

Mountmellick Community School

COVID 19 Response Plan

August 2020

School Policy

Mountmellick Community School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our students. To ensure that, we have developed the following COVID-19 Response Plan.

The BOM/ETB and all school staff are responsible for the implementation of this plan and a combined effort will help contain the spread of the virus. We will:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff providing up to date information to our staff and students on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct handwashing techniques
- agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan in relation to summer provision
- inform all staff and students of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the public health guidance and direction of the Department of Education
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and students engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education
- implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- provide instructions for staff and students to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education advice.

All school staff will be consulted on an ongoing basis and feedback is encouraged on any concerns, issues or suggestions. This can be done through the Lead Worker Representative(s), who will be supported in line with the agreement between the Department and education partners.

1: Introduction

The Minister for Education has published “The Roadmap for the Full Return to School” on the 27th July 2020. It sets out what the operation of schools will look like and the range of supports which will be available in a COVID-19 context. It has been developed in line with public health advice issued by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) and in compliance with the “Return to Work Safely Protocols” developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work.

This document sets out the information that Mountmellick Community School has implemented to facilitate a safe re-opening of our school , including a COVID-19 policy, lead worker representative/s (LWR) and a process to deal with a suspected case of COVID-19. The purpose of this document is to provide clear and helpful guidance for the safe operation of post primary schools through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19. It provides key messages to minimise the risk of COVID-19 for staff, students, families and the wider community while recognising the importance of education for the health and wellbeing of students and society as a whole. This document focuses on the practical steps which can be taken in Mountmellick Community School to minimise the risk of infection while recognising that no interpersonal activity is without risk of transmission of infection at any time. The contents of this document are supported by the public health advice provided by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) for the safe reopening of schools and educational facilities.

One of the key challenges is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for teaching and learning. This document identifies the steps Mountmellick Community School is taking to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school and the steps that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of the spread within the school itself in the event that COVID-19 is introduced to the school.

2: What is a COVID-19 Response Plan?

A COVID-19 Response Plan is designed to support our staff and Board of Management in putting measures in place that aim to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our school

environment. Our COVID-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for our school to meet the Government's 'Return to Work Safely Protocol' and the Department of Education plan for school reopening that will aim to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in the school environment.

It is important that the resumption of school based teaching and learning and the reopening of schools complies with the public health advice to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. The response plan supports the sustainable reopening of school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and students while promoting the educational and development needs of the children in the school. This is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice and any other relevant agreement with education partners as appropriate for post primary schools. In line with national advice and guidance, the key to a safe and sustainable return to work, and reopening of schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the Board of Management, staff, students and parents. The assistance and cooperation of all staff, students, parents, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

3: Planning and Preparing for Return to School

The return to the workplace will be done safely and in strict adherence to the public health advice and any guidance issued by the Department of Education. Details for the safe reopening of our school and the applicable relevant controls are outlined in this document. Before reopening schools for the 2020/21 school year Mountmellick Community School will have processes in place to include the following:

- Means of keeping up to date with public health advice, changes to any Government plans for the safe reopening of society and Department of Education updates;
- Means of passing on this information in a timely manner to staff, students, parents and others as required;
- Ensured that staff have reviewed the training materials provided by the Department of Education
- Provided staff with access to the Return to Work (RTW) form
- Identified a Lead Worker representative
- Displayed posters and other signage to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19

- Made the necessary changes to the school layout to support the redesign of classrooms to support physical distancing
- Removed unnecessary clutter to facilitate ongoing cleaning of the school but take into account the importance of having educational materials to create a stimulating learning environment
- Updated the Health and Safety Risk Assessment COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of post primary schools
- Made necessary arrangements to restrict access to the school and maintain records of contacts to the school

3.1: Induction Training: All staff will undertake and complete COVID-19 Induction Training prior to returning to the school building. The aim of such training is to ensure that staff have full knowledge and understanding of the following:

- Latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health
- COVID-19 symptoms
- What to do if a staff member or pupil develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at school
- Outline of the COVID-19 response plan

Staff will be kept fully informed of the control measures in place in the school and their duties and responsibilities in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and will be updated with any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities. If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the COVID-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal who is supported in this role by the Board of Management

3.2: Procedure for Returning to Work: In order to return to the workplace, staff will complete a Return to Work form, which is available electronically or from the Principal. A RTW form should be completed and returned 3 days before returning to work. There are some school staff who may be unable to return to school. Current public health guidelines have identified these people as being in groups who are defined as being at very high risk. Further details are available from school management.

3.3: Lead Worker Representative The protocol provides for the appointment of a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) in each workplace. The LWR will work in collaboration with

the school management and the Board of Management to assist in the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19 and monitor adherence to those measures and to be involved in communicating the health advice around COVID19 in the workplace. Strong communication and a shared collaborative approach is key to protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Adherence to the Return to Work Protocol will only be achieved if everyone has a shared obligation in implementing the measures contained within the Protocol in their place of work.

3.4: Signage: Mountmellick Community School will display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene. This will be displayed in prominent areas such as offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms and toilets.

3.5: Making Changes to School Layout: Maintaining physical distancing in the school environment is recommended as one of the key control measures to minimize the risk of the introduction and spread of COVID-19. In Mountmellick Community School we have reconfigured classrooms and other areas to support physical distancing in line with the guidance in advance of school reopening.

3.6: Health and Safety Risk Assessment: COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. Before re-opening, Mountmellick Community School will review our emergency procedures involving, fire safety, first aid, accidents and dangerous occurrences to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the schools existing emergency procedures will be documented and incorporated into the school's safety statement. We will also review our existing risk assessments to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the school's current risk assessments will be documented and be incorporated into the school's statement.

3.7: Access to School and Contact Log. In line with instructions from the Department of Education and Skills, access to the school building will be in line with agreed school procedures.

Arrangement for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal. In line with Department of Education instructions and as communicated to all Parents / Guardians, non-staff members are not allowed enter the school unless the visit is absolutely essential and organised in advance with the school Principal.

Parents / guardians are asked to not come to the reception when collecting a student. They should phone the school office, indicate that they are in the car park to collect the student. The secretary will sign the sign out book as confirmation and then let the student leave.

The Department of Education Inspectorate may also need to visit schools to support them as appropriate in the implementation of public health advice relating to creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

The prompt identification and isolation of potentially infectious individuals is a crucial step in restricting the spread of the virus and protecting the health and safety of the individuals themselves and other staff, contractors and visitors at the workplace. A detailed sign in/sign out log of those entering the school facilities will be maintained.

4: Control Measures - To prevent Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 in Schools

One of the key messages to manage the risks of COVID-19 is to do everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school. If infection is not introduced it cannot be spread. The risk of spreading the infection once introduced exists in all interpersonal interactions; student - student, teacher - teacher and teacher- student, and must be managed in all settings.

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID -19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, students, parents and visitors as far as possible within the school. The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

It is critical that staff, students, parents and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined and that they fully cooperate with all health and safety requirements.

Staff, should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to comply with health and safety requirements and to take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves, their colleagues and other parties within the workplace.

4.1: How to minimise the Risk of Introduction of COVID-19 into schools:

We will promote awareness of COVID-19 symptoms to include:

- Advise staff and students that have symptoms not to attend school, to phone their doctor and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation;
- Advise staff and students not to attend school if they have been identified by the HSE as contact for a person with COVID-19 and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
- Advise staff and students that develop symptoms at school to bring this to the attention of the principal (or Deputy Principal if the Principal is unavailable) promptly;
- Ensure that staff and students know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school
- Advise everyone entering the school building that they need to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitizer
- Advise all relevant parties that visitors to the school during the day should be by prior arrangement with the Principal and should be received at a specific contact point
- Physical distancing of two metres should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

4.2: Know the Symptoms of COVID-19

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- High temperature
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

4.3: Respiratory Hygiene

All members of the school community will be expected / required to follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and safely into a nearby bin.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

4.4: Hygiene

Staff and students should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands. As a school community we will promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the schools on how to wash your hands.

- Hygiene – Students are expected to wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds using hot water and soap at various points throughout the school day i.e. before and after each break. This is in addition to the use of hand sanitiser as referred to below.
- Hand Sanitising Stations are located as follows – All Student entrances, outside each toilet block, inside the staff room door, in each classroom, in all meeting areas, Extra resources will be available in all of the specialist rooms to ensure desks, tables, equipment etc. are cleaned down at the start and end of each class and when sharing equipment between students. They should be used throughout the day.
- Despite the manner in which class groups are assigned to base class locations, some movement will be required to facilitate higher level English, Irish & Maths along with along with all of the optional / specialist subjects. In these circumstances, where a student is occupying a desk that another student has previously occupied since the previous day, wipes will be available to the student, in line with government guidelines to wipe down the table and chair. These wipes will then be place in a specific bin in the classroom after which the student will sanitize their hands.

4.5: Physical Distancing:

Physical Distancing falls into two categories

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing interaction

Given that each school setting is different in terms of (i) location; (ii) physical layout (iii) available space within the school; and (iv) student numbers; schools themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate reconfigurations / operational changes necessary to maintain physical distancing.

In Mountmellick Community School, we have complied with the various aspects of advice and requirements from the Department of Education and other relevant agencies including:

1. Reconfiguration of class spaces to maximise physical distancing;
2. Utilising and reconfiguring all available space in the school in order to maximise physical distancing;
3. Review Timetables;
4. Reconfiguring Classes;
5. Consider Use of Live Streaming within the School
6. Accessing available spaces within the local community

We have been able to comply with national requirements by engaging with points 1 to 4. Due to a number of factors including our large classrooms and the number of large study halls, lunch halls, locker rooms, we did not need to include steps 5 and 6.

The resulting changes in our school for the coming year include the following:

- Classrooms - Student based classrooms are in operation for the coming year. Where students are moving to specialist / option classrooms, they should, where possible sit with their base classroom classmates.
- Restructuring of our school day: Following investigation / consideration of a number of alternatives, we have established that changing from a forty-minute class period to a one hour class period will reduce the movement of students about our school by a factor of 8,500 student movements per week from one classroom to the next during the changeover of class. While the introduction of one hour has established educational benefits, the health and safety benefits associated with this measure are also to be welcomed in the current circumstances.
- Restructuring our start and finish time by having class from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00 am to 1.20 pm on Friday also significantly reduces the health risks as it removes 20% of our lunch breaks per week thus reducing student interaction
- A number of one way systems will be in use in our school corridors to minimise contact in situations where students have to come into contact with each other.
- Students will be informed upon return of details relating to staggered lunch breaks / staggered morning breaks / staggered access to lockers / entry and exit routes. These will include.
- Arrival at school: The school building will be open from 8.15 am to facilitate the arrival of staff and any students who arrive on school buses. In the interest of the

gradual access of all other students to school, 3rd and 6th year students are asked to arrive at school between 8.30 and 8.40, 2nd and 5th year students between 8.40 and 8.50 with 1st year and TY students arriving between 8.50 and 9.00. Upon arrival, students should go to their lockers, make the necessary changes that are required until the next access at lunchtime and proceed to their first class. Class for 3rd and 6th will commence at 9.00, 2nd and 5th at 9.05 and 1st year and TY at 9.10

- Morning Break: 2nd Year, TY and 5th Year will have their morning at the earlier time of 10.40 to 11.00. 1st, 3rd and 6th year will have their morning break from 11.00 to 11.20.
- Lunch time: A similar arrangement will apply at lunchtime where an “early lunch” will take place from 12.40 to 1.20 with the scheduled regular lunch break from 1.20 to 2.00. Arrangements will be made where 1st year students will be given time prior to the commencement of lunch to eat in class under the supervision of their teacher to further facilitate social distancing.
- End of school day: At the end of the school day, class for 1st year and TY will finish twenty minutes early, 2nd and 5th year ten minutes early and at the regular time for 3rd and 6th year. This will facilitate access to lockers where students are appropriately spaced apart and an appropriate graduated departure from school
- Extra staff supervisors will be in place due to the measures outlined above. Teachers scheduled for class during the first period of the day will be in class from 9.00 to facilitate arrival between 9.00 and 9.05 / 9.10.
- Teachers of students who finish ten / twenty minutes early at the end of the school day will accompany their class group to the locker / lunch hall and observe their exit from the school building. Students who are released ten / twenty minutes early from class are expected to have left the school building during the ten-minute period following their release from class.

4.6: School meals

Similar to many other schools, our school canteen will not re-open at the start of the school year and as such, students will need to bring their food for lunch and break with them to school. However, we are actively considering the various methods of re-opening of this facility at a later stage during the course of the year.

4.7: Study

Similar to our school canteen, study will not commence at the start of the school year with the situation being monitored during the month of September.

4.8: Lockers

We have implemented the advice from the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) in relation to student lockers. As we have so many large open areas, we do not need to have lockers in the corridors which leads to obvious congestions. To further minimise congestion the previously used method where all students in a particular year group had their locker in one area has been dispensed with. From the 31st August, student lockers will be arranged in a linear fashion with a first year locker placed next to a second year locker, next to a third year etc. Other measures including specific year group access at particular times addressing the issue of student congregation at lockers.

No items can be left lying on desks / tables in open areas or in any other areas in the school. All personal belongings must be kept in the student locker or be kept with the student.

4.9: Uniform

As outlined by the Department of Education in <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/389bd-topics-being-raised-on-the-back-to-school-helpline/#> *there is no evidence to suggest that asking children to wear freshly laundered uniforms or clothes every day is an effective measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. School uniforms or clothes should be laundered regularly in line with usual good hygiene. If uniforms or clothes are visibly dirty or soiled, they should be laundered.* If a student wishes to wear their PE uniform / gear to school on the day that they have PE, this can be organised in advance.

4.10: Cash

No member of staff will be in a position to handle cash from students / Parents until further notice in line with government guidance. The online electronic payment system facilitates payment for various items

4.11: Use of PPE in Schools:

The Board of Management of Mountmellick Community School has adopted the recommendation issued by the Minister for Education to all schools on the 7th August 2020 and further clarified by the ACCS on the 19th August. This includes the following:

Cloth face coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Cloth face coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

It is therefore a requirement that teachers, staff and students attending post primary schools wear a face covering when a physical distance of two metres from other staff or students cannot be maintained. Masks can be of a plain or patterned nature and masks with graphics, text or messages are not permitted. In circumstances where a staff member is separated from others within a two metre distance by a block wall, a physical barrier or by a Perspex barrier a mask is not required. In certain situations, the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with students with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties.

All students on the post primary transport scheme should be asked to wear face coverings unless there is a good reason not to do so.

Cloth face coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

Face coverings should be stored in a space designated for each student that is separate from others when not being worn (e.g., in individually labelled containers or bags).

Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.

Face coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe. Mountmellick Community School will have additional disposable face coverings available for students, teachers, and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

On the use of face masks by staff, Mountmellick Community School will consider the specific circumstances where the use of medical face masks, to EU Standard EN 14683, may

be more appropriate for staff (for example where staff by necessity need to be in close and continued proximity with students with intimate care needs such as SNAs or School Bus Escorts).

Please note that wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

5: Hygiene and Cleaning in Schools

Mountmellick Community School has undergone a deep clean of our school during the Summer break. We are also implementing increased cleaning schedules from the start of the new school year. These new measures will include a focus on sanitising touch points i.e. handrails, door handles, in addition to our normal schedule of cleaning.

Students will be provided to enable them to wipe down their desk, chair and surface before leaving the room. All staff will have access to cleaning products and will be required to maintain cleanliness of their own work area. Under no circumstances should these cleaning materials be removed from the building. Staff should thoroughly clean and disinfect their work area before and after use each day. There will be regular collection of used waste disposal bags from offices and other areas within the school facility. Shower facilities shall not be available for use by staff or students due to the increased risk associated with communal shower facilities and areas. This shall be reviewed in line with government guidance.

5.1: Cleaning/Disinfecting rooms where a student/staff member with suspected COVID-19 was present. The rooms will be cleaned as soon as practicable possible. Once the room is vacated the room will not be reused until it has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry. Disinfection only works on things that are clean. Therefore, when disinfection is required it is always in addition to cleaning. Person/s assigned to cleaning should avoid touching their face while they are cleaning and household gloves and a plastic apron. Clean the environment and furniture using disposable cleaning cloths and a household detergent followed by disinfection with a chlorine based product (household bleach). Pay special attention to frequently touched surfaces, the back of chairs, couches, door handles and any surfaces that are visibly soiled with body fluids. Once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be reused.

6) Dealing with a Suspected Case of COVID-19

Staff or students should not attend school if displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. The following outlines how Mountmellick Community School will deal with a suspected case that may arise in our school setting. A designated isolation area will be identified within the school building. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of COVID-19 has been considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases is in place. The designated isolation area is behind a closed door and away from other staff and students. If a staff member/student displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, the following are the procedures that will be implemented:

- If the person with the suspected case is a student, the parents/guardians will be contacted immediately;
- Isolate the person and accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2 metres away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from the symptomatic person at all times;
- If it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2m a staff member caring for a student should wear a face covering or mask. Gloves are not necessary as the virus does not pass through skin;
- Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms if one is available. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises;
- Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents and call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home;
- Facilitate the person presenting with symptoms remaining in isolation if they cannot immediately go home and facilitate them calling their doctor. The individual should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects. Advice should be given to the person presenting with symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with the disposable tissue provided when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the waste bag provided;
- If the person is well enough to go home, arrange for them to be transported home by a family member, as soon as possible and advise them to inform their general

practitioner by phone of their symptoms. Public transport of any kind should not be used;

- If they are too unwell to go home or advice is required, contact 999 or 112 and inform them that the sick person is a COVID-19 suspect;
- Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery;
- Arrange for appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and work areas involved. The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of COVID-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff and student confidentiality is essential at all times.

7) Blended Learning

Blended Learning Plan – as the Covid-19 crisis may continue to evolve, Mountmellick Community School will take appropriate steps to safeguard our school community while at the same time maintaining teaching and learning insofar as possible. This may see a return to distance learning / blended learning environment using Zoom and other technologies. Further details will be circulated if and when necessary.

Ratified by the Board of Management: 27th August 2020