – Back to Sport Guidelines* – showers and changing rooms will not be available for students. Additional sanitizer and disinfectant will be available for all equipment after each PE class. As the

school gym is being used as a lunchroom for the time being, it will not be available for PE classes. Further guidance from the DES is to issue in relation to PE before schools reopen.

22. Positive behaviour: We are very lucky in our school to have students who are responsible and respectful. Now, more than ever, we require all students to ‘step-up’ and support our school community by modelling positive and responsible behaviour which will enable us to manage Covid-19 and prevent its introduction into our school. Students are asked to be particularly aware of the control measures mentioned earlier in this document. We will expect our Prefects and senior students to play a key role in this regard.

23. Travel and Self-isolation: Students who have travelled to ‘non-green list countries’ for non-essential travel will be required to isolate for 14 days on their return to Ireland. It is the responsibility of students/parents/guardians to inform the school if they have engaged in non-essential travel to ‘non-green list’ countries prior to the reopening of the school.

24. Signage: Appropriate signage will be displayed throughout the school alerting the school community to the symptoms of Covid -19 and of the importance of social distancing, as well as maintaining coughing and sneezing etiquette. Good hand hygiene remains an essential requirement for us all and signs to that effect will be very visible throughout the school.

25. Toilets: We have upgraded the students’ toilets in the College. Hot and cold water, hand soap, hand dryers are available in toilet blocks. As per the school Code of Positive Behaviour, congregating in the toilets is not allowed. The **physical distancing guidelines** strongly support this. There are hand sanitizing facilities at the entrances to all toilet facilities in the College. Please observe hand hygiene guidelines when using toilet facilities.

26. Uniform: Until Public Health informs us otherwise, students are expected to present at school in full school uniform as normal. Items of uniform should be washed/cleaned regularly. Students will be updated in relation to clothing requirements for P.E.

27. Ventilation: Good ventilation is very important. Where possible it is recommended that windows be left open in all rooms, along with doors where possible. This guarantees good circulation of air which helps to prevent the spread of the virus.

Wellbeing: Our Pastoral Care Team, SEN Team, Year Heads and Teaching Staff will be available to support the transition of our students back to school. We will be providing advice to all students about how best we can all move forward together in the time ahead.

The wellbeing of our school communities is a fundamental element of the Department of Education's overall plan to ensure a successful return to school. We are living through exceptional times and this impacts people in different ways and at different times. **We must not underestimate the absolute necessity to be mindful of everyone's wellbeing as we reopen our school.** Schools have received guidance from the Department on how best to support everyone in our school community through this transition, and we will be making this a priority as we welcome students back.

Supporting the wellbeing of our school community at this time is helped by **fostering resilience** using five key principles that promote a

- **Sense of safety** – so that people feel safe, and that those around them are safe
- **Sense of calm** – so that people feel relaxed, composed and grounded
- **Sense of belonging and connectedness** – so that people experience having meaningful relationships with others who support and understand them
- **Sense of self-efficacy and community efficacy** – so that people believe they can manage, and do what is needed, and that the school community can too
- **Sense of hope** – so that people believe that things will work out well

Supporting a successful transition back to school will require all of us to keep these five principles in mind.

A whole school response will be required to support the wellbeing of all within the school community. For now, the important messages are:

- *our school is opening up and staff are really looking forward to welcoming students back and helping them re-engage with learning in school*
- *most students will be looking forward to school and meeting up with friends, teachers and other school staff. Many will feel excited, relieved and happy. Some may feel a little anxious and worried about getting back. That's to be expected and it's a normal response at a time of transition and change. Most students will settle in over time, as they reconnect with friends and get used to the new school safety routines*
- *our school has been working very hard to make sure that the school building and grounds will be safe for all of the students, teachers and parents.*

This will mean some new routines and rules to keep everyone safe. We will support you to learn these new routines and rules

· school staff know that wellbeing is important and needed for learning to happen. We are prioritising the things that we know will promote wellbeing at this time

· school staff know that parents have made great efforts to support their child's continued education when schools were closed and that parents have done their best.

· getting back to a school routine, getting enough sleep, eating healthily, taking physical exercise, taking some time to be creative and reconnecting with friends will help everyone to settle back in

It is important to note that some students may find the return to school extra challenging and require additional support. Collaboration between parents/guardians, students and teachers will be hugely significant in helping students to adapt to the new school environment

REMEMBER, our school community will get through these difficult times and we are all in this together.

Please note that this guidance note is a live document and may be updated in response to management needs and health and safety guidance.

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