

Updated Covid-19 School Response Plan: March, 2021

Introduction

This Covid-19 Response Plan is designed to support the staff and Board of Management (BOM) in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in CAHIR NATIONAL SCHOOL. Originally devised in August, this Covid 19- Response plan takes account of the revised 'The COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools that has been re-examined by DE to ensure that they remain fully in compliance with the Government's Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19 and the 'Work Safely Protocol' which has been developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's '*Return to Work Safely Protocol*', the Department of Education & Skills (DES) plan for school re-opening and to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the school environment. The plan incorporates current advice about measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the community issued by the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

It is important that the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities comply with the protocol to minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued by NPHE continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address MAY ALSO CHANGE.

The Response Plan will support the sustainable re-opening of our school where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and pupils while promoting the educational and development needs of the children in the school.

In line with the Return to Work Safely Protocol, the key to a safe and continued return to work, and re-opening of our schools requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the BOM, staff, pupils and parents/guardians.

This document aims to provide details of:

- 1. Covid-19 School Policy**
- 2. Planning and Preparing for Return to School**
- 3. Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative**
- 4. Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**
- 5. General Advice to prevent the spread of the virus**
- 6. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**
- 7. Control Measures**
- 8. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**
- 9. Staff Duties**
- 10. Covid-related Absence Management**
- 11. Employee Assistance and Well-being Programme**

The assistance and co-operation of all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided in this document. However, should errors or omissions be identified, please notify us so that appropriate measures can be taken to rectify same.

NOTE: The plan is a live working document and may be reviewed and amended to take into account new guidance from www.Gov.ie, www.dbei.ie, www.hse.ie, www.hpsc.ie, www.hsa.ie; www.education.ie.

1. Cahir National School Covid-19 Policy

This Covid-19 policy outlines our commitment as a school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the Principal Teacher and the Chairperson of the Board of Management and brought to the attention of staff, parents/guardians and others.

Covid-19 Policy Statement

Cahir National School is committed to providing a safe and healthy workplace for all our staff and a safe learning environment for all our pupils. To ensure that, we have developed the following Covid-19 Response Plan. The BOM 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:

1. continue to monitor our Covid-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff
2. provide up-to-date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and www.gov.ie
3. display information on the signs and symptoms of Covid-19 and correct hand-washing techniques
4. agree with staff, a WORKER REPRESENTATIVE who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan
5. inform all staff and pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
6. adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the DES
7. keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
8. ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction/familiarisation briefing provided by the DES
9. implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of Covid-19 while at school
10. provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of Covid-19 during school time
11. implement cleaning in line with DES 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: Ms Clara Brosnan**

Signed: Jean Mac Gearailt

2. Planning & Preparing for Return to School

The BOM aims to facilitate the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the return to the workplace of staff. The return to work must be done safely and in strict adherence to the advice and instructions of public health authorities and the Government.

Details for the re-opening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

School Buildings

Before re-opening school the following must be checked:

1. Does the water system need flushing at outlets following low usage to prevent Legionella disease?
2. Has school equipment and mechanical ventilation been checked for signs of deterioration or damage before being used again?
3. Have bin collections and other essential services resumed?

Signage

Cahir National School will be required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of Covid-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene. Signage appropriate for primary school pupils (and versions in Gaeilge) is available at <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/>

Signage in the school is being regularly assessed and updated.

Procedures for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW) Form**, made available by the school. A RTW Form should only be completed **at least 3 days** prior to any proposed return to the workplace. This RTW form takes account of the new revised checklist.

On receipt of the completed form, the Principal will provide and remind staff of

1. Details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff prior to the return to the workplace and
2. Details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

3. Return to work safely & Lead Worker Representative

Responsibility for the development and implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies primarily with the Board of Management and the School Leadership.

The Return to Work Safely protocol provides for an agreed procedure between management and staff to appoint a Lead Worker Representative to carry out a specific role. The process for appointment of the Lead Worker Representative will be circulated by the DES in advance of the re-opening of schools.

The role of the Worker Representative is to ensure that Covid-19 measures are adhered to in the workplace as follows:

1. Work collaboratively with the employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of employees in relation to Covid-19
2. Promote good hygiene practices such as washing hands regularly and maintaining good respiratory etiquette along with maintaining social distancing in accordance with public health advice
3. Assist with the implementation of measures to suppress Covid-19 in the workplace
4. Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19
5. Consult with colleagues on matters relating to Covid-19 in the workplace
6. Make representations on behalf of colleagues on matters relating to Covid-19 in the workplace.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the Covid-19 Response Plan and control measures or the adherence to such control measures by staff, parents/guardians, contractors or visitors, he/she should contact the Lead Worker Representative who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

Name of Lead Worker Representative: MS Clara Brosnan

Contact Details: 064 6642244

All staff, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors have a responsibility both as individuals and collectively to have due regard for their own health and safety and that of others and to assist with the implementation of the Covid-19 Response Plan and associated control measures.

4. Safety Statement & Risk Assessment

Covid-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. A Risk Assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 in school settings is attached. (See APPENDIX 1)

It is important that schools review their 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 school's existing emergency procedures should be documented.

Schools should also review their existing risk assessments to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's Covid-19 Response Plan and any changes to the current risk assessments should also be documented.

5. General Advice to prevent the spread of the virus

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

1. High temperature
2. Cough
3. Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
4. Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

The best way to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in a school is to minimise the risk of introduction of the disease into the school setting in the first place.

This can be achieved through the following measures:

1. Promote awareness of Covid-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors

2. Advise staff and parents of pupils who have symptoms of Covid-19 or other acute infectious diseases **NOT** to attend school, to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation.
3. Advise staff and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as contact of a person with Covid-19 not to attend school and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
4. Ensure that staff and pupils know what to do if they develop symptoms at school
5. Everyone entering the school building should be required to perform hand hygiene with hand sanitiser.
6. Visitors to school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contact point.

Staff, pupils and visitors should at all times adhere to the up-to-date advice and instructions of the public health authorities in relation to protecting oneself and others against the risk posed by the Covid-19 virus.

Updated advice from the HSE is available on its website - <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

The Department of Education & Skills will ensure all updated advice is circulated to schools. Cahir National School will arrange for this advice to be circulated to staff, pupils and visitors in a timely manner.

The Department has been working closely with the HSE and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) to develop health advice which has been tailored to the needs of schools in order to support schools in planning for the re-opening in autumn. **The link to the Interim Public Health recommendations for the re-opening of schools can be found at [hse.ie](https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/)**

The advice will continue to be updated in line with public health advice generally and will inform the development of more detailed guidance for schools by the Department of Education & Skills.

<https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/interim-recommendations-for-the-reopening-of-schools-and-educational-facilities.pdf>

Managing the risk of spread of Covid-19

WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Regular hand-washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of Covid-19. Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

HAND HYGIENE AND HAND SANITISERS

Hand hygiene can also be achieved by the use of hand sanitisers (when hands are clean). Hand sanitisers congestion of staff and pupils waiting to use hand washing facilities. They will be available at entry and exit points and in each classroom.

AVOID TOUCHING EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose and mouth.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing is recommended to reduce the spread of infection in the workplace.

Guidance on the physical distancing requirements will be informed by the public health advice for schools.

Ventilation

The Department has published guidance setting out the practical steps for good ventilation on accordance with public health advice 'Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools'.

Windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during breaktimes or lunchtimes (Assuming not in use) and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance provides that good ventilation can be achieved in classrooms without causing discomfort.

PRACTISE RESPIRATORY HYGIENE

Make sure that all (i.e. you and the people around you) 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. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

Good hygiene practices and washing your hands properly and regularly can help stop the spread of the virus. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff adhere to this advice and adopt the following practices as strictly as possible:

DO

Wash your hands properly and often

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing

Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands

Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

DO NOT

Touch you eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Share objects that touch your mouth - for example, bottles, cups, cutlery etc.

People at very high risk (extremely vulnerable):

Current public health guidelines have identified groups who are defined as being at very high risk. The HSE has set out these groups, which include people who:

The list of people in very high risk groups include people who:

1. Are over 70 years of age - even if you're fit and well
2. Have had an organ transplant
3. Are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
4. Are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
5. Have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
6. Are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
7. Are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
8. Have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
9. Severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD

10. Have a condition that means you have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
11. Are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
12. Have a serious heart condition and you are pregnant

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Staff who are in this groups should self-declare on the Return to Work Form if they believe that they are at very high risk. Details of the leave arrangements that will apply will be updated by the Department of Education & Skills.

If the Board/Principal is unsure whether or not staff fall into the very high-risk category, advice will be sought from the Occupational Health Service.

6. Control Measures

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, pupils, parents/guardians and visitors as far as possible within the school.

These control measures are outlined in this document.

The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis.

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

Staff, in particular, should note that they have a legal obligation under Section 13 of the Safety, Health & 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.

The following control measures have been put in place:

I Return to Work Form

Staff will be required to complete a RTW form at least 3 days prior to any return to the school facility (see Section 2 above). The purpose of the RTW form is to get confirmation from staff that, to the best of his/her knowledge, he/she has no symptoms of Covid-19 and is not self-isolating or cocooning or awaiting the results of a Covid-19 test.

II 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 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.

Note: Induction Training for re-opening schools in the new school year will be developed by the Department in consultation with stakeholders and made available for all schools and staff.

III Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette

It is crucial that all staff, pupils, parents/guardians, contractors and visitors are familiar with, and adopt, good hand and respiratory hygiene practices.

Guidance documentation and information posters will be available at various locations within the school facility. Information posters will be prominently displayed at appropriate locations within the school facility including offices, corridors, staff room area, classrooms and toilet areas. Such are intended to inform but also remind everyone about the importance of hygiene in preventing the spread of Covid-19 virus and protecting health and safety.

Hand washing facilities and/or hand sanitisers will be available at multiple locations within the school facility and should be available in each classroom.

The Department has arranged for a drawdown framework to be established to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers and any other necessary PPE supplies for use in the school.

There is a requirement for access to hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Alcohol-based sanitiser must not be stored or used near heat or naked flame.

IV Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE will be required to be worn within the school facility according to current occupational and public health guidance.

All teachers and SNA's will be provided with medical grade masks in the EN14583 and are expected to wear them at all times in the building.

Where a suspected case of Covid-19 is identified while at school Appropriate Appropriate PPE will be available for dealing with suspected Covid-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid. This will be updated as appropriate in line with advice from the HPSC. Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

Wearing of gloves: The use of disposable gloves in the school setting by pupils or staff is not appropriate. It does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves. Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene.

V Cleaning

Arrangements for more regular and thorough cleaning of areas and surfaces within the school will be made. Regular and thorough cleaning of communal areas and frequently touched surfaces shall be conducted, in particular, toilets, door handles and kitchens. Cleaning will be performed regularly and whenever facilities or surfaces are visibly dirty.

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 pupils.

Staff must use and clean their own equipment and utensils (cup, cutlery, plate etc.)

VI Access to the school building/Contact Log

Access to the school facility will be in line with agreed school procedures.

Arrangement for necessary visitors such as contractors and parents/guardians will be restricted to essential purposes and limited to those who have obtained prior approval from the Principal.

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 should be maintained. The school should maintain a log of staff and pupil contacts.

VII First Aid/emergency procedure

The standard First Aid/emergency procedure shall continue to apply in Cahir National School. In an emergency or in case of a serious incident, call for an ambulance or the fire brigade on 112/999. Contact the Principal or nearest First Aider giving details of location and type of medical incident.

7. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

Staff or pupils should NOT attend school if displaying any symptoms of Covid-19. The following outlines how Cahir National School will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of work. A designated isolation area will be identified within the school building. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of Covid-19 will be considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases put in place. The designated isolation area shall be well away from other staff and pupils.

School staff are encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contact tracing purposes both in and out of the school setting.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while at work in Cahir National School, the following are the procedures to be implemented:

1. If the person with suspected case is a pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately
2. Isolate the person and have a procedure in place to accompany the individual to the designated isolation area via the isolation route, keeping at least 2m from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2m from the symptomatic person at all times.
3. 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
4. Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents/guardians and call their doctor and continue self-isolation at home
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Carry out an assessment of the incident which will form part of determining follow-up actions and recovery.
9. 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 confidentiality is essential at all times.

8. Staff Duties

Staff have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of their colleagues and other parties. In order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Adhere to the School Covid-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined. The co-operation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of Covid-19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play.
2. Co-ordinate and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
3. Make themselves aware of the symptoms of Covid-19 and monitor their own well-being.
4. Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of Covid-19.
5. Not return or attend school if
 - (a) they have symptoms of Covid-19 under any circumstances
 - (b) or if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus
 - (c) if they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instances staff are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
6. If they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
7. Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
8. Must inform the Principal if there are any other circumstances relating to Covid-19, not included in the form, which may need to be disclosed to facilitate their safe return to the workplace.
9. Must complete Covid-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school.
10. Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices.
11. Cooperate with any public health personal and their school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice given in the event of a case or outbreak in their school.
12. Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

9. Covid-related absence management

The management of a Covid-19 related absence will be in line with agreed procedures with DES.

10. Employee Assistance & Wellbeing Programme

The Board of Management aims to protect and support the health and well-being of all staff (physical, mental, spiritual etc.) both at work, whether in the school facility or at home and outside of work. The Board of Management is mindful that the support and promotion of staff health and well-being is particularly important in the current context where the Covid-19 pandemic has caused considerable challenges for, and disruption to, people's personal, family and social lives as well as their work arrangements.

The Board of Management aims to foster a culture and work environment that support healthy behaviours and staff well-being and shall continue to make health and well-being tools and guidance available to staff as well as organising suitable support programmes, initiatives and events.

These are challenging times for everyone. Should a staff member experience any stress or anxiety in respect of work or work arrangements, he/she should feel free to speak to the Principal.