



St Nicholas of Myra N.S.

COVID-19 SCHOOL RESPONSE PLAN
AND
CONTROL MEASURES

(Revised September 2021)

Guiding Principles

The following document outlines the control measures that St Nicholas of Myra has put in place to mitigate the risk of infection and transmission of Covid-19. It is important that everyone in our school community (staff, students and parents) adopt these control measures to help mitigate the risk of infection from Covid-19. This document has been created by Brendan Fahy (Principal), Mary McDermott (Deputy Principal), Emma McNamara and Rónán Kennedy, and has been reviewed by Rónán Kennedy (new Principal) and Emma McNamara, in line with the following guidance documents and best practice:

- The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health - Return to Work Safely Protocol, Covid-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers
- The Department of Education and Skills – Re-opening of our schools – The Roadmap for the full return to school
- The Department of Education and Skills – Covid-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of primary and secondary schools

Responsibility

The Board of Management have a legal obligation under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to assess the risks associated with Covid-19, implement control measures to eliminate/reduce the associated risks and to design, provide and maintain a safe working environment, plan safe systems of work and provide suitable training and PPE measures.

Staff should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.

The Board of Management, staff, students, parents and guardians have a collective responsibility to ensure the safety of themselves and others in the implementation of these measures. The assistance and co-operation of all is critical to the success of this plan.

Planning and preparing for return to school

Before re-opening, the school will ensure the following:

- Water systems have been flushed regularly to prevent Legionella disease
- School has been decluttered and soft furnishings removed where possible
- Extra chairs and tables have been purchased to allow for social distancing and better cleaning
- Excess furniture removed to maximise use of space

- New seating layouts to allow, where possible, for 1 metre distance between students
- Designated “teacher-only area” marked out at the front of the room
- Waste management system put in place
- School thoroughly cleaned and new enhanced cleaning regime put in place
- Hand sanitising stations purchased and installed at each entrance, and throughout, the school
- Relevant signage displayed inside and outside the school
- Two Lead Worker Representatives, Emma McNamara and her deputy, Lisa Mullen, have been appointed as required by the guidelines

Signage

- Signs promoting good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene displayed throughout the school
- Social Distancing stickers on floor
- Entrances clearly marked
- “No visitor access” signs on doorways
- Appropriate signage located in all classrooms and offices
- Main door sign indicating protocols for visitors/parents

Classrooms

- Desks have been purchased to ensure social distancing as much as possible, when children are seated, working at their desks
- Excess furniture has been removed
- Hard surfaces will be kept clear for cleaning. Children will keep their boxes on their chairs when school ends to facilitate cleaning
- Hand sanitising stations installed in every classroom
- Teachers and SNAs will clean their own desks and work areas before leaving every day. They will be provided with cloths and cleaning materials for same
- Children will work at their own desk and sit in the same chair every day.

The School Office

- An accurate contact tracing log for all visitors to the school will be kept
- Parents are only to drop into the school office if they have an appointment
- Masks must be worn
- We are anticipating that the school office will be very busy during these times and request that parents use email contact when appropriate and only telephone for important reasons (eg collecting a child for an appointment)

Access to school building

- Other than staff and students, access to the school building will be kept to an absolute minimum
- Parents of children in the junior end are permitted to bring their child/children to the side gate. Otherwise entry to the school should be by appointment only.
- Parents collecting children for an appointment should sign the child out at the school office and wait for them outside the relevant entrance door
- Parents collecting children in the afternoon must wait in the designated areas only and maintain social distancing at all times
- Where possible, parent/teacher meetings will take place via phone call though appointments may be made at suitable times after school

New in-school structure

- The school will be divided into two distinct bubbles, Junior and Senior
- There will be little to no contact between these bubbles
- Each class from the senior end will divide their class into “pods”
- There will be two separate breaks for each bubble. The junior end will be 10.25-10.40 and 12.10 – 12.35, while the senior end will be 10.45-11.00 and 12.45-1.10
- Classes will stay in their own designated area within the yard during playtime
- Supervision will be by teachers from respective bubbles
- Children will not be sent on messages around the school which involve going into other classrooms
- Photocopier will only be used by adults – hands must be sanitised before and after use
- Staff will stay with their respective bubbles in the staff room
- Non-contact forehead thermometers will be available in both offices but children will not routinely have their temperature taken

New morning structure

- Children go straight to class from 8.50-9.10
- Children from the senior bubble enter the school by the main door and go straight to class
- Children from the junior bubble enter school through black gate at the side of the school where they will go straight to class
- Parents may not enter the school yard

New afternoon structure

- Junior and senior infants will be met at the black gate with juniors going first
- There will be staggered times for the other classes
- First and Second class will leave at 2.20
- Third and Fifth class will leave at 2.30
- Fourth and Sixth class will leave at 2.35
- Parents only meet children on school grounds if absolutely necessary and can wait on the grass as far back as the black gate to avoid contact
- Parents should wear masks at all times on school grounds

Induction training

All staff will have completed the Covid-19 training organised by the Department of Education and Skills in advance of returning to school.

The school will provide induction training for all staff to familiarise themselves with all new protocols and procedures in line with Government/HSE guidelines. This will include:

- 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

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 with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from 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 should seek immediate guidance from the Principal. Updated advice from the HSE is available on its website – www.hse.ie/coronavirus/

Two Lead Worker Representatives, Emma McNamara and her deputy, Lisa Mullen, have been appointed to assist in the implementation of this Response Plan.

Managing the risk of spread of Covid-19

- Staff and pupils that have symptoms should not attend school, should phone their doctor and follow HSE guidelines on self-isolation; doctor's certificates must be submitted to the school to cover absences
- 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 HSE advice on restriction of movement
- **Staff and pupils are not permitted to attend school for 14 days if they have travelled outside Ireland (unless they have travelled to counties in the "green zone").** Please note this is subject to change and the 14 day quarantine will apply if a country is no longer on the green list when you re-enter the country
- Staff and pupils that develop symptoms at school should bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly

- Staff should know the protocol for managing a suspected case of Covid-19 in school
- Everyone entering the school building needs to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser; parents are advised to contact the school if their child is allergic to hand sanitiser so that suitable alternate arrangements can be made
- Visitors to the school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point (outside the office)
- Parents should ring ahead if collecting their child during the school day for an appointment
- Physical distancing of 2 metres should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible

Know the symptoms of Covid-19

In order to prevent the spread of Covid-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- ✓ High temperature
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- ✓ Loss of smell, taste or distortion of taste

Under no circumstances should anyone with any of the above symptoms attend school. It is very important that close contacts (family members/siblings) of people experiencing symptoms stay away from school until such time as the person with symptoms has been tested and receives a negative test.

We ask that anyone with any other infectious illnesses (colds/tummy bugs etc) and anyone feeling generally unwell, stay at home.

The Board of Management reserve the right to refuse entry (or to send immediately home) any child presenting with the symptoms of Covid-19 or any child who is visibly displaying viral/respiratory-like symptoms (runny nose/sneezing etc)

Respiratory hygiene

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you sneeze or cough. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and safely into a nearby bin.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

Hand hygiene

- Staff and pupils should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands. Our school will promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the school on how to wash your hands
- Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>
- Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean)
- Everyone is expected to wash their hands after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands
- Hand sanitiser dispensers are available at exit and entry points of schools and classrooms and care should be taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risk of falls
- Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and paper towels are available throughout the school
- Hand sanitisers, soaps and paper towels will be filled daily
- Posters displaying hand washing techniques and promoting hand washing are displayed throughout the school
- Evidence of effectiveness is best for alcohol-based hand rubs but non-alcohol-based hand rubs can be used too
- Young children should not have independent use of containers of alcohol gel.
- While it is not necessary for children to bring their own hand sanitiser, as we expect to have ample supplies in class, if they are more comfortable using their own brand then they may bring them to school.

Frequency of hand hygiene

Pupils and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- On arrival at school
- Before eating or drinking
- After using the toilet
- After playing outdoors
- When their hands are physically dirty
- When they cough or sneeze

Uniforms

There is no evidence as yet to suggest a change in approach to the wearing of the school uniform. However, to facilitate cleaning during the week we have decided to make Wednesdays of every week a “No uniform day”

Lunches

Parents/guardians are asked to make sure that children bring in their lunches in a cleanable lunch box every day and have a water bottle filled from home with them. Children should not share their food and drinks with other children and will not have access to the staffroom for refills.

Children will eat their lunches at their desks as usual and bring home all their rubbish.

Physical distancing

Physical distancing will be promoted throughout the school allowing for some flexibility when needed. It must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue. Physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. Care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times.

Staff will wear masks at all times.

Adults in the school are requested to maintain 2 metres social distancing from other adults at all times.

However, where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1 metre distance, and where possible 2 metres, from students. They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face-to-face level, such as remaining standing rather than sitting down beside/crouching down.

Physical distancing falls into two categories:

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing separation

Increasing separation

Our classrooms have been reconfigured as much as possible to maximise physical distancing, however the sizes of the rooms make complying with the guidelines totally in the Senior bubble very difficult.

The creation of pods with limited interaction will help somewhat with this. The management of the children coming and going to and from school will promote social distancing.

The teacher's desk should be at least 1 metre and where possible 2 metres away from pupil desks.

Decreasing separation

A common-sense approach will be applied to decreasing interaction, recognising the limits to which this can be achieved between pupils.

Separate break times and movement breaks will help with this.

It is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors.

Corridors

Briefly passing someone in a hall/corridor is very unlikely to contribute significantly to the spread of infection if people do not have physical contact and avoid informal group discussions. However, there is a system already in place in the corridor to facilitate ease of passage

Yard

The risk of transmission from contact with outside surfaces and play areas is low.

Play times have been staggered to avoid overcrowding. Each class will have their own separate area within the yard. There are separate toilet times for classes in the Senior bubble, and only 4 pupils may be in the toilet at any one time.

Use of personal protective equipment

- All staff will be provided with a PPE pack containing a face shield, mask, gloves, and wipes
- Staff will wear facemasks where social distancing is not possible
- Children under 13 years of age are not required to wear face masks but may do so if they wish - Updated November 2021: All pupils from Third Class up are required to wear face masks to school. There are exceptions available for pupils who might have a medical condition or who aren't capable of using a facemask independently. Pupils are not required to wear a facemask whilst outside, or while eating their lunch. Teachers will facilitate more regular outdoor movement breaks in order to give pupils more opportunity to remove their masks for a time. Posters demonstrating proper technique for wearing masks will be on display in the main building. Teachers have provided guidance around facemasks and their proper use also.
- Adult visitors to the school must wear a mask at all times
- Other PPE equipment is available in the school should it be required
- The use of disposable gloves in the school by students or staff is not generally appropriate but may be necessary for matters such as cleaning, intimate care settings or when administering First Aid. Routine use does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves
- Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene

Cleaning

- The school has been decluttered to facilitate cleaning
- Soft furnishings have been removed or placed in storage
- An enhanced cleaning regime has been introduced which entails an increase from 2 hours per day to 6 hours per day
- Everyone will be required to play their part in facilitating cleaning by being tidy and co-operating with requests from cleaning staff

- Teachers and SNAs will clean their workstations throughout and at the end of each day
- Windowsills, counter tops and desks must be cleared every evening to allow for cleaning
- Concentration will be on keeping hard surfaces clean and sanitised
- Shared equipment, though kept to a minimum, will be cleaned after use
- Should the school have a suspected Covid-19 case, then the cleaning company, OIC Cleaning, will send in a dedicated cleaning team to sanitise all possible infected areas

Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

- Staff or pupils should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19
- If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at school the following procedures will be implemented:
 - If the person with the suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately
 - The bench at the front of the main building has been designated as the new isolation area. Should this not prove possible (likely due to weather conditions), the shelter in the small yard can be used instead
 - Isolate the person and accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person at all times
 - If it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2 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 the skin
 - The person presenting with the symptoms will be given a mask to wear. 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
 - The person presenting with symptoms will be facilitated to remain in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects.
 - If the person is well enough to go home, arrangements will be made for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and they will be advised to inform their GP 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 them that the sick person is a suspected case of Covid-19.
 - Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery.

- Arrangements will be made to clean the isolation area and/or classroom
- Contact the HSE regarding the next steps to be taken.
- 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 should be followed and staff and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times
- It will be the HSE who will inform the school of what, if anything, needs to happen next.

Staff responsibilities

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties.

The co-operation 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 Covid-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace
- Must complete the 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. Coordinate practices 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
- Adhere to the procedure outlined above if they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility
- Keep themselves informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

Parental Responsibility

We are heavily relying on the support of our parent body for this response plan to be successful.

- Parents must carefully read and familiarise themselves with this Covid-19 Response Plan
- Parents must co-operate fully with the plans for mornings and hometimes
- Contact details for parents and alternate emergency contact details must be kept up to date

- Parents must keep children at home if they are sick or showing any of the symptoms of Covid-19
- Parents must have arrangements in place for childminding in the event of a child falling ill during the school day or in the event of a sudden closure of a class or the school
- Please ensure that your child has a fully stocked pencil case as students will not be sharing items with each other. This pencil case must stay in school.
- Parents must ensure that children have a supply of tissues with them every day

Student responsibilities

- Students are requested to wash their hands regularly throughout the day and always before eating, after using the bathroom and if their hands are visibly dirty
- Students are required to follow the staff instructions relating to social distancing
- Students must use hand sanitisers before entering the school building and their classroom or when requested to do so by staff (unless they have allergies)
- Students must sit in the chair/at the desk allocated to them only and not use other children's designated seats
- Students must practice good respiratory hygiene at all times
- Students are expected to co-operate with staff and to enter and exit the school grounds without congregating/loitering
- Breaches of any of these responsibilities will have to be treated as gross misbehaviour in light of the current situation and dealt with accordingly

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 individual staff members 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 freephone confidential helpline 1800 411057 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.