

Gorey Educate Together National School

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14th August 2020

Reopening of Gorey Educate Together NS: Keeping Children & Staff Safe and Looking After Their Wellbeing

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I look forward to welcoming all classes back to our school building later this month.

Many things remain the same at Gorey Educate Together. The children will experience a welcoming and inclusive school, a broad range of stimulating and nurturing lessons & supports, as well as much fun and friendship.

There are several changes as well. Gorey Educate Together NS is taking the current public health situation very seriously. Everyone – pupils, families and staff – must do all that we can to minimise the risk of introducing and spreading infection in the school. A summary of the school's key public health related safety measures is provided overleaf.

Gorey Educate Together is also giving priority to the wellbeing of our pupils and staff. For this wellbeing to thrive, we must work through the current situation using balanced and sensible approaches. An overwhelming preoccupation with infection would be unhelpful, creating more nervousness or even fear, as well as unduly impeding the children's school experience and the staff's right to a calm & supportive working environment. A summary of the school's main pupil-related wellbeing measures can be found on the next page.

For much greater detail, you are invited to examine the 13 guidance documents provided to Gorey Educate Together (and all other schools) by the Department of Education & Skills and the National Health Protection Surveillance Centre. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/a128d-back-to-school/>

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Swan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Raymond Swan
Principal

Keeping Children and Staff Safe

Gorey Educate Together's main Covid-19 safety measures include:

- ✓ Children and school staff not attending school if they or a member of their household have one or more Covid-19 symptoms, i.e. **high temperature; cough; shortness of breath or breathing difficulties; loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste.** (Phone your doctor and follow HSE guidance on self-isolation.)
- ✓ Children and school staff not attending school if they have been identified by the HSE as a contact for a person with Covid-19.
- ✓ Children and school staff not attending school within 14 days of overseas travel (to non-green listed countries.)
- ✓ Restricting access to the school building during the current public health situation to pupils and staff only. Parents will drop/collect the children to/from school staff outside our building, keeping 2 metres away from staff and other parents as much as is possible. For callers to the school, a new hatch window is in place outside the main office.
- ✓ Respiratory Hygiene: Continuing to teach the children about cough and sneeze etiquette. All school staff will wear face coverings when a distance of 2m from children and other staff cannot be maintained (clear face visor or/and mask.) It is not recommended that children attending primary school wear face coverings.
- ✓ Hand Hygiene: Improving hand washing facilities throughout the school, including warm water, liquid soap and paper towels. Additionally, hand sanitisers are now in place at every classroom, as well as in other areas of the building.
- ✓ General Hygiene: Increasing cleaning hours by almost 50%, to include a new full-school-day cleaner for shared areas & equipment (such as library, PE hall, staff rooms, and equipment used by some children with special needs), frequently touched surfaces & objects (such as door handles and stair rails), and cleaning related to injuries/first aid and any sickness. Also, all pupils and staff will have a bigger part to play in keeping our school clean and tidy every day. A deep clean of the school building has been completed.
- ✓ Increasing awareness of the potential risks associated with shared learning materials & books, and encouraging everyone to perform hand hygiene after using any shared item. The children will not share pencils, crayons, colouring pencils, etc. (see 'practical information' letter.) We will eliminate higher-risk materials, such as shared playdough and shared dressing up costumes & masks that cover the head or face. Equipment or toys that are visibly dirty or contaminated with blood or body fluids will be taken out of use immediately for cleaning or disposal. Pupils & staff will clean school iPads between uses. Pupils & staff will also wipe down certain equipment or toys, (weekly/monthly schedule.) The school will prioritise the more thorough cleaning of equipment used by the few children who regularly place items in their mouths, (including some children with special needs.) Unfortunately, it is not feasible for the school to wash all classroom equipment and toys on a regular basis, nor wipe down all rental books and essential PE equipment (such as balls) between uses. Again, good hand hygiene will be emphasised. We will trial strategies such as 'storage periods' between uses of Rental Books, Maths Equipment, etc. by different Class Bubbles.
- ✓ Providing Covid-19 induction training for all school staff, to ensure that agreed processes for dealing with suspected cases are implemented and that the instructions of HSE Public Health are followed. The school principal will always fully and promptly cooperate with HSE Public Health. "HSE Public Health will: inform any staff/parents or students who come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process; contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made; and advise on the appropriate action, on a case-by-case basis, that should be taken vis-à-vis the operation of the school." It is very important that all families and staff are open and honest to their Doctor (or the HSE) regarding Covid-19. Covid-19 can affect anyone.
- ✓ **Physical Distancing:** Increasing separation and decreasing interaction at Gorey Educate Together, within reasonable limits for children in Junior Infants to Second Class and children in Third to Sixth Classes. Staggering morning arrivals and afternoon departures, to help prevent the gathering of crowds on or near the grounds of the school and to facilitate social distancing. (Class times remain almost the same overall.)

Class Bubbles will operate throughout the school. Example: During schooltime, a child in Junior Infants will only interact, learn and play with their 24 classmates. They will not play or undertake activities with the other 400 children at Gorey Educate Together. Staggered playground times will apply. Staff movements between Class Bubbles will be limited as much as is possible, e.g. Special Needs Assistant and Support Teacher. Unfortunately, indoor assemblies, school trips and after-school activities & clubs are suspended until further notice.

Classrooms have been reconfigured, with maximum space between every double-desk, and with all children facing in one direction when seated. (It is a given that the children will not remain seated in this way (or seated at all) for some parts of their school day. However, they will do so more than they did in the past (Junior Infant – 2nd Class) or much more than they did in the past (3rd Class – 6th Class) We are *decreasing* interaction, but we are not eliminating it. Fun & friendship remains an essential element of school life.)

What about the optional 'Pods' within Class Bubbles?

At Gorey Educate Together, our emphasis is on safe Class Bubbles: with very good hand- and respiratory-hygiene, with maximum space between every-double desk, in large & modern classrooms, and with no contact with other Class Bubbles.

Pods of 4-6 children, who must always sit and learn and play together only, are not being established at this school (or at several other primary schools.)

It can be expected that a child might interact/socialise/play/learn with any of their 24 classmates over the course of a school week.

Attempting to eliminate this would be *highly impractical* and it could be detrimental to the wellbeing of the children and the positive atmosphere of the school. Again, a balanced approach is best.

We will teach the children to interact and play and learn in a way that decreases close contact, as much as is possible/reasonable for pupils in Junior Infants – 2nd class and as much as is possible/reasonable for pupils in 3rd-6th classes. This will also involve adjusting some of our teaching approaches.

As an additional safety measure for each Class Bubble, the teacher will keep an up-to-date written Seating Plan throughout the school year. I.e. we can identify/report on the children who were closest together for most *seated* work, if required for contact tracing. (In any case, we would hope that contact tracers would look at an entire room of children, rather than just 4-6 children within that room, whether Pods were in place or not.)

Looking after pupils' wellbeing

Our main measures include:

- ✓ Helping the children to feel safe in Gorey Educate Together from the first day of school through care & kindness and a sense of calm.
- ✓ Listening to pupils and involving them in the setting of new rules and routines to keep children and staff safe.
- ✓ Recognizing that 2020 is not an ordinary 'Back to School' year. We will work harder and for longer on settling all children back into the school. We will create space, time and planned activities that enable the children to re-connect with all their classmates and re-form relationships with staff. The first weeks of school will see more language work (including talk & discussion, English & Irish,) use of the grounds of the school for socially-distanced outdoor learning, additional PE and Social/Personal/Health Education lessons, additional time for maths activities, as well as learning through play and socialisation. The ability to concentrate will be re-established. (This is all in line with current School Reopening Guidance from the Department of Education.)
- ✓ "Slowing down to catch up," (National Educational Psychological Service.) The children have had many different learning experiences over the past 5 months, and we look forward to hearing more about these. Regarding the Primary School Curriculum, there will be no pressure to 'catch up.' Overall, September (at least) will be a month to revisit and revise, in a stimulating way. There will be no rush to commence written homework or 'spelling tests.'
- ✓ **Providing Tiered Levels of Support:**
 - Recognising that many pupils need little support with returning to school. They are looking forward to it. Their resilience, confidence and sense of fun will be of major support to their classmates.
 - Recognizing that some pupils will go through a settling in period, or that they may settle in well initially but 'wobble' later because of certain school changes.
 - Recognizing that a few pupils will need a high level of support in returning to (or starting) school.

We will be versatile and well-informed in providing all the necessary supports. Our class teachers, support teachers and Special Needs Assistants will make full use of Social/Personal/Health Education programmes & resources, as well as 2020 guidance from the Department of Education & Skills and the National Educational Psychological Service, along with established wellbeing strategies such as Friends for Life and mindfulness.

Some supports will be delivered to whole classes, others to small groups or even to individual children.

We will provide home programmes for the very small number of pupils who cannot yet return to school, on the advice of their treating medical consultant. We will also keep them connected, to some extent, with their teacher and classmates via online or other methods (such letters/pen pals.)



Some reconfigured classrooms at Gorey Educate, with maximum space between every double-desk, and with all surplus tables, etc. removed.

Preparation of 'cleaning packs' for use by pupils & staff during the school day.

