Scoil Bhríde,

Nurney,

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**School Re-opening January 2022**

Dear Parents/ Guardians and pupils,

We hope you had a lovely Christmas break, and we are happy to be re-opening all classes as planned tomorrow, Thursday the 6th of January. We are down three staff members, but by the grace of God and lots of phone calls we have secured substitution cover for the day.

Over the next few months, we will continue to take all reasonable precautions to keep the school open safely and to implement best practices to mitigate the risks associated with Covid-19. As I am sure you know, the Covid-19 situation nationally is increasingly difficult at the moment. Although it appears that the Omicron variant is milder and causing less serious illness for most people, it is spreading rapidly across all age groups in Ireland currently.

Since September 2020, we have had to manage high levels of staff absences due to Covid-19, self-isolation rules, restricted movement rules, close contact rules, and non-Covid related absences. Unfortunately, we expect the level of absenteeism to be even higher in the coming weeks as more and more people test positive or are identified as close contacts, alongside the continued non-Covid related absences. We are doing everything in our power to keep the school open, however there is a high likelihood of changes to your child's SNA or teacher in the coming weeks and months. As a last resort, it may at times be necessary to close a classroom / classrooms due to lack of staffing, or due to a positive case within a classroom. We will try to give you as much notice as possible if this must occur, however these decisions may have to be taken late at night or early in the morning before the school opens. We apologize for any inconvenience that this may cause over the coming weeks, but the health and safety of our students and staff will continue to be our top priority, as it has been throughout the pandemic.

Continued support from our families will be crucial for the remainder of this school year as we face more obstacles due to the global pandemic.  We appreciate your support in implementing Covid-19 guidelines at home as we implement them in school. Thanks to the dedicated work of parents, staff and school management, the school only had ‘2’ Covid-19 cases from September 2020 to mid-December 2021. However, in the 2 weeks prior to Christmas we had ‘8’.

Please find the most recent advice from the HSE in relation to numerous possible Covid-19 scenarios and how they should be managed. There have been some updates to this since advice before the Christmas holidays, especially in relation to antigen testing, and children not returning to school until they are 48 hours symptom free (regardless of a negative antigen result). This is the advice that the school has to implement upon our return and has been designed by the HSE to keep us all as safe as possible.

The key symptoms to look out for in relation to Covid-19 have been updated as follows:

* *fever of 38.0⁰C or higher without another medical reason (such as chickenpox or a urine infection) OR*
* *new cough or difficulty breathing or worsening of an existing breathing problem, OR*
* *loss of sense of smell, change in sense of taste, or loss of sense of taste (if your child is able to say this) OR*
* *other minor breathing or chest problems in a child who has been in contact with an ill person, is part of an outbreak or is a contact of someone who has COVID-19*
* *Other symptoms associated with COVID-19 include fatigue, nasal congestion, conjunctivitis, sore throat, headache, muscle/joint pain, skin rash, nausea or vomiting, diarrhoea, chills or dizziness.*
* Symptoms may present differently in different age groups and with different variants of the virus. Some symptoms may also be confused with common cold, hay-fever or flu.
* If you have any new acute symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, self-isolate and contact your GP.
* However, if you or your child’s symptoms are very mild then stay at home, reassess after 48 hours and contact your GP for advice.

**If your child displays any of the symptoms above, please, for the safety of all, keep them at home.**

Latest guide for children aged under 13:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/algorithms/Isolation%20quick%20guide%20under%2013s.pdf>

We appreciate your continued support in following these protocols. We understand that they can be disruptive, however keeping a child at home for two or three days to allow them to recover from a minor illness, and/ or seeking a doctor's advice in relation to any Covid-19 symptoms, can help us to prevent outbreaks in the school and any closures associated with that. Please seek medical advice from your GP or out of hours service if you have any concerns about your son/ daughter possibly displaying symptoms of Covid-19.

We are greatly looking forward to seeing our pupils back as planned tomorrow. However, we understand that the return to school is a risk and that some families feel that they would rather not take this risk at this time. If this is the case, please let me know via email or phone, as it will help us to organize our classrooms for the coming weeks. If you wish to keep your son/ daughter at home and would like some schoolwork for this time, you can access the home learning page here [Home Learning (nurneyns.com)](https://www.nurneyns.com/home-learning) from our school website which has been specifically designed to match the topics your child would have doing onsite in class. The books needed are also online on our home learning page.

If your child is currently unable to return to school due to a positive Covid-19 test or being identified as a close contact, please let us know this too.

1. **If pupils are at all unwell (even with a non-respiratory illness), please keep them at home; we will send them home if we have concerns about their health - this is for the safety of all and to ensure we can keep our teachers and SNAs available for work.**
2. **Pupils from 3rd class up must continue to wear masks in school. This is for the safety of all and to ensure we can keep our teachers and SNAs available for work.**
3. **With the *'cold snap'* truly now begun, please also remember to ensure pupils are wrapped up warm in the mornings; we still must keep windows open to provide adequate ventilation (even with HEPA filters). This is for the safety of all and to ensure we can keep our teachers and SNAs available for work.**

We look forward to welcoming your children back tomorrow, and thank you for your continued support.

Kind regards,

Vinny Thorpe

*Principal*