



Ballykeel Primary School & Nursery Unit

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17th March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I wanted to take this opportunity to update you with regard to the current situation concerning the Covid-19 virus.

Communication from the Education Minister yesterday has reiterated the Department of Education's (DE) determination that schools, while they are likely to close in the future, are not closing at this time. The decision to close a school in such circumstances rests with DE and not with the school itself. We are continually monitoring this situation and will keep you informed if and when this position changes.

We as a school continue to follow advice published by the Department of Education (DE) and the Public Health Agency (PHA). Currently, schools are advised to continue with their normal routines and activities as much as is practically possible. There have however been significant changes to school life such as an increase in hand washing, hygiene and cleaning within the school and, moving forward, the cancellation of all 'outside events' such as swimming, football matches, the netball tournament, assemblies, shared education activities, and all other planned educational trips. The Spring Concert is cancelled as is the P.4 Easter assembly. We are also limiting the number of outside visitors to the school to those who are absolutely necessary.

In order to lessen the impact of school closures, as much as is practically possible, we plan to provide work for children to complete when they are at home, and staff are currently working on this. We also plan to have further advice, guidance and work available in the 'Classes' section of the website. While I realise that providing work is not the same as teaching children, it will be the only course of action open to all schools and your child's health and wellbeing will always be our prime concern. Please be assured that whenever school returns we will focus on the teaching of Literacy and Numeracy, to avoid any gaps in your child's learning in these crucial areas.

What can parents do to help?

- Take the time to talk with your children and explain the situation in a way they will understand. This is the approach we have taken in recent weeks in school. We do not wish to alarm them.
- Encourage the regular washing of hands at home and in school. Provide cream for those pupils for whom the increase in hand washing is causing difficulties.
- Provide your child with tissues if possible and explain the correct way to use them both in school and outside. The "Catch It, Bin It, Kill It" approach is a useful way of doing this.
- Continue to follow normal procedures for reporting illness to the school.
- If your child or any member of your household is showing symptoms of the virus you should self-isolate at home for 14 days. The symptoms are a new cough and/or a temperature or fever. If you are not sure you should call the helpline on 111 or your GP. Our advice in relation to absence from school is for **all parents to err on the side of caution and keep children at home for the recommended 14 day period if they show any symptoms. Inform the school if you are self-isolating. This advice also applies to any child who is living in a house where someone is self-isolating.** We anticipate the DE will issue a special attendance code to record against children who have had to stay of school in these circumstances.

In order for us to be able to communicate with you effectively it is very important that you do the following:

- Make sure we have an up to date mobile number so that you get our texts. (Should we be off school, and your contact details change, you can e mail your new number to the school).
- Make sure you have downloaded the app, subscribed to the website, **and in addition**, have verified your mobile number for private messaging via the app.

We are living in unprecedented times at present. We thank you in advance for supporting our efforts to minimize the spread and impact of the virus at this time. We will continue to keep parents/carers informed of developments within the school via our school text, website and app service.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Sheeran

Principal: Mrs S. Sheeran, B.Ed.(Hons), P.G.Dip.Ed, M.Ed.

