

# **Covid-19 Response Plan for Nicker N.S.**

**August 2020**

## **Rationale and Aims**

This Response Plan is based on “The Roadmap for the Full Return to School,” published by Minister for Education, Norma Foley, on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 and on the most recent update, “Re-Opening Our Primary and Special Schools,” of 12<sup>th</sup> August, as well as the HSE website, [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) .

This Response Plan aims to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 within the school and to deal, safely with a suspected case. The response plan supports the sustainable reopening of school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the pupils in the school. The COVID-19 response plan is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice as appropriate for primary and special schools.

In line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and sustainable return to work, and reopening of schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the BOM/ETB, staff, pupils and parents.

All staff, pupils, parents, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

Our main focus is for children to be happy, calm and at ease, to be aware of procedures and to be able enjoy their learning in this new environment. In accordance with the section, *Supporting the wellbeing of school communities as schools reopen: Guidance for schools* Promoting the wellbeing of our school communities is a fundamental element of Nicker National School’s overall plan to ensure a successful return to school as we continue to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to make our school a safe place during Covid 19, staff and Board of Management have followed and implemented guidelines from the Department of Education and from the Health Service Executive. We have followed checklists provided to all schools, drafted this Covid-19 Response Plan and we have also revised some policies –

Risk Assessment/ Health and Safety Policy

Behaviour Policy

## Changes to the Code of Behaviour Policy during Covid-19

In light of the need for students to be more mindful of appropriate behaviour during this pandemic, an amendment to the Code of Behaviour Policy is required so that students will be aware of specific rules on their return to school.

Any child who is intentionally coughing, spitting, biting or sneezing at another child, joking or threatening to spread Covid 19 to another child will be deemed to have seriously breached the school's Code of Behaviour and Discipline. The following sanctions will be applied, depending on the severity of the situation.

Step 1 – A general discussion will take place on August 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, at an age appropriate level, with all classes, on cough and sneeze etiquette, and an age-appropriate warning issued, that the above mentioned behaviours are potentially, very distressing or even dangerous and are not permitted.

Step 2 - Joking/messing/threatening to pass on Covid 19 to someone will be dealt with according to Level 2 of the school's Code of Behaviour.

Step 3 - Any child who intentionally spits, sneezes or coughs at another child will have Level 3 sanctions applied, up to and possibly including suspension.

Of course, it would be envisaged that this will not prove necessary and it is expected that a positive approach, with regular encouragement to use good hygiene practices will be implemented.

Our guiding principle when making any changes or adjustments to this policy is to be able to keep all of our students, families and staff safe. The amendments will be communicated to students, parents and staff.

### **Knowing the Symptoms and Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**

#### **Symptoms of Covid-19**

Symptoms include:

high temperature/fever

cough

shortness of breath or breathing difficulties

loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

In accordance with the document; "COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools," and HSE guidance as outlined at <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/if-your-child-has-symptoms.html>

if your child/children or any member of your household complains of any of these symptoms, please keep your child/children at home, call your GP without delay and observe HSE guidance on restriction of movements.

Staff and pupils should not attend school if they have been identified by the HSE as a contact for a person with COVID-19 and should follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.

Staff and pupils who develop symptoms at school should bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly.

The above link to the HSE guidelines will be shared on the school website and parents will be encouraged to view this information.

### Returning from holidays outside of Ireland

Given the current domestic and international situation, the Government has advised against unnecessary foreign travel. If your child/children has/have been abroad prior to school resuming, we would appreciate a call from you about this. Please note that in accordance with Government guidelines, anyone returning from a trip to a country not on the Green list should restrict their movements for two weeks and staff/students returning from these countries should not attend school until the two weeks have passed.

### **Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19**

As outlined above, staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19.

In line with Schools Pathway for COVID-19: The Public Health approach, (Paper prepared by the Office of the Clinical Director, Health Protection, HSE) the following outlines how Nicker N.S. school will deal with a suspected case that may arise in school.

A designated isolation area has been identified within the school building. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of COVID-19 has been considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases put in place. The designated isolation area is well ventilated, beside an open doorway and away from other staff and pupils. There are large blue screens/boards around the space so as to give privacy to the child who will be supported by a member of staff within 2 metres.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school the following are the procedures to be implemented:

If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately. For the comfort and wellbeing of the child, it is essential that parents provide up

to date contact details, with a number at which they can be reached during the school day and alternative contacts who can be called if the parent is unavailable. Contacts should be available to collect the child from the school within 15 minutes.

Isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2m away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2m from the symptomatic person at all times.

The virus is spread by droplets and is not airborne so physical separation is enough to reduce the risk of spread to others even if they are in the same room.

If it is not possible to maintain a distance of two metres, a staff member caring for a pupil should wear a face covering or mask. Gloves should not be used as the virus does not pass through skin.

A mask will be provided for the person presenting with symptoms. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.

Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents who will call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home.

In the case of an adult, the person presenting with symptoms will remain in isolation, while it is ascertained whether s/he is well enough go home unaccompanied and will be facilitated, if assistance is necessary, in calling their doctor.

The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided.

Arrangements will be made for a pupil or a staff member who is too unwell to go home unaccompanied, to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advice offered to inform their general practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used.

If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform emergency services that the sick person is a Covid-19 suspect.

An assessment of the incident will be carried out, which will form part of determining follow-up actions.

The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE will be followed and staff and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times.

If a pupil or staff member is diagnosed with Covid -19, the HSE contact tracing process will be activated. Contact tracing identifies people who were in close contact with someone who has coronavirus. The HSE states that “A close contact can mean someone who has spent more than fifteen minutes of face-to-face contact within 2 metres of an infected person in any setting”. Schools are required to keep a list of visitors to schools for the purposes of contact tracing. If a member of the school community has had such contact with a confirmed case, the HSE contract tracing team will contact you through a call from a contact tracer, or an alert through the Covid -19 tracker App. They will arrange a test and advise the person to restrict movements for 14 days. If advised by the HSE to restrict movement, the pupil/staff member should not attend work, and staff members will be on Covid- 19- Restricted Movement leave, as per Circular 49/20.

In line with Schools Pathway for COVID-19: The Public Health approach, (Paper prepared by the Office of the Clinical Director, Health Protection, HSE), schools do not need to inform parents that a pupil or teacher has been removed due to their symptoms. Other pupils or staff do not need to be removed from class. HSE Departments of Public Health will take action if the person has confirmed Covid-19 infection on testing, which will include HSE advice and guidance on communication to school pupils and staff where needed.

The parents / legal guardian of the sick child should contact their GP as usual, to discuss clinical concerns. If it is determined by the GP that the child/pupil requires to be tested for Covid-19, any other household contacts should be removed from the school setting.

In accordance with Pathway for COVID-19: The Public Health approach, (Paper prepared by the Office of the Clinical Director, Health Protection, HSE), it is vital that Nicker N.S. has current lists of staff and pupils, by classes with contact telephone numbers for parents and guardians. These should be in excel and ready to share with Department of Public Health, if required and requested under Infectious Diseases legislation, 1981, as amended.

Once the child has been collected from school, the parents should contact their GP by phone if the child has symptoms of concern, and/or symptoms consistent with Covid-19 infection e.g. fever OR a new cough, shortness of breath, deterioration of existing respiratory condition OR symptoms of ageusia or dysgeusia.

Their GP will assess and advise as per normal clinical practice and refer for testing as required. Testing is advised for any child who meets the testing criteria unless there is a strong clinical

reason to do otherwise. The Covid-19 Assessment and decision making pathway for all children greater than or equal to 3 months until completion of primary school should be used to guide next steps here. Covid-19 test results remain confidential as per doctor - patient relationship. No other child, parent, family or teacher will be informed of their results. However, parents should be advised at the point of testing that their child's swab test result if Covid-19 detected will likely need to be shared with the educational facility, if this is deemed necessary by the Medical Officer of Health, for the safe management of any potential outbreak. Only details as necessary for safe onward management are shared with an agreed senior person in the school, such that appropriate public health actions can be undertaken.

### **Cleaning/Disinfecting rooms where a pupil/staff member with suspected COVID-19 was present**

The room should be cleaned as soon as practicably possible.

Once the room is vacated the room should not be reused until it has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry.

Disinfection only works on things that are clean. When disinfection is required it is always as well as cleaning.

The person assigned to cleaning should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning and should wear household gloves and a plastic apron.

The environment and furniture will be cleaned using disposable cleaning cloths and a household detergent followed by disinfection with a chlorine based product (household bleach).

Special attention will be paid to frequently touched surfaces, the back of chairs, couches, door handles and any surfaces that are visibly soiled with body fluids.

Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be reused.

If a pupil or staff member suspected of having/diagnosed with COVID-19 spent time in a communal area like a canteen, play area or if they used the toilet or bathroom facilities, then the areas should be cleaned with household detergent followed by a disinfectant (as outlined in the HPSC interim health advice) as soon as is practically possible.

## **Measures and Operating Changes to be Implemented in Nicker N.S. to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19**

### Maintaining Physical Distancing

Physical distancing will be implemented in accordance with DES guidelines. Each class will be designated as a “bubble” and groups within the class will be designated as “pods.” Classrooms have been reconfigured to allow for 1 metre distance between pods from Third to Sixth Class. Infants to Second Class will be taught in pods, within their class bubbles, as outlined in government guidelines.

Staff will endeavour to maintain a minimum of 1m distance and where possible 2m between themselves and other staff members and children.

They will also, as far as is practical, take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside pupils/crouching down.

The teacher’s desk will be at least 1m and where possible, 2m away from pupil desks.

Where possible work stations will be allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces which are shared.

It is also recognised that it is not always possible for staff to maintain physical distance from pupils and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the pupil i.e. if a child sustains an injury and requires first aid, or in the case of necessary interactions with young children.

Generally speaking, the objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as the latter will not always be possible.

The aim of the system within the school is that class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measures, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble.

To the greatest extent possible, pupils and teaching staff will consistently work in the same Class Bubbles. Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided/minimised where possible.

The movement of staff members from class bubble to class bubble will be limited as much as possible.

Social physical contact (hand to hand greetings, hugs) will be discouraged.

Staff and pupils will avoid sharing of personal items.

Pupils will be encouraged to avoid behaviours that involve hand to mouth contact (putting pens/pencils in the mouth).

Where teaching and learning involves use of keyboards or tablets, the contact surface of the device will be cleaned regularly and hand hygiene encouraged.

#### *Travelling to and from school*

Nicker N.S encourages students to walk or cycle to school, if they can safely do so and with appropriate supervision. As always, to ensure child safety, students walking or cycling to and from school are required to provide a note confirming parental permission.

Parents/guardians are required to observe and respect all social distancing protocols in relation to any contact with the school. This includes maintaining a two metre distance from other parents when dropping off or collecting their children from the school and not congregating outside school when children have entered or left school grounds.

#### *Entering and Leaving School each day*

Guided by staff members, each morning, children will assemble, at 9 a.m. (with 1 metre distancing from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Class) in a designated zone of the school yard and enter the school building by a particular door, as follows;

#### *Procedures for Juniors, Seniors, First, Second and Third Class:*

Enter via the small green gate at staff car park.

Ms. Hourigan's class will assemble in Zone 1 just inside the fence.

Ms. Blackwell's class will assemble in Zone 2 in the middle of the yard.

Ms. Farrell's/Ms. Crowe's class will assemble in Zone 3 at the far end of the yard.

Access to these zones will be via a corridor indicated with painted yard markings.

Staff will assist the children in finding their zones.

#### *Procedures for Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Class:*

Ms. Franklin's class will enter via the main gate or stile to the left of the main gate. Ms. English's class will enter via the main gate or stile to the right of the main gate.

Ms. English's class will assemble in Zone 4 at the top of the steps on the right of the main school door.

Ms. Franklin's class will assemble in Zone 5 in the Infant yard to the left of the main school door.

Children will remain in their zones until escorted by staff to their classrooms via their designated entry doors.

Physical distancing of one metre will be respected for children from 3rd to 6th class as per government guidelines and the children will be facilitated in doing this in their zones.

Children arriving by bus will be guided by staff to enter their classrooms in an orderly fashion.

This process will be reversed at 1.50 p.m. for Junior and Infants and 2.50 p.m. for First to Sixth Class, who will be accompanied from their classrooms according to class groupings and also as to whether they travel by car or bus. On wet mornings, children may assemble in their zones with adequate rain gear or remain in their cars until 9.05 a.m. On wet evenings, children will remain in the classroom and be directed, by staff, to their parents as they arrive.

### *School Transport*

The following advice has been issued by Bus Éireann:

A pupil is requested not to use school transport if displaying symptoms of Covid -19

Pupils are to maintain physical distancing while waiting for transport

Pupils are asked to sit in pre-assigned seating and next to a sibling or child from their class group (this should be the same child at all times)

Pupils are requested to use hand sanitiser upon boarding the bus

Pupils should observe respiratory etiquette at all times while waiting for and on-board transport services

Pupils will disembark from the bus one by one in an orderly fashion

### *Break and Lunch times*

Break times will be staggered to facilitate children remaining with their own class bubble and enjoying more space in which to play. Junior Infants to Third Class will take their break at 10.45 a.m. and their lunch at 12.30, Fourth to Sixth Class will have break at 11.05 to 11.15m. and their lunch at 1.05 p.m. to 1.35 p.m. each day. It is not envisaged that children from the same class bubble would keep their physical distance in the yard. Children in different class bubbles will not play together.

Staff members will maintain the recommended distance from each other and from pupils and avoid congregating in the staff room at break times.

### *Use of face coverings*

As per guidelines, children under 13 do not need to wear a face mask. However, parents are asked to confirm in writing whether they feel their child requires extra support or whether their child has an underlying condition and is vulnerable.

To help us keep everybody as safe as possible we require written notification from a consultant/GP if a particular child needs a mask or Perspex screen around their work space.

The school is more than happy to accommodate any particular needs communicated in writing to the school e mail.

Staff members will follow DES guidance on face coverings. Additional information regarding face coverings is available from the HSE website -

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>

### *Phased return to school*

To ensure the smooth running of these new procedures and to allow the younger pupils, extra time and space to become accustomed to the new routine, Nicker N.S. is operating a phased return. Junior Infants to First Class and all staff will return on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August and all classes on Friday 28<sup>th</sup>.

### Additional considerations for those with Special Educational Needs

For children with special educational needs (SEN) maintaining physical distancing in many instances will not be practical or appropriate to implement. The focus should therefore be on emphasising that parents/guardians should have a heightened awareness of signs, symptoms or changes in baseline which suggests illness/COVID-19 infection and where symptoms are present children should not attend school. Similarly, staff should be aware of their responsibility not to attend work if they develop signs or symptoms of respiratory illness.

### Visitors to the School

Visitors will only attend the school by prior arrangement and when necessary, will have their details recorded in a contact tracing log. To limit the number of social contacts of all involved, there will be minimal contact between visitors and members of the school community. Visitors to the school during the day will be received at a specific contact point. Everyone entering the school building needs to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser. Physical distancing (of 2m) should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities will be maintained. The school will maintain a log of staff and pupil contacts. The Sample Contract Tracing Log provided by the DES will be used. The Data Protection Commission guidance on <https://www.dataprotection.ie/en/news-media/data-protection-implications-return-work-safely-protocol> will be adhered to.

School records and data are maintained and processed in compliance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Acts.

### Home – School Communication

Every effort will be made, this year, to limit social contact between members of the school community, to keep children, parents and staff safe and reduce the risk of infection.

Appointments with the principal or class teachers need to be arranged in advance, through the school office, between 9am and 12.30pm. Parents are kindly requested not to come onto the school premises without prior arrangement. A contact tracing log will record the details of all visitors to the school.

To further facilitate the valuable link between home and school, phone contact, the school website and teacher e-mails will be valuable lines of communication. Parents are encouraged to set up an e mail address and to ensure the school has accurate contact details, to facilitate this process.

If a parent needs to pass on a brief message please contact the school by phone and the message will be relayed to the teacher via the school intercom.

Forgotten lunches or other items, clearly labelled with the child's name, may be placed in a plastic box outside the main entrance and the child in question will be called, by intercom, to collect the item. All staff will be minimising interaction and contact, even within the school, in order to reduce risk of infection and will not be delivering items/messages to the various classes. Staff will not be responsible for any items left outside the school main door.

We look forward to the co-operation of parents in minimising the amount of contact, for the safety of everyone.

### Enhanced Cleaning Regime

In addition to the usual high standard of cleaning carried out each day, a deep clean will be carried out at the beginning of the school year and at intervals throughout the year.

Checklists have been compiled to allow for extra cleaning to be carried out each day and week.

There will be an emphasis on cleaning, as appropriate, in the course of the school day.

The specific advice in relation to school cleaning is set out in the ~~HPSC~~ advice and is being covered in the induction training. This advice sets out the cleaning regime required to support schools to prevent COVID-19 infections and the enhanced cleaning required in the event of a suspected cases of COVID-19. Particular care will be taken of the hygiene arrangements for hand washing and toilet facilities.

An additional focus will be placed on frequently touched surfaces – door handles, hand rails, chairs/arm rests, communal eating areas, if used during the day, sink and toilet facilities. All

staff will have access to cleaning products and will maintain cleanliness of their own work area. Staff will thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day.

There will be regular collection of used waste disposal bags within the school.

### Promoting Good Hygiene Practices

#### *Hand Hygiene*

Staff and students will be briefed on the importance of hand hygiene and also on when and how to wash their hands. We will promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the school. This will be a huge focus in our teaching and learning for the first week of school and will be revisited regularly.

Hand sanitiser dispensers are located at exit and entry points to the school and inside classrooms.

Wash hand basins/sinks with hot water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities are provided in all toilets and classrooms. Plans are in place to minimise contact between the two classes sharing the main toilets on the school corridor, (Ms. Farrell/Ms.Crowe's class and Ms.English's class.) Extra sinks have been installed in Ms. Franklin's, Ms.English's and Ms. Farrell/Ms. Crowe's classrooms.

Children who are unable to wash their hands by themselves will be guided in cleaning their hands using soap and water or a hand sanitiser.

#### *Frequency of Hand Hygiene*

Students and staff will focus on hand hygiene:

at 9.05am when they walk into school

before eating or drinking

after using the toilet

after playing outdoors

when their hands are physically dirty

when they cough or sneeze

#### *Respiratory Hygiene*

Good respiratory hygiene is essential in managing this pandemic. This means covering one's mouth and nose with a tissue or coughing or sneezing into your elbow when necessary. By

following good respiratory hygiene, we protect the people around us from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

We will display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene.

*Personal Equipment/Stationery* We would encourage all students to have their own equipment this year. Children from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> will not be able to share their materials/books, while children in junior classes will share.

Children will have their own hand sanitiser to minimise the need for frequent movement around the classroom, at regular intervals.

#### *Cleaning of Shared Equipment*

The school has invested in a 'Fogging Machine'. This machine will be used in particular in the Junior classes to disinfect the entire room. This process takes about 20 minutes. This machine will also be used in Senior classrooms and in particular if a child/staff member becomes ill (with covid 19 symptoms) and needs to go home, the room can be sanitized promptly making it appropriate for use the following day.

#### In the Infant classrooms:

##### Toys

All toys will be cleaned on a regular basis. This will remove dust and dirt that can harbour germs.

Toys that are visibly dirty or contaminated with blood or bodily fluids will be taken out of use immediately for cleaning or disposal.

Cloth or soft toys in use are machine washable.

Jigsaws, puzzles and toys that young pupils may be inclined to put into their mouths are capable of being washed and disinfected.

All play equipment will be checked, regularly, for signs of damage, for example breaks or cracks. If they cannot be repaired or cleaned they should be discarded.

Clean toys and equipment will be stored in a clean container or clean cupboard.

At this time soft modelling materials and play dough where used will be for individual use only.

#### Cleaning Procedure for Toys

- Wash the toy in warm soapy water, using a brush to get into crevices.
- Rinse the toy in clean water.
- Thoroughly dry the toy.
- Some hard plastic toys may be suitable for cleaning in the dishwasher.
- Toys that cannot be immersed in water that is electronic or wind up should be wiped with a damp cloth and dried.
- In some situations toys/equipment may need to be disinfected following cleaning for example: toys/equipment that pupils place in their mouths. Toys/equipment that have been soiled with blood or body fluids or toys where a case of COVID-19 has been identified.
- If disinfection is required: A chlorine releasing disinfectant should be used diluted to a concentration of 1,000ppm available chlorine. The item should be rinsed and dried thoroughly.

### Impact of COVID-19 on certain school activities

#### *Choir/Music Performance*

Choir practices/performances and music practices/performances involving wind instruments may pose a higher level of risk and special consideration will be given to how they are held ensuring that the room is well-ventilated and the distance between performers is maintained.

Some activities may take place outside.

#### *Sport Activities*

Nicker N.S. will refer to the HPSC guidance on Return to Sport. Link to return to sport protocols is found here.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07253-return-to-sport-protocols/>

Shared Sports Equipment – Minimal equipment sharing will take place and shared equipment will be cleaned between uses by different people.

Art – Pupils will be encouraged to have their own individual art and equipment supplies - scissors and glue stick

Electronics – Shared electronic devices such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards will be cleaned between use.

Musical Equipment/Instruments – To the greatest extent possible, instruments will not be shared between pupils. If the set of percussion instruments is used it will be cleaned between uses. Tin-whistles will not be shared.

Library Policy – Pupils will have their own books or the use of a copy of a book which will not be shared until it has been cleaned and “quarantined.” Novels and graded readers which are shared are covered in a plastic covering that can be wiped with a suitable household cleaning agent between uses. Books will be quarantined four days before being used again.

Pupils will be encouraged to perform hand hygiene after using any shared item.

### **Supporting the wellbeing of students**

There will be a significant emphasis, this year, on promoting the wellbeing of our school community. The SPHE curriculum (Social, Personal and Health Education) will be very important during the month of September and throughout the school year. Programmes such as RSE and Stay Safe, which may have remained unfinished since March will be prioritised. Homework will be significantly reduced at this time, certainly for the first couple of weeks, to allow children and families an opportunity to settle back into the routine of school life and to enable the safest procedures to be put in place to minimise the risk of spreading infection between home and school on books/other materials.

#### In accordance with the Roadmap for Settling In - Slow Down to Catch Up

Nicker N.S. recognises that it will take time for staff and students to adjust to being back in the school environment and be ready and available to fully engage with teaching and learning. A sense of urgency about returning to the curriculum is natural but time spent on settling the students and getting the students ready for learning will yield positive outcomes in the longer term and will likely reduce stress. School staff will not rush into a focus on formal teaching and learning before first considering readiness, and focusing on wellbeing.

- Routines create a sense of psychological safety by providing predictability. Re-establishing routines or creating new ones will contribute to a safe and calm learning environment and give students a sense of security
- We will observe a variety of responses amongst our students as our school reopens, ranging from excitement and happiness to worry and anxiety, which are normal responses to unprecedented events. Normalising feelings by communicating that we have all struggled with aspects of school closure, the pandemic and school reopening, will help to create a safe environment for students. (It’s normal to feel anxious when things are changed)
- We will remember that adults in the school are important role models for students. Modelling calm responses and coping strategies will help students learn helpful ways of managing their fears and anxieties
- Some students may find it more difficult to sit, focus and concentrate for lengths of time they may have been able to manage prior to school closure. We usually see this when students return to school after summer holidays. Shorter learning intervals, followed by safe movement breaks (even standing up and stretching), will help to support increased concentration and focus. Many will benefit from relaxation techniques and calming activities, such as mindfulness, drawing, physical activity, music, and relaxation/ breathing exercises

- Plan for managing those transitions that were impacted by school closures in a way that the school can manage. For example, for some students in primary school who will have a new teacher, having an opportunity to meet with the teacher they had as schools closed at short notice, may be helpful.
- Different cohorts of students may require a different wellbeing focus
- Students transitioning into a school for the first time (Junior Infants/First Years/Those moving school) may need particular attention to be focused on establishing relationships

### **The Role of Staff Members**

The Health and Safety at Work Act, 2005, sets out the responsibilities of employers and employees in ensuring that the workplace is a safe environment. The following guidelines in the document, Re-opening our Primary and Special Schools, seek to address some of the issues in working safely in the school environment while the Covid-19 Pandemic continues.

#### Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW)** form, which is available online or from the office. A copy is attached also at ***Appendix 2 Re-Opening Our Primary and Special Schools.***

A RTW form should be completed and returned **3 days** before returning to work.

The principal will also provide details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

There are some school staff who may be unable to return to school. Current public health guidelines have identified these people as being in groups who are defined as being at **very high risk**. This will be updated in line with public health advice.

#### People at very high risk (extremely vulnerable):

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 immune-suppression 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

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Details of the arrangements that will apply for these staff, which will be in accordance with those applying for the public service generally, will be updated by the Department of Education following consultation with management bodies and unions and a circular will issue to all schools.

### Lead Worker Representative

The Protocol provides for the appointment of a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) in each workplace. The LWR will work in collaboration with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19 and monitor adherence to those measures and to be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID-19 in the workplace.

This section sets out how the provisions will operate in schools. The process for appointment of the lead worker representative in schools has been agreed centrally between the Department of Education and the education partners.

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management/ Education and Training Board and School Management.

Strong communication and a shared collaborative approach is key to protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Adherence to the Return to Work Protocol will only be achieved if everyone has a shared responsibility in implementing the measures contained within the Protocol in their place of work.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 Response Plan, control measures or the adherence to such measures by staff, pupils or others he/she should contact the lead worker(s) who will engage with the principal/BOM.

### **Role of the Lead Worker Representative**

In summary, the role of the LWR is to:

- Represent all staff in the workplace regardless of role, and be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts;
- Work collaboratively with school management to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19;
- Keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice;
- Assist school management with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace in line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol and current public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Conduct regular reviews of safety measures;
- Report any issues of concern immediately to school management and keep records of such issues and actions taken to rectify them;
- Consult with the school management on the school's COVID-19 Response Plan in the event of someone developing COVID-19 while in school including the location of an isolation area and a safe route to that area;
- Following any incident, assess with the school management any follow up action that is required;
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace;
- Make representations to school management on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

The role of the Assistant LWR will be to:

- assist the LWR in their duties as set out above; and
- deputise as LWR where the LWR is absent

<b><i>Name(s) of lead worker representative and Deputy:</i></b>	<b><i>Contact details:</i></b>
K. Franklin; S. English; M. Blackwell E. Shanahan	061 384761

### **Induction Training**

All staff will undertake and complete Covid-19 Induction Training prior to returning to school. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health;
- Covid-19 symptoms;
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of Covid-19 while at school;
- Outline of the Covid-19 response plan.

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and will be updated with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities.

If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the Covid-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she may consult the Lead Worker Representative and/or seek guidance from the Principal, who is supported in this role by the BOM.

### **Staff Duties**

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play. In this regard and in order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adhere to the School COVID-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined.
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
- Must inform the principal if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace.
- Must complete COVID-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to

their return to school.

- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices.
- Coordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.
- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Not return to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances.
- If they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

### **COVID-19 related Absence Management**

The management of a COVID-19 related absence will be dealt with in line with agreed procedures with the Department of Education.

### **Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. Support for school staff wellbeing will be provided by Department Support Services including the PDST and CSL, as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team. An [Occupational Health Strategy](#) is in place as a supportive resource for staff in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life under the logo of '*Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile*'.

Under the EAS, employees have a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management support etc. Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home). A bespoke wellbeing portal and app which offers access to podcasts and blogs on topics around wellbeing and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition is also available. In addition online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. As part of the services provided by Spectrum Life, a Mental Health Promotion Manager is available to develop and deliver evidence

based mental health and wellbeing initiatives to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy and to increase engagement with the service. They will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote staff wellbeing in schools as schools reopen and during the upcoming school year.