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**For Parent/Guardian
Information**
Education Restart
13th August 2020

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Frequently Asked Questions From the Department of Education

➤ Returning to school: When will children and young people return to school ?

The start of term will be 24th August 2020 for Primary 7. All other pupils will return to school from the week commencing 31st August 2020.

Harding Memorial Primary School will start on Tuesday 1st September 2020 for all Primary 2 to Primary 7 Pupils. Primary 1 pupils will have a staggered start during this week with information communicated in advance to each Primary 1 Parent/Guardian

➤ Will 31 August 2020 remain a public holiday for schools ?

The Department expects 31 August 2020 to remain a public holiday for schools, however ultimately this is a local planning decision for schools.

➤ Why are only certain groups returning to school on 24 August 2020 ?

Primary 7 is an important transitional year as children prepare to leave primary school and enter post-primary education. This is a major change in their educational journey. Year 12 and Year 14 are key examination years. Other jurisdictions (e.g. England, Scotland and Wales) are all bringing similar cohorts back earlier in August for similar reasons.

➤ What about children of key workers ?

Children of key workers will return to school at the same time as all other children of their age.

➤ What is the scientific evidence basis of the DE guidance on school reopening ?

The Department has worked closely with the Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health and the Public Health Agency in developing guidance for the return to school. To promote transparency with regard to the scientific, public health and wider policy judgements that have informed the approach set out in the New School Day guidance, the guidance links to published scientific and public health advice.

➤ What will the attendance patterns be when children return to school ?

The return to school will be on a full time basis of five days a week for every pupil, including those who attend Special Schools.

➤ Will every school operate in the same way from the start of term ?

On some aspects the Department expects consistency in schools and the guidelines set out these types of issues including start dates, attendance patterns and cleaning practices. However, the Department has not prescribed a 'one size fits all approach' – this is not possible and would not be practical. School leaders are asked to consider the strategic guidance and put this into practice in their own schools to the best of their ability. Every school is different, every classroom is different. Therefore, there will be variances in how schools approach the return to school.

➤ **What social distancing will be required in schools ?**

Strict social distancing requirements between all pupils will be relaxed from a specific distance to the best spacing that can be achieved but will remain in place between adults and, as far as it is practicable between adults and pupils. Schools should continue to implement as much social distancing as is practical and where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit. On the return to school, the overriding provision will be a full class return with all appropriate and practical protections put in place.

➤ **What protective measures will be in place in schools ?**

To make sure that schools remain safe for our children, young people and staff, a number of measures will be put in place. These include, but are not limited to;

- ✓ **Keeping Covid-19 out of schools.** Anyone displaying any Covid-19 symptoms **must not** attend school.
- ✓ **Enhanced hygiene and cleaning measures** will be in place. All cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance. Regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. will take place throughout the day.
- ✓ Children will **wash their hands** as soon as they arrive at school and regularly throughout the school day.
- ✓ Public health guidance with respect to **social distancing of 2 metres (2m) will remain in place between adults** and as far as possible between adults and pupils.
- ✓ Whilst the stringent application of social distancing requirements between pupils will be relaxed, as far as is practicable, **social distancing should be maximised for both children and adults who are not from the same household.**
- ✓ **Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action where possible.** The protective bubble arrangements will be used to segment pupils into a consistent group or groups that arrive together, learn together, play together and eat together, reducing contact throughout the school with other children.
- ✓ **Classroom space will be maximised** as far as possible with unnecessary items removed and schools will make use of all space including outdoor space.
- ✓ **Children will not sit facing each other where possible** and **seating plans can be used to aid contact tracing** in the event of a positive Covid-19 case.
- ✓ PHA guidance under the **Test and Trace and Protect programme** will be applied for all staff or pupils in contact with someone who tests positive for Covid-19.
- ✓ **Lunch and break times may be staggered** with more sittings, take away services and / or delivery to classrooms.
- ✓ **Staggered arrival and pick up times** may be introduced to limit interactions and avoid gatherings at the school gates.
- ✓ Given the risk mitigations in place in schools to limit and contain the spread of COVID-19, **face coverings are not generally recommended for routine use in schools.** Staff and pupils may wish to use them during the routine school day and this is acceptable.
- ✓ With the exception of those who are exempt, it is **mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport.** It is also strongly recommended that **all pupils regardless of age, should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis** for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

➤ **What is a protective bubble ?**

Protective bubbles will be used to segment pupils into a consistent group or groups as far as is practicable. The purpose of using consistent groups is to limit the number of different interactions in any single day. This will reduce the risk of transmission and improve the ability to focus the tracking and tracing of the virus in circumstances where there is a positive test. The approach will vary depending on age group. In primary schools, it is envisaged that in most cases a relatively straightforward approach can be adopted. A class will act as a single consistent group or bubble, with minimal prolonged interaction with other classes within the school.

➤ **Will additional funding be available for schools to cover costs associated with Restart ?**

The Department recognises that additional funding will be required to enable schools to safely re-open, however there is currently no funding within the existing education budget to address the scale of pressures anticipated. Working with the Education Authority, the Department has quantified the additional requirements and these have been submitted to the Department of Finance for consideration by the Executive. Once the Executive has taken decisions on allocating any funding to education, schools will be advised as appropriate.

➤ **How will school transport work ?**

While parents and children should be encouraged to use other means of travelling to school for example, walking or cycling where it is safe and reasonable to do so, for many children the home to school transport network may be the only available option. There will therefore be no requirement for children to follow public transport guidance for social distancing between pupils on dedicated home to school transport vehicles. However where it is possible to socially distance pupils should do so. A series of mitigating actions for transport on these vehicles will be put in place. Pupils using public transport services will continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines for the general public.

➤ **Why is guidance that has been issued not more prescriptive ?**

It is neither practical, nor indeed would it be helpful, to be overly prescriptive about the arrangements that every school must follow – every school setting has different physical characteristics and flexibility will be key to facilitate planning by schools that best meet local circumstances.

➤ **What will happen if someone starts to display symptoms of Covid-19 onsite ?**

If anyone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature/fever or anosmia (a loss or a change in your normal sense of smell, which can also affect your sense of taste) in an educational setting, they must be sent home and advised to follow the PHA guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection.