

12 Courtenay Hill, Newry, Co Down, BT34 2EA
Phone: (028) 3026 2175

23 March 2020

Dear Parents

You will be aware that schools have received direction from the Minister of Education, Peter Weir, to offer 'child care' to the children of 'Key workers' and 'Vulnerable Children' whilst schools are 'closed' as part of the world wide effort to slow down the spread of Covid 19.

Every member of our school staff is beyond indebted to all our key workers at this time, and are anxious to do whatever we can to offer support to them. However, we are extremely anxious about our ability to keep children and staff safe when school opens to offer this 'child care' provision.

The definition of 'Key workers' and 'Vulnerable children' is so broad that I have done an initial count and believe that we could have **over 318** children eligible to be in school. Clearly, having this number in school would render it impossible for us to implement all Public Health Authority (PHA) guidance, but particularly the 'social distancing' component, which as we all know is being advocated by advice givers as the key means of slowing down the spread.

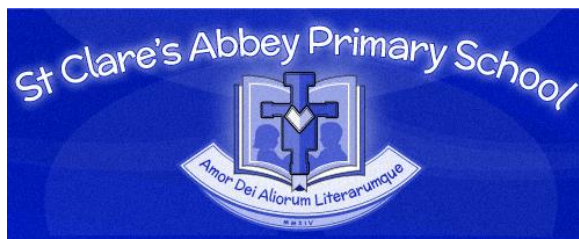
Therefore, to move forward in the safest way possible and also bearing in mind that I have a hugely reduced number of staff, due to many 'self- isolating' as per medical advice, I need all eligible parents to work with me and **only apply for a place in school as an absolute last resort**. As principal, I am EXTREMELY worried about having children in school, I know now that:

- I will not have a trained First Aide on the premises
- Children will be limited to 5 pupils in each classroom to try to accommodate social distancing, However, I cannot guarantee that this will be observed at all times as we are dealing with children.
- Children will probably not be with class mates nor their own teacher/assistant as I will have to make the classes mixed age to maximise the chance of social distancing happening.
- Staff will not be able to help your child in any way that requires physical support as they too will be observing 'social distancing.'
- There is a chance that an adult/child in your child's class may very well, unknowingly, have the virus whilst in class.

I could expand further with my many worries but will instead share with you some of the Minister's views on how this provision should operate. He states:

' We want to keep the children looked after in school to a minimum:

- ***If you are not a key worker DON'T send your child to school***
- ***If your child is medically vulnerable DON'T send your child to school***
- ***If you are self- isolating DON'T send your child to school***
- ***If you can make alternative arrangements to look after your child... DON'T send your child to school.'***



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I personally would add to this:

- ***If your child is presenting with any symptoms DON'T send him/her to school.***

As stated in my opening, I envisage us having a lot of parents eligible to apply for a place and whilst I hope that each parent will make arrangements based primarily on keeping their child safe, I do anticipate myself being in the unenviable position of having to prioritise requests.

I beg you for your support and understanding to avoid the need for this, but if, after reading this you still feel that you require a place in school for child minding purposes from 9am -2.30pm daily, Monday – Friday, I ask you to either:

- An application is available on the website, please complete and email to me on mmonaghan771@c2kni.net prior to 8.00 pm this evening.
- Telephone school on 02830262175 prior to 3.00 pm today only if you don't have access e-mail. We will complete the application over the phone.

I hope to process this tonight with a view to being able to contact parents on Tuesday to confirm the outcome of their application.

Please note, I do not know when we will be starting the service at this point as our 'Deep Clean' has to be completed first, which could take several days. Additionally, please be aware that the situation is very fluid and if available staff diminish further, due to illness etc, the situation may change.

I finish by assuring you that I am eager to support you in your heroic work at this time, as are the whole staff and Board of Governors. However, the safety implications for having our precious children and staff in school at this time are weighing very heavily on me.

With heartfelt prayer, I leave this matter with you.

Yours in partnership
Michelle Monaghan

ST CLARE'S ABBEY PRIMARY SCHOOL