

## **Covid Response Plan - Ardscoil Phádraig (Revised 23 August 2021)**

### **1. Introduction**

In accordance with the Work Safety Protocol each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work.

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

### **2. Covid-19 Response Plan**

The COVID-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for a school to meet the Government's 'Work Safely Protocol', to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in the school environment.

It is important that school-based teaching and learning and the operation of school facilities complies with the public health advice and guidance documents prepared by the Department. Doing so minimises the risk to students, staff and others. The response plan supports the sustainable operation of schools where the overriding objective is to protect the health of staff and students while promoting the educational and development needs of the students in the school. The COVID-19 response plan is a living document and will be updated in line with the public health advice as appropriate for post primary schools.

In line with the Work Safely Protocol, the key to maintaining a safe school requires strong communication and a shared collaborative approach between the BOM/ETB, staff, students, and parents. The assistance and cooperation of all staff, students, parents, contractors, and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

Please see Appendix G for additions to the COVID-19 Response Plans required by 'Work Safely Protocol' updates on the return to school in February 2021

### **3. School COVID-19 Policy**

A COVID-19 policy outlines the commitment of the school to implement the plan and help prevent the spread of the virus. The policy will be signed and dated by the chairperson and principal of the BOM/ETB and brought to the attention of the staff, students, parents, and others. See appendix A for the Ardscoil Phádraig COVID-19 Policy.

### **4. Reviewing the safe operation of School**

Ardscoil Phádraig in conjunction with Longford and Westmeath ETB aims to facilitate the continuation of school-based teaching and learning and a safe working environment for staff. The operation of schools must 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 operation of the school and the applicable controls are outlined in this document. Each school will need to review their current processes to ensure that they include the following:

- Arrangements to keep up to date with public health advice, changes to any Government plans for living with COVID-19 and Department of Education updates;
- Arrangements to pass on this information in a timely manner to staff, students, parents and others as required;
- Ensure 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 (details at Section 4.6)
- Made necessary arrangements to restrict access to the school and maintain records of contacts to the school

Reviewed the school buildings to check the following:

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

The following measures have been implemented in Ardscoil Phádraig in compliance with measures listed previously

- The management of Ardscoil Phádraig keep up to date with public health advice, and Department of Education updates through circular letters issued by the department, following reputable media outlets, regular checking of relevant websites e.g. [www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/](http://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/) and [www.gov.ie/en/news/7e0924-latest-updates-on-covid-19-coronavirus/](http://www.gov.ie/en/news/7e0924-latest-updates-on-covid-19-coronavirus/)
- All relevant information is passed on to staff, students, and parents in a timely fashion via email and text notification.
- All staff have reviewed the training materials provided by the Department of Education and LWETB as part of their induction on the return to work.
- All staff completed the Return-to-Work form online through the Longford and Westmeath ETB website. The school management have access to completed forms to monitor and ensure all staff completed it prior to returning to work.
- Two Lead Worker Representatives have been appointed in line with Department protocols.
- Relevant and appropriate posters in relation to Covid 19 have been place in all classrooms and other key locations throughout the school grounds. See appendix B for examples of posters used in the school.
- As recommended by the Department of Education and Skills, each class group will be assigned a base classroom in which most of their lessons will take place and each student will be assigned a desk. In order to ensure compliance with social distancing recommendations, we have reduced some class sizes.

- On arrival to the school each morning, students will be asked to go directly to their base classrooms entering through the assigned door.
- To ensure social distancing is maintained throughout the school, a one-way system of movement will operate around the school grounds. Students will be introduced to this on their return.
- Students will not have access to a student locker at the beginning of the school year. We will monitor this decision as the term progresses and as our students become accustomed to their new routines.
- To limit social interaction with personnel outside of our immediate school population, students from any class will NOT be permitted to leave school grounds during lunch break.
- School meals will continue to be available in the school in sealed containers or individually wrapped portions.
- Students cannot share any class materials with other students and therefore should ensure that they have all resources required for each subject.

## **4.1 Induction Training**

All **new** 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 BOM/ETB.

## **4.2 Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**

To return to the workplace, staff must complete a Return to Work (RTW) (Appendix C) form, which is available electronically from Longford and Westmeath ETB or from the principal. A RTW form should be completed and returned 3 days before returning to work. Staff are requested to confirm that the details in the Return to Work Form remain unchanged following subsequent periods of closure such as school holidays.

On receipt of the completed form the principal will provide details of the **Induction Training** for completion by staff prior to the return to the workplace and details of any additional health and safety measures in place in the school to facilitate the staff member's return to the school facility.

Details of the working arrangements that apply to the very high risk school staff, is in accordance with those applying for the public service generally and is detailed in the relevant Department of Education circulars available on the Department's website.

## **4.3 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 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 COVID-19 in the workplace.

Responsibility for the development, updating and implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan and the associated control measures lies with the Board of Management/ Education and Training Board and school management.

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.

If a staff member has any concerns or observations in relation to the COVID-19 Response Plan, control measures or the adherence to such measures by staff, students or others, they

should contact the LWR who will engage with school management. The role of LWR is separate to that of the Safety Representative under the health and safety legislation. However, the Safety Representative may act as the LWR if selected to do so by the staff.

**In summary, the role of the LWR is to:**

- Represent all staff in the workplace regardless of role, and be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts;
- Work collaboratively with school management to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health, and welfare of employees in relation to COVID-19;
- Keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, 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;
- Assist school management with implementing infection prevention control measures to suppress COVID19 in the workplace in line with the Work Safely Protocol and current public health advice;
- In conjunction with school management, monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Conduct regular reviews of safety measures;
- Report any issues of concern immediately to school management and keep records of such issues and actions taken to rectify them;
- Consult with the school management on the school’s COVID-19 Response Plan in the event of someone developing COVID-19 while in school including the location of an isolation area and a safe route to that area;
- Following any incident, assess with the school management any follow up action that is required;
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace;
- Make representations to school management on behalf of their colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace;

The Lead Worker Representative/s for Ardscoil Phádraig are:

<b>Name(s) of lead worker representative:</b>	<b>Contact details:</b>
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Mr Michael Domican	<a href="mailto:Mdomican.apg@lwetb.ie">Mdomican.apg@lwetb.ie</a> 0879564411
Mr Daniel Byrne	<a href="mailto:DByrne.apg@lwetb.ie">DByrne.apg@lwetb.ie</a> 0858228843

All staff, students, parents, 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 infection prevention control measures.

Full details of the arrangements which apply for the LWR in post primary schools is set out at Appendix B

#### **4.4 Signage**

Schools are required to display signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene. Age-appropriate signage provided by the Department highlight key health messages – hand washing, sneeze, and cough etiquette etc. Posters are displayed in prominent areas such as offices, corridors, staffroom area, classrooms, and toilets. See appendix C

#### **4.5 Making Changes to School Layout**

Maintaining physical distancing in the school environment is recommended as one of the key infection prevention control measures to minimize the risk of the introduction and spread of COVID-19. Ardscoil Phádraig have reconfigured classrooms and other areas to support physical distancing in line with advice from the Department of Education. All unnecessary furniture has been removed from rooms to maximise physical distancing and ensuring students are the required distance apart. Separate entrances have been allocated to each year group and a one-way system has been put in place. Teachers will meet students on the first day of their return and guide them through this process. On arrival to the school each morning, students are requested to enter by the designated entrance and should go directly to their base classrooms. To ensure social distancing is maintained it is essential that students and staff observe the one-way system of movement around the school.

#### **4.6 Health and Safety Risk Assessment**

COVID-19 represents a hazard in the context of health and safety in the school environment. A template risk assessment to identify the control measures required to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 in school settings is attached at Appendix D.

Risk assessment may be required for fire safety, first aid, accidents and other 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 should be incorporated into the school's safety statement.

Standard First Aid/emergency procedures shall continue to apply in schools. In an emergency or in case of a serious incident, schools should call for an ambulance or the fire brigade on 112/999 giving details of location and type of medical incident.

Ten members of staff have undertaken training as First Aid Responders to ensure we have the most up to date procedures in relation to first aid.

#### **4.7 Access to School and Contact Log**

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 school management. The Department of Education Inspectorate may also need to visit schools and centres for education, 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.

Ardscuil Phádraig will not be able to allow parents/guardians to come to the school without an appointment. Parents/guardians are asked to phone or email the school with any queries.

All visits to the school must be by appointment only and must be sanctioned by the Principal. A detailed Sign-in and Sign-out system and contact tracing log will be in place and maintained by the school secretary.

All visitors must enter the school at the reception area and wait for a member of staff to assist them or escort them around the school grounds if appropriate. The school will maintain a daily log of staff and student contacts. The Data Protection Commission has provided guidance on the data protection implications of the return to work protocols. This advice can be found here:

<https://www.dataprotection.ie/sites/default/files/uploads/2020-07/Data%20Protection%20implications%20of%20the%20Return%20to%20Work%20Safely%20Protocol.pdf>

All school records and data must be maintained and processed in compliance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Acts. The responsibility for compliance with the legislation rests with each school (or ETB) in their role as data controller.

## **5. Infection Prevention Control Measures - To prevent introduction and spread of Covid-19 in Schools**

To prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in school 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.

**The best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a workplace or any setting is to practice physical distancing, adopt proper hand hygiene, follow respiratory etiquette and increase ventilation.**

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.

### **How to Minimise the Risk of Introduction of COVID-19 into schools:**

It is essential that awareness of COVID-19 is promoted by;

- 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 to self-isolate or restrict their movements at home if they display any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 and contact their family doctor to arrange a test;

- Advise staff and students to follow the HSE advice if they are a close contact of a suspected/confirmed case of Covid-19
- If they have travelled outside of Ireland; in such instance staff and students are advised to consult and follow latest Government advice in relation to foreign travel.
- Advise staff and students that develop symptoms at school to bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly;
- Ensure that staff and students know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school (*details at Section 8*);
- Advise staff and students to cooperate with any public health officials and the school for contact tracing purposes and follow any public health advice in the event of a case or outbreak in the school;
- Everyone entering the school building needs to perform hand hygiene with a hand sanitiser;
- Visitors to the school during the day should be by prior arrangement and should be received at a specific contract point;
- Physical distancing of 2 metres should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

## **5.1 Know the Symptoms of COVID-19**

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

Infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 can cause illness, ranging from mild to severe, and, in some cases, can be fatal. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of cold and flu.

### **Common symptoms of coronavirus include:**

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above).
- a new cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties.

- loss or change in your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

If you have any common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), self-isolate (stay in your room) and phone your family doctor straight away to see if you need a free COVID-19 test. Other people in your household will need to restrict their movements (stay at home).

Getting an early diagnosis means, you can get the help you need and take steps to avoid spreading the virus, if you have it.

For the complete list of symptoms, please refer to the HSE Website. If you do not have symptoms, you can get a free COVID-19 (coronavirus) test at a COVID-19 walk-in test centre.

## **COVID-19 Tracker App**

COVID Tracker app is a free and easy-to-use mobile phone app that will:

- alert you if you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus)
- keep other app users safe by alerting them if you test positive for COVID-19
- give you advice on what to do if you have symptoms

You can download the free app from Apple's AppStore or the GooglePlay store

**Employers and workers must keep themselves up to date on Public Health information as this can be updated on a regular basis. Public Health information on close contacts, casual contacts and testing is available from the [HSE website](#).**

## **5.2 Respiratory Hygiene**

It is necessary that all members of the school community 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.

### **5.3 Hand Hygiene**

Staff and students should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands.

Staff and schools should always promote good hygiene practices to students.

A large number of posters are displayed throughout the school on how to wash your hands.

Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>.

Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean).

Use of hand hygiene facilities including wash hand basins needs to be managed to avoid congregation of people waiting to use wash hand basins and hand sanitisers. Hand sanitiser dispensers **are** deployed at exit and entry points to the school and to classrooms and care is taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risks of falls.

**78** hand sanitising points are located around the school (see appendix F).

Warm water is preferable to hot or cold water for hand washing but if the plumbing system only supplies cold water, a soap that emulsifies easily in cold water should be used. Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities are provided in all toilets, kitchens, and any food preparation areas.

Hand washing facilities should be maintained in good condition and supplies of soap and towels should be topped up regularly to encourage everyone to use them. Sanitisers, toilets and food preparation areas are checked and cleaned on regular basis throughout the day. Posters displaying hand washing techniques and promoting hand washing are located on walls adjacent to washing facilities.

Hand sanitiser is suitable for use for hand hygiene when hands are not visibly soiled. Evidence of effectiveness is best for alcohol-based hand rubs but non-alcohol-based hand rubs can be used too. When hand rubs/gels are being used in school care should be taken to ensure that students do not ingest them as they are flammable and toxic.

## **Choosing a Hand Sanitiser**

Hand sanitising gels are biocides and fall under the Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR) –Regulation (EU) 528/2012. The Pesticide Registration and Control Division (PRCD) of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is the competent authority for biocides in Ireland. Only biocidal products listed on the DAFM biocide product register are legal to market and use in Ireland. Schools should ensure that all sanitisers and disinfectants they have carry a PCS 9xxxx, PCS 1xxxxx, IE/BPA 7xxxx or an EU-000xxx-xx registration number on the label. Each product registered by DAFM will carry a unique registration number specific to that particular product. If the product label does not contain any of these number formats, Schools should not purchase or use the product. To confirm the biocide can be used on the Irish market, Schools can check the registers of products online at [Biocidal Product Registers](#). Further information from DAFM on Sanitisers and Disinfectants is available by contacting them at [biocide-enforcement@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:biocide-enforcement@agriculture.gov.ie) or at the [Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine website](#).

Hand sanitisers for use against COVID-19 must contain a minimum of 60% alcohol. Non-alcohol based hand sanitiser may also be used. However, in choosing a hand sanitiser, it is important to ensure that it is effective against Coronavirus.

## **Frequency of Hand Hygiene**

Students and staff should perform hand hygiene:

On arrival at school

Before eating or drinking

After using the toilet

After petting animals

After playing outdoors

When their hands are physically dirty

When they cough or sneeze.

A drawdown framework which was established for the 2020/21 school year will continue to remain in place for the 2021/22 school year to enable schools to purchase necessary supplies of hand-sanitisers and PPE requirements. The Department will provide funding for the costs associated with the hand sanitising and PPE requirements in schools.

## 5.4 Physical Distancing

Physical distancing can be usefully applied in a post primary school setting allowing for some flexibility when needed. It must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue. Care should be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at time.

It is also recognised that it is not always possible for staff to maintain physical distance from students and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the student.

**However, where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1 m distance and where possible 2m. They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down. 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 recognition that a ‘one size fits all’ approach would not be appropriate as schools themselves are best placed to decide on the appropriate configuration for their school, the Department has developed a *Framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom in Post Primary Schools with a full return of all Students for the 2020/21 School Year*. **This remains in place for the 2021/2022 School Year.**

Ardcoil Phádraig has taken the following precautions to minimise potential infection.

- As recommended by the Department of Education and Skills, each class group will be assigned a base classroom in which most of their lessons will take place and each student will be assigned a desk.
- On arrival to the school each morning, students will be asked to go directly to their base classrooms, entering the school building through their designated door.
- To ensure social distancing is maintained throughout the school, a one-way system of movement will operate around the school grounds.
- Students will not have access to a student lockers at the beginning of the school year. We will monitor this and review this throughout term 1 and considering advise from the Department of Education and the HSE.
- To limit social interaction with personnel outside of our immediate school population, students from any class will **NOT** be permitted to leave school grounds during the lunch break.
- Students cannot share any materials with other students and therefore should ensure that they have all resources required for each subject are
- Hand washing and/or sanitising will be required when moving between classes by teachers and students.
- Physical distancing between the teacher and class will be observed.
- Where movement of class groups between rooms is required it should be planned to minimise interaction with other class groups.
- Limit interaction on arrival and departure and in hallways and other shared areas.
- Social physical contact (hand to hand greetings, hugs) will be discouraged.
- Where students need to move about within the classroom to perform activities (access to a shared resource) it should be organised to the greatest degree possible to minimise congregation at the shared resource.
- Staff and students should avoid sharing of personal items.
- Where teaching and learning involves use of keyboards or tablets, the contact surface of the device should be cleaned regularly, and hand hygiene encouraged.
- Students that been dropped off/collected should maintain a physical distancing of 2m where possible.

### **Physical Distancing outside of the classroom and within the school**

- Students go directly to their base classroom in the mornings.
- Walking/cycling to school is encouraged as much as possible.
- Designated entrances for all class-groups.
- Staggered small and lunch break times.

## **Staff**

2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching such as the staff room and arriving to work. Consideration could be given to formation of staff “pods” or teams who work together and take breaks together. Staff meetings should be held remotely or in small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing. Minimise gathering at the beginning or end of the school day.

Ardcoil Phadraig has put the following protocols in place for staff:

- Staff meetings are held remotely on ‘Microsoft Teams’.
- There is a no hand shaking policy in place.
- Physical distancing is observed between staff members within the staff room through staggered morning and lunch breaks.
- Staff go directly to classroom in the mornings to minimise gathering of school staff at the beginning of the school day.

## **Canteen**

Physical distancing is applied in canteen facilities.

- Students and staff maintain a 2 metre distance when having morning and lunch breaks.
- Staggered morning and lunch breaks.
- A queue system operates.
- Students sanitise their hands entering and exiting the canteen area.

## **Corridors and Stairwells**

A one-way system operates around the school.

## **Ventilation**

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

- The guidance sets out an overall approach for schools that windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (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, particularly during cold weather.
- The Department has also published guidance on how these practical steps measures can be supplemented and enhanced by the use of Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors. Links to all aforementioned guidance can be accessed [here](#).

### **Use of PPE in Schools**

The updated advice from the HPSC to the Department of Education has recommended that face coverings should be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or students. The Department has accepted this recommendation.

Accordingly, it is now a requirement for face coverings to be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or students.

Workers should be trained in the proper use, donning/doffing, cleaning, storing and disposal of PPE. The HPSC has produced posters and videos on the correct donning and doffing of PPE available on the HPSC and HSA websites [https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19\\_coronavirus\\_information\\_and\\_resources/covid-19\\_business\\_supports/business\\_supports/hse-hpsc\\_posters\\_and\\_videos/](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19_coronavirus_information_and_resources/covid-19_business_supports/business_supports/hse-hpsc_posters_and_videos/)

PPE will also need to be used at certain work activities or work areas. These might include roles such as:

- Performing intimate care
- Where a suspected case of COVID-19 is identified while the school is in operation

- Where staff are particularly vulnerable to infection but are not in the list of those categorised as people in very high risk groups or may be living with people who are in a very high risk category.
- Administering first aid.

Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

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.

Face masks 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.

All staff and students wearing face coverings should be reminded to not touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering. All teachers and staff should be aware that they should wash or sanitize hands (using a hand sanitizer) before and after helping a student put on or adjust a face covering. 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. Disposable face coverings are available for students, teachers, and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

## **Medical Grade Masks**

Ardscoil Phádraig will provide medical grade masks in the EN14683 category to all SNAs and teachers in special schools and special classes and those staff by necessity that need to be in close and continued proximity with pupils with intimate care needs including School Bus Escorts.

Wearing a face **mask** does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

## **Gloves**

The use of disposable gloves in the school by students or staff is not generally appropriate but may be necessary for matters such as cleaning, intimate care settings or when administering first aid. Routine use 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.

## **Aprons**

Aprons may also be appropriate in certain circumstances including for intimate care needs or for staff assigned to cleaning an area where a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 was present.

## **Impact of COVID-19 on certain school activities**

### **Choir/Music Performance**

Choir practices/performances and music practices/performances involving wind instruments may pose a higher level of risk and special consideration should be given to how they are held ensuring that the room is well-ventilated and the distance between performers is maintained.

### **Sport Activities**

Schools should refer to the HPSC guidance on Return to Sport. Link to return to sport protocols is found here.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07253-return-to-sport-protocols/>

### **Shared Equipment**

**Art** – Where possible students should be encouraged to have their own individual art and equipment supplies.

**Electronics** – Shared electronic devices such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards should be cleaned between use and consideration could be given to the use of wipeable covers for electronics to facilitate cleaning.

**Musical Equipment/Instruments** – To the greatest extent possible, instruments should not be shared between students and if sharing is required, the instruments should be

**Library Policy** – Where practical students should have their own books. Textbooks that are shared should be covered in a wipeable plastic covering that can be wiped with a suitable household cleaning agent between uses. Students should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene after using any shared item.

**Shared Sports Equipment** – Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between uses by different people.

## **Hygiene and Cleaning in School**

Ardcoil Phádraig takes particular care of the hygiene arrangements for hand washing and toilet facilities.

- In summary, the school setting will be cleaned at least once per day. Additional cleaning will be focused on frequently touched surfaces – door handles, hand rails, chairs/arm rests, communal eating areas, sink and toilet facilities.
- When students are moving between classrooms appropriate cleaning products 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.

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

The advice in relation to school cleaning is set out in the HPSC advice and will be covered in the induction training. This advice sets out the cleaning regime required to support schools to prevent COVID-19 infections and the enhanced cleaning required in the event of a suspected cases of COVID-19. The school will take particular care of the hygiene arrangements for wash hand and toilet facilities.

Cleaning/Disinfecting rooms where a student/staff member with suspected COVID-19 was present, should be cleaned as soon as practicable possible.

- Once the room is vacated the room should 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.
- If a student or staff diagnosed with COVID-19 spent time in a communal area like a canteen, play area or if they used the toilet or bathroom facilities, that the areas should be cleaned

### **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 a school should deal with a suspected case that may arise in a school setting.

A designated isolation area has been identified within the school building. The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of COVID-19 and a contingency plan for dealing with

additional cases put in place. The designated isolation area should be 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 to be implemented:

- If the person with the suspected case is a student, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately;
- Isolate the person and follow the procedure in place to 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;
- The isolation area does not have to be a room but if it is not a room it should be 2m away from others in the room;
- 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 should not be used as the virus does not pass through skin;
- Provide a mask for the person presenting with symptoms. 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 who 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 – (**details at Section 7**)

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. School staff should be encouraged to download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contract tracing purposes. Both in and out of the school setting (see section 5.1).

## 9. 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.

The cooperation and assistance of all staff is essential to reduce the risk of spread of COVID19 and to protect health and safety as far as possible within the school. All staff have a key role to play.

In this regard and in order to facilitate a safe return to work, these duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Adhere to the School COVID-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined.
- Complete the RTW form before they return to work.
- 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.
- **New staff must** complete COVID-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school.
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Coordinate practices and work with their colleagues to ensure that physical distancing is maintained.
- Make themselves aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their own wellbeing.
- Self-isolate at home and contact their GP promptly for further advice if they display any symptoms of COVID-19.

- Not return to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances.
- **Follow the HSE guidance if they are identified as a close contact.**
- 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.
- If they develop any symptoms of COVID-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above.
- Keep informed of the updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.
- Cooperate with any public health personnel 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
- Undergo any COVID-19 testing that may be required as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health.

## **10 COVID-19 related absence management**

The management of a COVID-19 related absence will be managed in line with agreed procedures with the Department of Education.

## **11 Employee Assistance Service**

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective self-care. Support for school staff wellbeing will be provided by Department Support Services including the PDST and CSL, as well as by the HSE's Health Promotion Team. An [Occupational Health Strategy](#) is in place as a supportive resource for individual staff members in schools. The aim of the Occupational Health Strategy is to promote the health and wellbeing of employees in the workplace, with a strong focus on prevention. The Occupational Health Strategy comprises the Employee Assistance Service and the Occupational Health Service. The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is provided by Spectrum.Life under the logo of 'Wellbeing Together: Folláinne Le Chéile'.

The EAS is a self-referral service where employees have access to a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year providing advice on a range of issues such as wellbeing, legal, financial, mediation, management

support etc. The service is also available via SMS, WhatsApp, e-mail, live chat and call back request. All points of contact for the service are qualified, accredited and experienced mental health professionals.

Where required, short-term counselling is available to employees and their families (over the age of 18 years and living at home).

The EAS also provides advice and support to managers and delivers interventions to help them deal with health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

A bespoke wellbeing portal and app is available which offers access to podcasts, blogs, live chats and videos on topics around wellbeing and mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition. E-Learning programmes across mental health, sleep and a range of wellbeing topics are also available. In addition online cognitive behavioural therapy is provided. As part of the services provided by Spectrum.Life, a Mental Health Promotion Manager is available to develop and deliver evidence based mental health and wellbeing initiatives to reduce stigma and improve mental health literacy and to increase engagement with the service. Spectrum.Life also provides a series of webinars and presentations to promote wellbeing in schools.