

Returning to School

SEPTEMBER 2020

What parents need to know



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School will be a bit different this year, especially at the beginning, but the children will get used to it very quickly.

Explain to your child that things will be a bit different, but try not to let them know that you are overly worried. Children pick up on your stress.

Keep an eye on your school's website, blog and/or social media platforms for updates. They will be busy preparing the school and the new policies and procedures over the coming weeks.

Check that the school has your correct contact details. Let the know if you have moved house, changed phone number or email address. You may also want to check that your emergency contact details are up to date.



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What You Can Do to Prepare

Practice washing hands properly, with soap, for 20 seconds. Make sure that your child also knows how to dry their hand thoroughly. Children should also know how to use hand-sanitizer correctly, and that it should not be ingested.

Teach your child correct cough and sneeze etiquette. Cough or sneeze into a tissue, or into your elbow if you do not have a tissue. Put the tissue in the bin and wash or sanitizer your hands.

Make sure that your child can INDEPENDENTLY open and close their lunchbox and bottle, their coat, and their shoes. Shoes with laces are not recommended for younger children!



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Drop-off and Collection

Schools must “limit interaction on arrival and departure from school.”

This means that some schools will have to have staggered drop-off and collection times, assign access points and entrances to specific classes , and put one-way systems in place to reduce congestion.

In urban areas, walking or cycling to school is encouraged.

School Transport Scheme services will run as normal. Children will sit in pre-assigned seats. Primary-aged children are not required to wear face masks.



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Physical Distancing

Children from Junior Infants to 2nd Class are not required to physical distance. Children from 3rd-6th class are expected to keep a distance of 1m where possible.

Each class will be a 'Bubble'. Contact between bubbles will be extremely limited and break times may be staggered.

Classes will be divided into groups, or 'Pods'. These children will sit, work and play together. They will stay in the same pod for a number of weeks.

Staff will try to maintain physical distance from children when they can, and will wear face coverings and other PPE when needed.



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Hand Hygiene

Children will perform hand hygiene regularly during the school day:

- on arrival at school
- before eating or drinking
- after using the toilet
- after a cough or sneeze
- after playing outdoors
- when hands are physically dirty

Hand sanitizer dispensers will be installed throughout the school.

Children are not required to supply hand sanitizer or any other hand hygiene products, but some schools may allow older children to bring them in.



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Schoolbags and Lunches

The government have not given any guidelines regarding these items but a common-sense approach should be followed.

Ensure that your child does not have any unnecessary items such as toys in their schoolbag.

Choose lunchboxes, bottles and pencil cases that are easy to clean, as they will need to be cleaned frequently.

The school may provide individual stationery and resources for each child (especially in the junior classes), or they may ask you to provide scissors, prittstick etc for your child. It is important that your child has all the stationery that they need as they will not be able to share with their classmates.



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Communication with Teachers

Parents will not be permitted to enter the school building.

Appointments may be made to visit the school for essential purposes. A contact tracing log will need to be filled out for each visit.

This does not mean that you will be unable to communicate with your child's teacher. You can communicate with them via the traditional methods such as homework diary, phone calls etc. They may also have additional electronic means of communication such as email, Class Dojo, Seesaw etc.



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Suspected Cases of COVID-19

Symptoms of COVID-19

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of Breath or Difficulty Breathing
- Loss of smell or taste, or distortion of taste

Children should NOT ATTEND school if they are unwell or if any members of their household are unwell with symptoms of COVID-19.

If any pupil becomes unwell while at school, they will be brought to an isolation room and given a mask to wear. Parents will be contacted to collect the child as soon as possible.

The HSE will inform any parents of children who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case.



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Teacher Absences

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation have put pressure on the Department of Education on the issue of substitute teachers. Supply panel clusters of substitute teachers are being set up to increase substitute availability.

If the school is unable to secure a substitute teacher, the school May use a non-mainstream teacher to cover the absence. (This includes Special Education Teachers and administrative principals).

Every effort will be made to avoid a class being split between other classes.



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Cleaning

Cleaning in schools will be increased considerably. Schools have been given a budget for the extra cleaning and cleaning materials required. Each classroom will be cleaned daily.

Resources will be provided for children individually where possible, or shared with their 'pod'.

Resources that are shared between classes will be cleaned between uses.

Books, toys and resources will be cleaned regularly or quarantined for 72 hours before being reused.

Older children *may* be asked to wipe down their table and chair at the end of the day.



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Starting Junior Infants

Unfortunately, parents will not be permitted to enter the school with their child on the first day of school (or on subsequent days).

Most schools will organize for either a short visit to school by appointment, or a video or virtual tour of the school before the first day.

Rest assured, the Junior Infant teachers and other school staff will do their best to make sure that every feels happy and safe at school.

The benefits of play are well-documented, and infant teachers are very aware of this. Lots of time will be spent playing and listening to stories. The number one priority for the first few months of school will be the children's well-being.



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Children with Additional Needs

The Special Education Team in your child's school will make sure that your child's needs are catered for to the best of their ability.

Special Education Teachers may be required to cover for mainstream teachers in the case of their absence and a substitute teacher is not available. This may mean that your child may have reduced support at times, but the school will do their best to avoid this happening.

If your child suffers from anxiety, or does not respond well to change, will most likely hear from your child's school in advance of reopening. They may provide a virtual tour of the school or a social story.

If you have concerns or questions, email the school within the next week or two. Doing it now rather than in the first week back will give them a better chance to respond and prepare where necessary.



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High-risk Pupils

The list of people in very high risk groups include people who:

- are over 70 years of age - even if fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- have severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- have a condition that means they have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition and are pregnant

Pupils at high risk may not be able to return to school. These pupils will receive appropriate support to engage with learning. Ongoing connection with the classmates and school community will be ensured.

