



Principal: S Cumper
info@hardingmemorial.belfast.ni.sch.uk

Monday 10th August 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian

On Thursday 6th August 2020 the Minister of Education confirmed that the existing “*New School Day*” guidance would be revised to allow for **all Schools to return to more normal patterns of operation and attendance, in line with standard legislative requirements**. This means that all Harding Memorial Primary School pupil will return to school 5 Days a Week Full-Time and that the previous information shared with Primary 2 – Primary 7 Parents about a “Split Week” is no longer relevant. There is no doubt in my mind that our children have missed their friends and the social development and emotional well-being they help to foster. There is no doubt they have missed the professional and pastoral guidance of their teachers to direct them through their learning. There is no doubt they have missed the many varied and collective opportunities that extend far beyond the classroom. There is equally no doubt that we as a staff have missed the daily interaction and involvement in the lives of our children. It is good that we now have a confirmed **Starting Date for pupils in 2020/2021**.



Harding Memorial Primary School
105 Cregagh Road
Belfast BT6 8PZ
Telephone: 028 90458040
Fax: 028 90460917

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS STARTING SCHOOL

- ✓ School will start for all **Primary 7 pupils on Monday 24th August 2020**
- ✓ School will start for all **P2 to P6 pupils on Tuesday 1st September 2020**
- ✓ Individual starting times will be confirmed with Primary 1 pupils during the week beginning Monday 17th August 2020 and the **Primary 1 Pupils will have a staggered start from Tuesday 1st September onwards**

The most frustrating thing about this for me as Principal of Harding Memorial Primary School is that these pronouncements by the Department of Education rarely, if ever, provide clear, exact, detailed and unambiguous guidance. As I write this letter, we still have received no clarification or follow up detailed guidance or information about several crucial back to school issues e.g School Transport, School Meals, School Uniform, School Bags etc

However you have my assurance as School Principal that we, in Harding Memorial Primary School, will approach the issue of Restarting School in 2020/2021 in exactly the same way that we approached the closure of school. We will avoid the noise, bluster and speculation and will make what we consider to be the decision that is in the best interests of our whole school community and, in particular, our children. What the “new normal” will eventually look like is still anyone’s guess but as a school we will continue to provide what help and guidance as we move to getting our children “Back Into School Routine”. I am conscious that there has been considerable speculation amongst our school stakeholders about the

issue of School Uniform. We would strongly encourage all P1 – P7 pupils to wear fresh School Uniform each day to assist with our efforts to ensure the highest standard of hygiene.

Harding Memorial has an excellent uniform wearing tradition. We feel that wearing the “School Uniform” promotes the child's feeling of belonging to our school. But the wearing of a school uniform is not governed by legislation but falls to schools to determine. The Department of Education has *“encouraged schools to show flexibility around the issue of school uniforms in these extraordinary times.”* The issue of uniforms was considered and advice issued as part of the New School Day Guidance: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-publishes-guidance-new-school-day>. The guidance states that while Coronavirus can land on fabrics and remain for some time, schools are not a high risk environment and while all children and young people should be encouraged to wear clean uniform or fresh clothes each day, this is not essential. Therefore, Harding Memorial Primary School is proposing the following actions for the start of the new School Term.

- **Harding Memorial Primary School would strongly encourage the wearing of uniform by all Pupils as they start back to school in 2020/2021.** Our Primary 2 – Primary 7 pupils are used to wearing school uniform as part of their established school day routine.
- The School has a significant number of “spare uniform” items which can be made available to parents who wish to have the opportunity to “clean the previous days uniform” to minimise the spread of any potential infection between Home and School.
- However if any parent is not able to ensure that their child has “clean uniform” for the next school day, their child/children will be able to wear “Non-Uniform Clothing”.
- This issue of “flexibility of the wearing of school uniform” is something that we be monitored by the School during the First Half Term as we would still prefer that pupils get back into the “School Uniform Routine” during 2020/2021

There are a huge number of additional issues that will need to be clarified and confirmed by the Department of Education for the start of the new 2020/2021 School Year. The Minister of Education has stated that Schools will need the *“revised detailed guidance as soon as possible to help plan for the return to school and I can advise that, subject to the agreement of our medical colleagues, that this will be published on Wednesday 12 August 2020 or at the latest on the morning of Thursday 13 August 2020.”*

Harding Memorial is planning to issue additional communications to all parents about “Back To School Procedures” once this additional documentation has been supplied by the Department of Education. In the meantime I would like to recommend the following website for all Parent/Guardians: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUnul7np4mQ. The video mentions Nervocitement – a Mixture of Nervousness and Excitement and may possibly reflect how a significant number of School Pupils, Parents and Staff currently feel about starting school again. But we will be there for you all in 2020/2021

