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**Covid-19 Response Plan**

**New Ross Educate Together National School Covid-19 Response Plan**

**Introduction**

This *Covid-19 Response Plan* is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in New Ross ETNS. The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government’s ‘*Return to Work Safely Protocol’*, the Department of Education and Skills plan for school reopening and to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment. The plan incorporates current advice about measures to

reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). It is important that the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities comply with the protocol to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued by NPHET

continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address may also change. The response plan will support the sustainable reopening of our school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the children in the school.

In line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and continued return to work, and re-opening of our schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the Board of management, staff, pupils and parents.

**New Ross ETNS COVID-19 Policy**

This COVID-19 policy outlines our commitment as a school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management and brought to the attention of staff, pupils, parents and others.

**COVID 19 Policy Statement**

New Ross ETNS is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID-19 Response Plan. The BOM and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

* continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
* provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
* display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
* agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan
* inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
* adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education and Skills
* keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
* ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education and Skills
* implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
* provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
* implement cleaning in line with Department of Education and Skills advice

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any

concerns, issues or suggestions.

This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Planning and Preparing for Return to School**

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff. The return to the work must be done safely and in strict adherence to the advice and instructions of public health authorities and the Government. Details for the reopening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

**Calendar start date**

School will re-open for all students on Monday, August 31.

Staff will be in earlier than this for Staff Meetings and Croke Park hours.

**Junior Infants**

The transition to Junior Infants is a big one in the life of all children. Usually, Junior Infants have a year in pre-school to help them with this but this year it was not possible. We will be bringing Junior Infants in on Monday 31 August in two groups for an hour each so that they can have that safe time to meet their teacher and see their classroom without being anxious about being away from their families for too long. I will email Junior Infants families separately with times for this. Parents and guardians can come into the door of the classroom on that day. For the rest of September, Junior Infants will go home at 11.30. We will review this time closer to October when we feel that everyone is settled in properly and all of our Covid-19 plans are in place and running smoothly. Rest assured, the Junior Infant teacher and other staff will do their best to ensure that every child feels safe and happy in school.

**Changes to drop off and collection**

Parking in the mornings will be in the Geraldine’s GAA grounds again like last year. When you park, you can walk down with your child ensuring social distancing yourself. The school gates will be open from 8.20. For the first few weeks, children will leave you at the gate and walk straight to their classrooms where there will be supervision until school starts at 8.30. As we cannot have any visitors on site while the children are here, it is very important that every child is here before 8.30.

At collection times, parking will be available in the Geraldine’s GAA grounds again. Parents can come to the door that their children come out, ensuring social distancing themselves. We would ask you to move into and out of the yard quickly. To ensure as much social distancing as possible on school grounds we have decided split the last collection –

* 1st and 2nd will be collected at 2.05. If they have brothers or sisters in 3rd and 4th, they will be let go at this time too.
* The rest of 3rd and 4th will be collected at 2.10.

**Changes to break times**

To ensure that we keep to class bubbles as much as possible, there will be changes to break times.

* Junior Infants and Senior Infants/1st Class A will go to yard from 9.50 – 10.10. They will wash their hands on return inside and then eat.
* 1st Class B/ 2nd and 3rd/4th will go to yard from 10.15 – 10.35. They will wash their hands on return inside and eat.

The same applies for the next break.

* Junior Infants and Senior Infants/1st Class A go to yard 11.50-12.10, return inside wash hands and eat.
* 1st Class B/ 2nd and 3rd/4t to go to yard 12.15-12.35, return inside, wash hands and eat. There will be one teacher on yard supervision at all times.

**Hand Hygiene/Sanitising**

Children will perform hand hygiene regularly during the school day and especially at these times:

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

Hand sanitiser dispensers will be widely available throughout the school, in each classroom, at entry and exit points, the SET room, staffroom and other areas that have a high volume of people. Children are not required to bring their own sanitiser to school. Teachers will facilitate hand washing at regular intervals. Children will use paper towels to dry their hands.

In the main building where classroom 1 and 2 are located, one child will be allowed to use the bathroom at a time. There will be a system in place to facilitate this.

**Class Bubbles/Pods**

Junior Infants to second class are not required to social distance. Therefore, they will be staying in their class bubble together.

Third and fourth class will be placed in pods of four to six students in their class bubbles and those pods will keep a metre distance where it is physically possible from each other.

These class bubbles must also be kept at playtimes.

**Staff members movement around school**

Staff members can rotate between classrooms but this will be minimized where possible. Special Educational Teachers and Additional Needs Assistants, amongst others will have to move between classrooms. Where this happens, agreed sanitising routines will be observed. If children are withdrawn to the SET room, chairs, tables and all surfaces will be sanitised after each child. Staff often need to communicate with each other during the day. To reduce contacts and ensure unnecessary entry and exits to classrooms, the staff will be using their phones if a message needs to be delivered to a room.

**Children moving around the school**

If a child needs to walk around the school, they will ensure to keep a physical distance from anyone they meet, try not to touch anything, and perform hand hygiene on their return to the classroom. We will also be ensuring to keep to one side of the corridor.

**Teacher Absences**

If there is a teacher absence, the school will do everything possible to find a substitute. If there are no substitutes, the school may use a non-mainstream teacher for the absence. In the very unlikely event of there being no supervision for a class whatsoever, we will not be able to take that class into the school on that day. You will be given as much notice as possible about this so you can make other arrangements.

**Schoolbags, drinks and lunch boxes**

There is currently no guidance from the government on this however, a common sense approach should be taken to the care of these items. These will be the only things going between school and home in September so regular cleaning is advised. Children are to be reminded not to share food or drinks with other children. Children will be asked to bring all items, finished and unfinished, home. All rubbish from lunches must go back into the lunchbox or a good idea is to have a little ziplock bag in the children’s schoolbag for messier items such as bananas or yoghurt pots. At the moment, children should not bring in any non-essential items like toys into school.

**Books, copies, stationary etc.**

Children will have their own books, copies, glue sticks, pencils at their desk. It is important that they do not share them with anyone else.

**Homework**

We will not be giving any written homework at the start of the year that has to be brought home and then into school again. Children will get mindfulness homework, tasks to complete, oral reports and P.E. homework in the first few weeks. This is to facilitate the children being back in school after so long. They are going to be very tired in the first few weeks, added pressure of homework will only exacerbate this. We will have a homework policy in place at the end of September that is in place with the current 72-hour rule.

**School Visitors**

Due to Covid-19, we will not be able to receive any visitors without prior appointment with the principal. All visitors must be monitored, sign the contact tracing log and wear a mask. We pride ourselves on our good relationship with parents and usually welcome them into the school but unfortunately, we will have to restrict parents to prior appointment, outside school hours until further notice. If you need to get in contact with the school, you can use email, phone us or write a note. There is an option to pay book rental money electronically and we would encourage you to use this option. If you do need to physically hand in money, notes or anything else, we will not be opening it for 72 hours. We will be able to read it and get back to you then. The best way to communicate with us at the minute is email, as we can check that daily.

**Masks**

Children under 13 are not required to wear masks. Most recent guidelines state that staff should wear masks or face coverings. Staff may choose to wear either visors or face masks. Any other adult entering the school must wear a mask.

**PPE**

Besides masks, staff are not required to wear PPE. However there are some instances where PPE should be worn like:

* assisting with intimate care needs
* dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

and other instances as they arise. PPE will be available in the school.

Gloves are considered inappropriate for children under the guidelines. There will be gloves available to staff members when needed. There will be an emphasis on hand hygiene rather than glove wearing in the school.

**Cleaning**

The school will be thoroughly cleaned daily, paying particular attention to frequently touched areas. Waste will be collected daily from bins. There will be a cleaning schedule adhered to and overseen by the principal. All staff will have access to the cleaning products and are required to maintain the cleanliness of their work area each day.

Resources will either be provided individually to children or used within a pod. Once the children have finished with the resources, they will be placed in isolation for 72 hours before being cleaned and ready to go back into use. The school has purchased a fogging machine to facilitate the cleaning of these items and the rest of the school.

**Doors and Windows**

Where possible, doors will be left open at times that children enter and exit the school. Windows will be open in the classroom as often as possible to ensure the classroom is well ventilated.

**Photocopying**

Staff should use the photocopier when the office is empty and wipe it down after use.

**Staffroom**

All staff members should adhere to a two-metre distance when not engaged in teaching. Two members of staff can be in the staffroom at any one time and still keep this distance. Staff should bring their own cutlery/utensils/plates.

**Child/Staff member suddenly feels unwell or develop COVID symptoms**

**Child:**

* If a child develops any symptoms of acute respiratory infection including cough, fever, shortness of breath or sudden loss of taste or smell while in the school, a staff member will need to take them to our isolation room. If that is not possible it will be a place 2m away from others in the room.
* Call their parent or guardian and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible.
* Remember the virus is spread by droplets and is not airborne so the physical separation is enough to reduce risk of spread to others even if they are in the same room.
* If a distance of 2m cannot be maintained then a staff member caring for a child waiting for pick-up should wear a cloth face covering or mask. Gloves should not be used as the virus does not pass through skin.
* The staff member should be aware that it is essential to avoid touching their own nose, mouth or eyes while caring for a symptomatic child and to perform hand hygiene.
* If a member of staff has helped someone with symptoms they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves or unless they are subsequently advised to by public health.

**Staff member:**

If a staff member develops symptoms of acute respiratory infection including cough, fever or shortness of breath we will ask them to go home without delay and contact their GP by telephone.

* They should remain 2 m away from others if possible.
* They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the bin.
* If tissues are not available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.
* If they can tolerate doing so and one is available they should wear a clean cloth face covering or a surgical mask.
* If they must wait, then they should do so in an office or other area away from others mindful of the need to observe good respiratory and hand hygiene.
* If they need to use toilet facilities they should wipe contact surfaces for example taps clean and clean their hands after attending the toilet.

**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 electronically or from the Principal. A RTW form should only be completed at least 3 days prior to any proposed date of return to the workplace. On receipt of the completed form the Principal will provide: details of the Induction Training for completion by staff prior to the return to the workplace 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.

**Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative**

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and the School Leadership. The Return to Work Safely protocol provides for an agreed procedure between management and staff to appoint a Lead Worker Representative to carry out a specific role.

Note: The process for appointment of the Lead Worker representative in schools will be agreed centrally between the Department of Education and Skills and the education partners. That process, once agreed, will be circulated to all schools in advance of the re-opening of schools.

The role of the worker representative) is to ensure that Covid-19 measures are adhered to in the workplace as follows

* Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19.
* 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 with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
* Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
* Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
* Make representations on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.

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

Name(s) of Lead Worker representative: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contact details\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

All staff, parents/guardians, 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.

**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. 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. 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
* 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 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
* 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 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
* Keep informed of the updated advice of the publ**ic** health authorities and comply with same.

**Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. There has been a Risk Assessment completed and added to the school’s Health and Safety Statement in light of Covid-19.

**Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

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’.

A free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and staff members are encouraged to make use of the service when the need arises.