



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



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

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Dear P2 – P7 Parent/Guardian

We hope that you and your family are staying safe and well and have had an enjoyable and relaxing Summer Vacation Period. We would like to take this opportunity to share with both Pupils and Parent/Guardians updated information about the various **“Covid 19 Mitigation Organisational Strategies and Procedures”** that will be in operation in Harding Memorial Primary School from the start of the incoming 2021/2022 School Year.

The Minister of Education, Michele McIlveen, issued an e mail to all schools on the evening of Wednesday 18th August 2021. This e mail provided a link to the Department of Education Document: **DE Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland**. The DE website states that the Department’s COVID-19 Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings has been fundamentally reviewed ahead of the 2021-22 academic year to reflect the latest public health messages and in line with medical and scientific advice.

However yet again there appears to be a **“lack of detailed operational detail from DE”** about a significant number of school issues. The most frustrating thing 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**.

Therefore in the absence of such detailed advice from the Department of Education, it would be the intention of our school to follow the advice of a local Teacher Trade Union Representative who has stated: *“The advice that we are giving to school leaders across the country is the routines and mitigations that you have already set up, that your school community is already familiar with, that your teachers are already implementing are still appropriate. If it’s working for you, don’t change it.”*

Undoubtedly the previous 2020/2021 school year was not without its challenges, especially during the period of Home/Remote Learning. But as each day passed, especially during the last Term, life began to slow returning to normal for both Pupils, Parents and Staff at Harding Memorial Primary School. **We have been very fortunate that HMPS has managed to avoid any classes being required to self-isolate because of Covid Infection being present in our School.** I believe that the guidance from the Department of Education has come too late for our Schools to make "sweeping changes" before term begins next week as all Schools need time to prepare before we are able to enact some of the proposed changes. Therefore Harding Memorial will approach the issue of Restarting School in 2021/2022 in exactly the same way that we operated during the previous school years of 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. 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.

As a school team we will continue to provide what help and guidance we can as we move to getting our children "Back Into School Routine. I wish to confirm that it is the intention of all School Staff that our Primary 2 – Primary 7 pupils will return to our previously traditional welcoming, relaxed environment – ***“Everyone Is Important In Our School”***. We will work hard to avoid a draconian, unwelcoming and intimidating environment. Our aim is that when your child leaves school after their first day back, they will feel that everything is “as close as possible to what day to day school life was like last year” and that our newest Primary 1 Pupils will experience the joy of “their first day at HMPS”.

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS STARTING SCHOOL

- ❖ **There will continue to be Three Separate Entrance and Exit Areas for all Primary 1 – Primary 7 Pupils at Harding Memorial Primary School**
- ✓ Primary 1 and Primary 2 Pupils will enter and exit at Mrs Shannon’s office. They will use the main entrance and exit gate from the Cregagh Road at the Front of School
- ✓ Primary 3 and Primary 4 Pupils will enter and exit at the P3/P4 Playground Door. They will use the entrance and exit side gate at Dromore Street
- ✓ Primary 5, Primary 6 and Primary 7 Pupils will enter and exit at the rear playground P5, P6 and P7 Playground Door. They will use the second Cregagh Road Entrance and Exit that is opposite Iceland.
- ✓ SC1 and GLSC pupils will enter and exit at the rear playground gate in the alley way.
- Primary 2 pupils will Start at 8.45am and Primary 2 pupils will Stop at 1.50pm
- Primary 1 pupils will Start at 9.00am and Primary 1 pupils will Stop at 12.15pm until Monday 4th October 2021 when they will stay until 2.00pm
- Primary 4 pupils will start at 8.45am and Primary 4 pupils will stop at 2.50pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The P4’s will stop at 2.00pm on a Wednesday
- Primary 3 pupils will start at 8.55am and Primary 3 Pupils will stop at 1.50pm
- SC1 pupils will start at 9.00am and stop at 2.00pm (Monday - Thursday) and 1.45pm (Friday). GLSC pupils will start at 9.00am and stop at 3.00pm (Monday-Thursday) and 1.45pm (Friday) to facilitate EA transport arrangements.
- Primary 7 pupils will start at 8.45am and Primary 7 pupils will stop at 3.00pm
- Primary 6 pupils will start at 8.50am and Primary 6 pupils will stop at 2.55pm
- Primary 5 pupils will start at 8.55am and Primary 5 pupils will stop at 2.50pm
- A series of 3 bells will ring in the morning at 8.45am, 8.50am, 8.55am and in the afternoon at 2.50pm, 2.55pm, 3.00pm to assist with the organisation of “staggered starting and stopping times at Harding Memorial Primary School.

- ❖ Children should not congregate in the playgrounds in the mornings but instead go straight to their individual classrooms. A member of School Staff will be supervising at each School Entrance Area in order to ensure that all children use the appropriate entrance door for their age group and enter school at the correct time
- ❖ If you think your child is able to walk into school, you should consider leaving them at the school gate to avoid any unnecessary gathering of parents in or around the school grounds. (We would recommend this only for P4 – P7 pupils)
- ❖ All P1 – P3 pupils must be collected from school by an adult but it may be an option for P4 – P7 pupils to walk and meet you outside of School. **Please consider this as a way to reduce footfall in the school grounds in order to maximise Infection Control at HMPS.**
- ❖ If you do need to come in to school grounds to pick your child up, please make your way to the relevant exit and collection points and keep a sensible distance from each other.



➤ **What about Class Bubbles ?**

The new guidance from the Department of Education stated that it would be "for each school to determine if they wish to continue to use some/all of the principles of bubbles that they will have previously used during the 2020/2021 year". We have decided to continue with our well established Classroom and Playground Key Stage Groupings whereby Foundation Stage (P1 & P2), Key Stage 1 (P3 & P4) and Key Stage 2 (P5, P6 & P7) pupils will be in contact with each other as we feel that this approach will "support the PHA's (Public Health Agency's) contact tracing by encouraging pupils to remain within a consistent group of pupils wherever possible". This will be a familiar experience for the children as they generally socialise in their class groups at break and lunch anyway and we will use all available space for outdoor play

➤ **What about school bags and lunchboxes ?**

Harding Memorial P.S. will be allowing **School Bags and Lunchboxes to be brought to School**". We would continue to request that all Lunch boxes and Containers should be wiped down each day with suitable wipes before being sent in the next day.

➤ **Does my child need to wear a face covering ?**

Face coverings are not advised for children aged 11 and under. But this will be an individual decision for each school family and Harding Memorial Primary School will respect the decision of each Parent/Guardian when addressing this important but problematic issue.

➤ **What about School Uniform ?**

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 issue of uniforms was previously considered and advice issued as part of the New School Day Guidance which stated 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. **We would strongly encourage the wearing of uniform by all Pupils as they start back to school in 2021/2022.** Our P2 – P7 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.

➤ **Will school dinners be available ?**

Exact details of how the school catering service will operate have yet to be finalised, but it is envisaged that School Dinner Arrangements will continue to operate as before during Term 3 of the 2021/2022 School Year. Further details be provided to Parent/Guardians by School once clarification has been provided by the Education Authority.

➤ **What Physical Education Clothing will my child need ?**

The Department of Education has sent recent guidance to School stating that: *"Schools can play a pivotal role in helping to develop positive physical activity habits through a well-balanced PE programme; by increasing children's' exposure to fun and varied activities across the curriculum, as well as creating more active environments so that pupils have regular opportunities for movement during their school day."* Harding Memorial Primary School is fortunate to have excellent PE facilities both inside and outside and we would be seeking to ensure that all children in our school will have regular access to PE within the curriculum on their return to school due to the positive impact that physical exercise can have on young people's health and wellbeing. However we have noted that DE has formally stated that *"Changing continues to be considered a higher risk environment and schools should minimise the need for changing wherever possible. If primary schools wish pupils to wear sports clothing during PE, it is strongly recommended that schools allow to children to come to school in their PE uniform on relevant days to minimise the need for changing."* Therefore, it would the intention of Harding Memorial Primary School that P1 – P7 children would come to school **"wearing their PE Kit on their designated PE Timetabled Day"** as they previously did last year. Additional information about this issue will be distributed to individual classes by their Class Teacher(s) via Seesaw at the commencement of the new School Year once Organisational Timetabling Arrangements have been confirmed by School Teaching Staff.

➤ **What if my child displays symptoms of Covid 19 (new, persistent cough, high temperature, loss of taste and/or smell) ?**

If your child (or anyone else in your household) displays any of the symptoms of Covid 19, you must keep them from school and follow the PHA guidance for households with possible coronavirus infections. The executive had previously decided that if a child was identified as a close contact of a positive Covid case, they would no longer have to self-isolate for 10 days. Instead, they should self-isolate and book a PCR test. If the PCR test is positive they should isolate for 10 days, but if the result is negative they can end their self-isolation. **However, the new Department of Education Guidance does not provide detailed advice for schools on the new arrangements.** The Minister of Education has stated that the PHA was currently "preparing guidance" for schools on the new self-isolation arrangements to ensure they "applied equally to all pupils in each year group". However, she did not state when schools would receive the new PHA guidance. Once this information has been received by our School, that information will be shared with all Parent/ Guardians and School Stakeholders.

➤ **What if my child displays Covid 19 symptoms while at school ?**

If your child displays Covid 19 symptoms at school, he or she will be moved to our School Isolation Room (Room 13) and you will be contacted to collect your child from there. You should then follow the PHA guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection.

➤ **Am I able to call into Harding Memorial Primary School ?**

Harding Memorial Primary School is part of the local community and is very appreciative of the support it receives from the various stakeholders in the school. In recognising that the education of our children is a partnership between the home and school, the Board of Governors, Principal, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff seek to allow Parents/Guardians a clear right of access at all reasonable times to their child's Class Teacher and the Principal. **The Principal, as the day to day manager of the school, will seek to ensure that all such contacts are conducted in a manner which will promote the educational interests of the pupil and allow for the safety of all the children and staff.** This is particularly important regarding the current situation with Covid Infection Control Measures at Harding Memorial Primary School. If a Parent/Guardian has a non-urgent question or query then a phone call should be made or an e mail sent to school and then school will respond in a timely manner. **If it is an "urgent issue" – then the Parent should "wait outside school" until the Principal or a member of the School Management Team is available.** I would be encouraging all School Stakeholders to adhere to our ongoing procedures to limit the impact of Covid within our school community.

➤ **No Parent/Guardian or Adult should access school without invitation** any Parent/Guardian granted access to school will be expected to use an **"Appropriate Face Mask Covering."**

➤ Previous Department of Education Guidance has stated that *"at both arrival and collection times, parents should be actively discouraged from entering the school buildings as a means of preventing spread of the virus. Where parents must enter school buildings, appropriate hygiene measures should be in place."*

Additional mitigation strategies employed during 2021/2022 at Harding Memorial:

- ✓ Doors open throughout the school to minimise contact points
- ✓ Regular cleaning of contact points – door handles etc
- ✓ Windows open in classrooms to provide ventilation
- ✓ No large communal school events such as Assemblies will take place during Term 1
- ✓ Reinforcement of the hand hygiene message through use of child friendly signage in toilet areas etc. regarding the importance of keeping hands clean
- ✓ There will be a number of handwashing opportunities during the school day
- ✓ There will be “Hand Sanitising” stations at various points around the school
- ✓ Reinforcement of respiratory hygiene (catch it, kill it, bin it) with child friendly signs reminding the children of this.
- ✓ Encouraging children to stay on the left hand side in the corridors

COVID INFECTION CONTROL REMINDER

- High Temperature, New / Persistent Cough, Loss of taste or smell – Stay at home, isolate and book a test. **Please do not send your Child/Children to Harding Memorial Primary School if they are unwell, particularly if they have any covid symptoms.**
- Inform school immediately and advise us of the result as soon as possible.
- Pupils do not return until symptoms have gone for at least 48 hours – even if the test result was negative.
- Where a child has been in school it is essential that Parents inform the School by email immediately if they becomes unwell with Covid symptoms or are being tested, even if the result is negative
- **We may appear “fussier about this than normal”, especially for working parents, but we ask for your patience and understanding in advance during these most challenging of times for both our School and wider society in Northern Ireland**



✓ School will start for all Primary 2 to Primary 7 pupils on Tuesday 31st August 2021

- ✓ There will be NO SCHOOL DINNERS AVAILABLE on this date
- ✓ School will close at 12.05pm for all Primary 3 and Primary P5 pupils
- ✓ School will close at 12.10pm for all Primary 2, Primary 4 and Primary 6 pupils
- ✓ School will close at 12.15pm for all Primary 7 pupils

I hope that the information contained within this letter will have given you confidence that we will continue to put your child/children at the centre of our 2021/2022 Starting School Plan and are sensible and proportionate to the current risk levels of Covid 19 in N. Ireland

Mr S Cumper
Principal