



Important Letter to Parent/Guardians in relation to BETNS Reopening on August 26th 2020

10th August 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you may be aware, the Government has published *Reopening Our Schools - The Roadmap for the Full Return to School* and the *COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of Primary and Special Schools* as well as numerous other documents. Based on these, BETNS is working towards the safe reopening of our school. We will have a Covid-19 section on our website including our Risk Assessment, Response Plan, Policies and related documents.

There will be changes to the way we operate to ensure the safety of our children, families and staff. We are trying to ensure that this transition is as seamless as possible and we are lucky to have a small school with wonderful open spaces.

The following are some of the key points from our Risk Assessment which has been developed after consultation with BETNS staff and the Board of Management. I ask that you read carefully. Please contact me if you require further clarification or have suggestions that may enhance our policies.

In advance of returning to school

We ask that you continue to model and teach correct hand and respiratory hygiene to your children.

If you have travelled to countries outside of the 'Green List', please ensure your child has isolated for two weeks before entering BETNS.

Children who are unwell

The Response Plan states that children or staff members should not attend school if feeling unwell. Therefore, we ask that, if your child feels unwell, they do not come to school. If we have reason to believe a child is sick, we may check their temperature and will contact home if required.

We will use the principal's office as an isolation area if a child displays symptoms of Covid-19. The child will wait with a staff member until they can be collected by their Parent/Guardian.

Access to BETNS

As stated in the Reopening School's Guidelines and the Response Plan, access to school can only be done by appointment with the principal. A Contact Log will be located at the front door to be completed by Parent/Guardians and other visitors.

I understand this is considerable change but all the measures we are outlining are to ensure everyone's safety.

New Pupil Transitions

After consultation with the Board of Management and contact with numerous school leaders seeking advice and ideas, it is with a heavy heart that we cannot allow Parent/Guardians to accompany their children into class for the first couple of days. This is something that has always happened and will again, once this virus is gone. I understand that this is incredibly disappointing.

To alleviate this somewhat, I'm asking that new families, if they would like, email me to arrange family visits to BETNS on Monday 24th August between 9 am and 2 pm. I will show you around the class and school and give an overview of a typical day. Please contact jonathan@betns.ie

For our Junior Infant families, a reminder that Junior Infants will go home at 12.30 pm on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of the first week (26th – 28th August).

Dropping off and Collections

In order to limit too many children and adults gathering in proximity we ask that - Parent/Guardians walk their child to their classroom door in the morning and collect them from the same door. Children will not be lining up in the yard.

Children in the Middle Room will use the school's side door. Parent/Guardians are encouraged to park at the side of the school. There will be a row of cones along the side of the school to facilitate walking safely inside.

Children in the Senior Room will use its external door. Parent/Guardians are encouraged to park at the front of the school.

Children in the Junior Room will use its external door. Parent/Guardians are encouraged to park in the Basketball Court.

For any late arrivals the above applies. As there is no external door in the Middle Room, we ask that Parent/Guardians knock on the window of Fiona's room. She, or the SNA, can then meet at the front door to bring your child to class.

Physical Distancing

The Reopening Schools Guidelines and the Response Plan discuss, in depth, advice about physical distancing and classroom layouts. In practicality at BETNS, not a huge amount is changing. Children will sit in groups, or pods, of four as they have always done. These pods within the classes will be 1m away from other pods.

A notable change is that classrooms are now described as 'bubbles', the idea being that classes don't mix with each other to ensure the virus does not spread throughout school. Therefore, the Junior, Middle and Senior Rooms will have designated play areas on yard and these will be rotated every two weeks. Although

not ideal, at least the individual classes can play together on yard. It also means we will not have school assemblies.

In conclusion, bubbles are viewed as the core method of stopping Covid-19 spreading and a means of containing the virus, the pods are considered an additional safety measure.

Mainstream Class Teaching

Teachers and our SNA will continue to interact with children individually, in groups and at a class level, in a safe and supportive way. Teacher desks will be positioned 1m away from children's desks. Teachers and our SNA will stand, where possible, instead of bending down close to children. Context is important and this will depend on the age of the children and situation.

Face Covering guidelines were updated on 7th August which recommend that staff, in primary schools, wear face coverings if a distance of 2m cannot be maintained. Staff in BETNS will have choice should they decide to wear face coverings or visors.

Jonathan, as the Infant Teacher, will consult with the families of the Junior Room. Initially, he may not wear a face covering in order to make the transition as comfortable as possible for our youngest pupils.

Similarly, although it is recommended that children do not wear face coverings or visors, this is completely at the discretion of the child and their family.

Special Education Teaching

Lynn will continue to support children in their classroom and in the SET Room. Lynn will wash and sanitise her hands prior to entering each classroom. Our SNA will also do so.

Staff and children will wash and sanitise hands prior to entering the SET Room. Children will keep at least 1m distance from each other and 2m if in very small groups or attending individually.

Substitute Teacher and SNA Cover

It is expected that we will require additional access to substitute cover as teachers and SNAs cannot come to school if feeling unwell.

The DES has informed schools that regional areas will have access to substitute panels. Blessington is identified as one of these areas and we are hopeful three substitute teachers will be allocated to the schools in Blessington.

Due to the administration work and additional hours required to oversee Covid-19 safety protocols, all schools with a teaching principal have been allocated one day per week for administrative work outside the classroom. Therefore, Angela Cox will be teaching every Tuesday in the Junior Room and Jonathan will be based in the office.

Cleaning and Hygiene

Training will be given to staff by the DES in relation to hygiene. Fiona has been appointed as our Lead Worker Representative. Pauline is our Deputy Lead Worker Representative. Their roles will be to support, but also to assess, that management have the correct systems and supplies in place to ensure a safe teaching and learning environment.

During the first days and weeks of school, children, through SPHE lessons and talk and discussion will learn about hand and respiratory hygiene.

In terms of physical changes to BETNS, all access points and strategic areas will be fitted with hand sanitisers. Classrooms and toilets will have the necessary cleaning resources. The school has been deep-cleaned in August while our cleaning contractor has been given additional hours each week and will work-off a Covid-19 cleaning checklist.

We are also hopeful of making some minor school upgrades in line with Covid-19 policies.

Wellbeing

We are very aware that Covid-19 has brought huge changes for us all in how we live our lives and interact. BETNS will be as warm and welcoming as always. We will continue to support, care and listen to the children. September will be about balancing the personal, social and academic. We will liaise with parents and guardians where necessary. We will engage with NEPS if required. CAHMS is a service available for children with mental health difficulties. In short, we will use a range of supports and resources to support the wellbeing of our pupils, families and staff.

Afterschool Activities

We have agreed to pause these and reassess before Term 3.

Graduation

Due to the rising cases of Covid-19 and the safety measures being put in place, we have decided to invite only the graduates to school on August 21st. We apologise that we cannot invite everyone but we feel this is the correct measure as our initial plans were based on the reopening of society as set out in Phase 4.

Lynn and Claire will be contacting the families with information shortly.

To Conclude

I'd like to thank our families for their support and understanding in what has been a very difficult year. We are lucky to have you! I want to welcome our new children and families. You will be joining a wonderful and caring school. We are also lucky to have such a proactive and supportive Board of Management. It's very much a team effort and it has made preparations for this year so much easier than I imagined. Finally, thanks, without end, to the staff for giving their time, wisdom, and energy towards the

reopening of BETNS. I have no doubt that all of us together will make this a special and rewarding year.

Warm regards,
Jonathan.