

Sion Mills Primary School, Nursery Unit & Speech and Language Unit

The Park, Sion Mills
Strabane, Co Tyrone
BT82 9HP

Telephone: (028) 816 58249

Principal: Mrs Oonagh McNelis

E-Mail: omcnelis240@c2kni.net

<http://sionmillsps.com/>



August 2021

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

The Revised Guidance that was issued to schools recently, advises a “**cautious**” approach to the relaxation of protocols and routines introduced to keep children and staff as safe as possible.

In essence then, most of the same routines that your children and you have become familiar with, **will** remain in place. The only change is the relaxation towards the use of schoolbags. The guidance states,

“... **there is a relatively low risk of virus transmission associated with surface contacts in schools.** The risk from sharing resources such as library books or bringing schoolbags into school is extremely small. [...] The small risk presented by sharing resources such as pens and computers in school can be further reduced by regular hand hygiene and regular surface cleaning practices.”

As we approach the new school year, we wish to assure you that we have carried out risk assessments in line with current DE guidelines to ensure the safest return to school we possibly can.

As a **REMINDER** and for parents new to Sion Mills PS the following pages will outline:

- General returning to school procedures and routines
- Safeguarding provisions
- Covid-19 Code of Conduct checklists for school staff/parents/pupils

Supporting children in their return to school

We want to ensure that the children are excited and relaxed about coming back to school. Staff have revisited the requirements and with the time away we are mindful of the need to:

- Re-introduce children to procedures and routines in a measured and calm manner;
- Support and baseline children’s emotional needs;
- Baseline and ascertain appropriate starting points for children’s learning.

School Bags and Other Items

Whilst schoolbags and pencil cases are now allowed, we urge parents to keep the contents to a minimum.

The updated guidance has reminded staff that we must continue to be prepared for another lockdown, so teachers will continue to use Seesaw as a method to cut down on the amount of paper that is carried in and out of school. These activities will be class specific to age and stage of children's capabilities.

Keeping COVID-19 out of school

If anyone in your household is displaying symptoms of Covid-19 your child **MUST NOT** attend school. Symptoms include: raised temperature, persistent cough, loss of taste and loss of smell. Your household should isolate in accordance with the latest Public Health advice. If your child should begin to display symptoms during the school day they will be placed in supervised isolation until they can be collected by a parent/guardian.

If there is a confirmed case of someone in the school having the Covid-19 virus the school will adhere to the Department of Health's 'Test, Trace and Protect' strategy. This requires the early identification of such cases, rapid testing, tracing of close contacts and isolation to break transmission chains.

Wearing of PPE

Under current DE guidance, the general wearing of face coverings in school is not recommended for children or adults. School staff may, on occasions, wear items of PPE which might include wearing visors and/or gloves and/or an apron and/or a mask if they are giving first aid to a child, assisting a child with toileting or if the staff member's own personal circumstances requires additional protective measures to be taken in certain situations.

Hand Hygiene

Children should be reminded of the significance of hand hygiene in preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus. To prepare children for restarting school, you should ensure that they know how to wash their hands properly for at least twenty seconds with soap and water. This will be particularly important for younger children. When the children return to school we will be asking them to wash their hands regularly throughout the school day. Hand sanitisers will be available in each classroom. Please inform your child's teacher if there is the possibility of your child having an allergy or skin reaction to sanitiser liquid/gel. Staff will not administer hand sanitisers to pupils. If children can bring their own sanitiser to school for their own individual use, this should be labelled with their name and should not be shared with other pupils.

‘Catch It, Bin It, Kill It’

Please explain the importance of good respiratory hygiene to your children and encourage them to follow the ‘Catch it, Bin it, Kill it’ approach. Children should be discouraged from touching their eyes, face, nose and mouth. Please show them how to cough or sneeze into their elbow if they do not have a tissue. When using a tissue, they should be shown how to cough or sneeze into it and then dispose of it safely into the nearest bin.

Your help in building a level of routine in relation to respiratory hygiene would be much appreciated. ***We also request that each child brings a box of tissues, at the beginning of term, for use in school.***

Social Distancing for pupils and adults

It is acknowledged that young children cannot reasonably be expected to remain apart from each other throughout the day and that children flourish mentally, physically and emotionally through interactive play. However, to mitigate the risk of virus spread, each class will *continue* to be organised as a ‘protective bubble’. The use of protective bubbles has been somewhat relaxed to allow for some “cautious” mixing and this will be based on the educational needs of the pupils.

Public health guidance with respect to **social distancing of 2 metres (2m) remains in place between adults** and as far as possible between adults and pupils.

Please note: If a child is distressed or in need of assistance, staff will use appropriate PPE and support your child, as necessary, within existing Safeguarding and Child Protection guidelines.

Breaks and Lunches

All children should continue to bring a *healthy* break and water bottle, these should be in clearly labelled plastic containers and **washed/refilled daily**. Where they are not availing of a school meal, they should also bring a packed lunch in a plastic box which should be **washed daily**. School Meals will resume on Tuesday 31st August 2021 with some necessary adjustments to the service.

Payments and Cash Handling

It has not yet been possible to implement cashless payment procedures for school meals or other school activities. Therefore, we would ask that payments to the Education Authority or the school should, where possible, be made by cheque. If you are sending cash to school, we would ask you to place it in an envelope or wrapping which is labelled clearly showing what the payment is for. Please try to ensure that the **correct** amount of money is provided as change cannot be provided. This will improve efficiency and may also help to reduce potential spread of the virus.

Breakfast Club and After School Clubs

In line with the “cautious” approach the decision has been taken to *postpone* provision of our Breakfast Club. After School Clubs will resume during September.

Safe social distancing at dropping off and collection times

The guidance requires appropriate social distancing to continue to be observed among parents/carers when children are entering/exiting the school grounds. The processes in place during 2020/21 worked very well and will continue. As before, each class should use their designated signposted gate and proceed directly to their classrooms. We must all accept our collective responsibility to prevent virus spread, therefore only one parent/adult should attend and parents are asked not to congregate around the site and to drop off and collect promptly.

Traffic Management was less challenging for our school in 2020/21 and we all must aim to keep the site and the drop-off/pick-up points as a safe place for all users. Parents/carers are reminded that, in the current circumstances, there has been an increase in the number of pupils walking/cycling to and from school. We would encourage as many car drivers as possible to park away from the school gates and walk your child/ren to the appropriate entrance gate.

Arrangements for Arrival and Pick-up Times

As for 2020/21 staff will be 'on duty' at entrance gates from 8.45a.m.

ARRIVAL

Nursery: As agreed with Miss McGeady at induction meetings

Speech & Lang Unit: As agreed with class teacher

Primary 1: Teachers have discussed and demonstrated at induction meetings

Primary 2: Children enter through Gate 1 and line up as directed by class teacher

Primary 3: Children enter through Gate 1 and proceed to their classroom door

Primary 4 – 7: Children enter through Gate 3 and proceed to external classroom door via upper playground. Staff will be in place along the pathway to direct children to appropriate entrance door

PICK-UP

Nursery: As agreed with Miss McGeady at induction meetings

Speech & Lang Unit: As agreed with class teacher

Primary 1 & 2: As directed by class teachers at induction meetings. P1S – Gate 1, P2H – Gate 2, P2C – Gate 3

Primary 3: Children will exit through Gate 1. Staff will walk children to the gate

Primary 4 – 7: P5K & P6/7C Gate 2 and P4L and P6/7McG Gate 3

We trust that parents/carers will respect the social distancing signage in place at the gates. Due to Covid-19 regulations parents are NOT PERMITTED onto the school grounds without an appointment.

This plan and the precautions set out are in place to help stop the spread of the Covid-19 virus and to ensure that we all take responsibility for this. Please do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher or Mrs McNelis (Principal) or Mrs McAleer (SENCO) to discuss any concerns you may have.

These arrangements will be kept under review and any changes will be communicated to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Oonagh McNelis
Principal