

**ST. PATRICK’S PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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**‘Together we learn, together we grow, developing our future, wherever we go!’**

22nd June 2020

Dear Parents

We write to you as a Board of Governors in what is, what we are sure you will all agree, a very challenging time for our pupils, parents and staff of St Patrick’s Primary School.

When schools were initially directed to close, the limited guidance given was to quickly prepare for a closure period of up to 4 weeks. We find ourselves many weeks later in the same positon of limited guidance, as does every other school throughout Northern Ireland.

Initially the staff, with the help of our Friends of Group, put together Home Learning Packs that were distributed to every home and set up email contact links with every household which would allow at least weekly communication between home and school. This worked well for the vast majority of households, but we recognise, not all.

We have had some parental requests for ‘Zoom’ to be used, however EA have advised schools not to use this type of platform for communication as it is not a fully protected platform. Child Protection is a paramount concern and we followed EA advise not to use it.

After the Easter holiday period, teaching staff began to research online learning platforms. This was done, with no EA face to face support. Staff worked very hard remotely, navigating hardware and connectivity issues, to ensure that they found a platform that was first and foremost ‘safe’ in terms of child protection issues, managed by C2K (the information and communications network operated on behalf of the Education Authority) and manageable for staff and children. We were delighted to launch our Google Classrooms for the month of June. Google classroom opens up greater communication between the pupil and their teacher. The teacher can provide online learning support materials, guidance notes and request work to be returned for marking. This work will be marked in line with the school’s Marking for Improvement Policy and returned to pupils. We are all using the month of June to familiarise ourselves with this platform and discover what further it can allow us to do, together. This will enhance all future teaching and learning. Teachers are continuing to work hard to use this platform to the best of its ability and to secure a platform that is more child friendly in the Foundation years that is supported by C2k in schools. The work has been and is, ongoing.

At school level, sanitation and social distancing preparations are being made to reopen in September, under current guidelines. The social distancing guidelines currently stipulate that pupils are at least 1 metre distances apart. This obviously impacts class sizes for a majority of schools. Under these current guidelines schools will be restricted as to how many children they will be able to have in a classroom.

The Board of Governors has been working on our class set up for the next academic year. At this point, with the current guidelines, we are concentrating on ‘Learning Bubbles’, whereby only certain classes, or parts of classes, are in school on anyone day. Online learning will be available for any day that children are not in school.

Current social distancing guidelines make these ‘Learning Bubbles’ necessary and this will mean that children will not be in school every day of the week. As a family orientated school, we are currently working on how we can facilitate this best, by aiming to bring members of the same family in on the same days. This will not be possible in every situation; however, we aim to accommodate as many families as we can.

The classes for next year are, currently, as follows

* Reception/ Primary 1 - Miss Oliver
* Primary 2/3 - Mrs Canavan (4 days) / Mrs Starrs (1 day)\*
* Primary 4 - Mrs Starrs (2 days) and Mrs McGrath (3 days)
* Primary 5 - Mrs Corbett
* Primary 6/7 - Mrs Magennis\*

**\*With anticipated ‘Learning Bubbles’ please note that the composite classes will be taught on separate days with their peers. For example P2 will be taught as one class in their own ‘Learning Bubble’ and this will apply to children in Primary 3, Primary 6 and Primary 7. For the period of social distancing, they will NOT be taught in their composite group.**

Our Reception and Primary 1 class will also have their own ‘Learning Bubbles’.

Transfer support will still be offered twice each week on an afterschool basis for children in P7 from September and once per week for children in Primary 6 from January.

Until any further clarity is given to schools by DE, we will re-open for the new school year on Tuesday 1st September 2020. Primary 7 class however, will begin for the new school year on Monday 24th August. If further advice, for any class is given to schools prior to this by the Department of Education, we will inform you at our earliest opportunity.

We appreciate that parents have many questions on how schools in Northern Ireland will operate to ensure the best learning for their child. We as a governor group are working hard to ensure that we are being proactive by planning ahead, however, it is very important to remember, if or when further DE guidance becomes available to schools, we may need to review our planning.

We will be in touch with you all by approximately Mid-August, to inform you of the structure of the week for classes to attend. As you may appreciate, guidance could change again by this point. Within the first ½ term, we will also be in touch with you all, to seek your thoughts and views on the formulation of a new, 3 year School Development Plan.

Yours sincerely

Board of Governors of St Patrick’s Primary School