

Scoil Naomh Mhuire COVID-19 School Response Plan

Scoil Naomh Mhuire, Staplestown, Co. Kildare

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1. Introduction

This *Covid-19 Response Plan* is designed to support the staff and Board of Management in putting measures in place that will prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Scoil Naomh Mhuire, Staplestown.

The Covid-19 Response Plan details the policies and practices necessary for Scoil Naomh Mhuire to meet the Government's '*Return to Work Safely*', and more recently, its '*Work Safely*' Protocols - the Department of Education and Skills plans for school reopening 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 (NPHEET).

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 NPHEET continues to evolve, this protocol and the measures management and staff need to address may also change.

The response plan will support the sustainable reopening 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 and Work Safely Protocols, 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 Board of management, staff, pupils and parents.

This document aims to provide details of:

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. COVID-19 School Policy**
- 3. Planning and Preparing for Return to School**
 - a. School Building**
 - b. Signage**
- 4. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)**
- 5. Return to work safely and Lead Worker Representative(s)**
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- 10. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**
- 11. Staff Duties**
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- 13. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

The assistance and cooperation 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

2. Scoil Naomh Mhuire 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.

COVID 19 Policy Statement

Scoil Naomh Mhuire 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:

- continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and amend this plan in consultation with our staff and the wider school community
- provide up to date information to our staff and pupils on the Public Health advice issued by the HSE and Gov.ie
- display information on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and correct hand-washing 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 pupils of essential hygiene and respiratory etiquette and physical distancing requirements
- adapt the school to facilitate physical distancing as appropriate in line with the guidance and direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- keep a contact log to help with contact tracing
- ensure staff and pupils engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education and Skills
- 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 pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time
- implement cleaning in line with Department of Education and Skills 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 **Mrs. Tierna Murphy**

Signed: Áine Crotty

Date: 28/02/2021

Principal

Signed: Maeve Caldwell

Date: 28/02/2021

Chairperson BOM

3. Planning and Preparing for Return to School

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

Details for the reopening of the school facility and the applicable controls are outlined in this document.

a. School Buildings

The school buildings and equipment and mechanical ventilation systems contained therein have been checked for signs of deterioration or damage since the school closure of 21st December 2020.

b. Signage

Adequate signage outlining the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to support good hand and respiratory hygiene have been displayed in prominent areas throughout the school. Copies of these signs can be found here:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/posters/>

4. Procedure for Returning to Work (RTW)

In order to return to the workplace, staff must complete a **Return to Work (RTW)** form, which is available electronically or from the Principal.

A RTW form should only be completed **at least 3 days** prior to any proposed date of return to the workplace.

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.

5. Return to work safely and 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 Board of Management and staff of Scoil Naomh Mhuire, Staplestown, in line with the Return to Work Safely and Work Safely protocol has agreed to appoint **Ms. Tierna Murphy** as Lead Worker Representative to carry out a specific role.

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

- 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.
- 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 with the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Monitor adherence to measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Consult with colleagues on matters relating to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Make representations on behalf of their 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 who will engage with the Principal/BOM.

Name of Lead Worker representative:	Contact Details
Ms. Tierna Murphy	School Phone: (045) 869229 School Email: staplestownns@gmail.com

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.

6. Safety Statement and 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 Scoil Naomh Mhuire has been carried out and documented

The Board of Management has reviewed 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 school's existing emergency procedures will be documented.

All staff and parents are asked to please read Sections 7 and 8 of this document very carefully order to become familiar with the symptoms of COVID-19 and the most effective measures in preventing the spread of disease.

The following link <https://ncse.ie: A Book For Children.pdf> leads to a lovely book for children about COVID-19.

7. 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:

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

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Scoil Naomh Mhuire is to minimise the risk of introduction of the disease into the school in the first place.

The Board of Management of Scoil Naomh Mhuire hope to achieve this through the following measures:

- Promote awareness of COVID-19 and its symptoms amongst staff, pupils, parents and visitors.
 - Relevant information is outlined in this document (specifically sections 7 & 8) which will be posted on both our school website and our school Facebook page.
 - Signage and posters will be displayed prominently throughout the school alerting all members of the school community to the symptoms of COVID- 19 and best practice in curtailing its spread.
 - Both parents and staff are asked to read the following book to the children: <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coronavirus - A Book For Children.pdf>

The book provides clear explanations about the coronavirus and its effects – both from a health perspective and the impact it has on a family’s day-to-day life.

Parents are asked to read the book prior to your child’s return to school and teachers are asked to read it within the first two weeks of school’s return.

- Staff and parents of pupils who have symptoms of COVID-19 or other acute infectious diseases are asked not to attend the school, to phone their GP and follow the HSE guidance on self-isolation.

- Staff and parents of pupils who have been identified by the HSE as contact of a person with COVID- 19 are asked not to attend the school and to follow the HSE advice on restriction of movement.
- Ensure that staff and pupils know what to do if they develop symptoms at school.
- Everyone entering the school building should be required to perform hand hygiene with hand sanitiser.

a. Visitors to the School

In the interest of the health and safety of all members of the school community, it is best to keep visitors to the school to a minimum. With this in mind, parents are asked to ensure that their children have everything they need for school with them when they come to school in the morning, and to keep any children's appointments to after school time, thereby minimising the need for parents to visit the school throughout the day.

- A lidded box will be left outside the school building and in the event that parents need to drop something to their child, the item can be left in the box with a note attached. We will ensure that the item reaches your child.
- It is important that the school day runs as normal. Parents must ensure that their children arrive at school on time in order to maximise the school's capacity to fulfil its obligation to maintain physical distancing between class groups and to avoid disruption to schedules.
- Please note that early collection of children cannot be facilitated under the current circumstances unless absolutely necessary and we urge parents not to take their children out of school early.
- Visitors to the school must be by appointment only and they must enter through the main entrance at the front of the school (even if their reason for visiting relates to the senior building).
- Hand sanitiser must be used upon entry.
- Contact tracing log must be signed.

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 and Skills will ensure all updated advice is circulated to schools. Scoil Naomh Mhuire will arrange for this advice to be circulated to staff, pupils and visitors in a timely manner.

b. Safe School Attendance and Travel Abroad

- Government policy, which is based on official public health advice, continues to advise against non-essential travel overseas for everyone.
 - Staff and pupils are asked not to return to or attend school if they have travelled outside of Ireland. In such instances, staff and pupils are asked to consult and follow the latest government advice in relation to foreign travel.
- © For more information
- on travel advice see <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/75d92-covid-19-travel-advice/>

8. Managing the risk of spread of COVID-19

a. Wash your Hands Frequently

Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-

19. HSE guidelines on handwashing will be followed in Scoil Naomh Mhuire.

In line with public health advice on when and how to wash your hands, pupils will be presented with regular opportunities throughout the school day to wash their hands with soap and water.

Paper towels will be provided for use and children are asked not to bring their own hand towel to school.

For advice from HSE on how to wash your hands the following link will be helpful to all staff and pupils: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

b. Hand Hygiene and Hand Sanitisers

Hand hygiene can also be achieved by the use of a hand sanitiser (when hands are clean).

A number of hand sanitising stations will be available for use throughout the day within the classrooms. In senior classes from 3rd-6th Class there will be one hand sanitising station per pod of six children.

Hand sanitiser will also be available at entry and exit points to and from the school and outside the door of each classroom.

Children may also bring their own bottle of hand sanitiser for personal use if preferred.

c. 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 or mouth.

d. Physical Distancing

Physical distancing is recommended to reduce the spread of infection in schools. In line with current public health advice, control measures will be put in place in Scoil Naomh Mhuire in order to maintain a safe distance between individuals, pods (groups within a class) and bubbles (entire class). However, the Board of Management and staff are mindful of the recommendation that physical distancing must be applied in a practical way and that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue.

Advice for pupils is that they be split into bubbles (class groups) and that within each bubble, pupils are further divided into pods (smaller groups). A distance of 1 metre should be maintained between pods and where possible between children within pods.

At Scoil Naomh Mhuire, we will strive to adhere to this recommendation as much as is reasonably practicable. However, we must be realistic in our expectations around maintaining a minimum of 1 metre distance between all pupils at all times.

With this in mind, our aim is to ultimately keep each class group (bubble) together and minimise its interaction with any other bubble. For instance, Infants will mix only with infants, 1st and 2nd class pupils only with other 1st and 2nd class pupils etc.

In line with advice and in accordance with the Roadmap for the Full Return to Schools;

'it is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore, achieving this recommendation in the first 4 years of primary school is not a prerequisite to reopening a primary school for all pupils.'

However, we will endeavour to adhere to the guidance throughout the school and so pods will be in operation for all classes - including in the junior classes (Infants to 2nd Class) where practicable.

e. 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.

f. Use of Face Coverings

Medical Grade Masks in the EN16483 category will be provided for all staff of Scoil Naomh Mhuire to wear throughout the school day.

g. Practice respiratory hygiene

Staff and pupils of Scoil Naomh Mhuire should be aware of the following information regarding the importance of following good respiratory hygiene:

Make sure 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:

h. Do

- Wash your hands properly and often
- Wash or sanitise your hands when entering and exiting vehicles and school buildings
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

i. Do Not

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- Share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups, cutlery, etc.

j. 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 as outlined below:

- are over 70 years of age - even if you're fit and well
- have had an organ transplant
- are undergoing active chemotherapy for cancer
- are having radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- are having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- severe respiratory conditions including cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, pulmonary fibrosis, lung fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and severe COPD
- have a condition that means you have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes you much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppression therapies)
- have a serious heart condition **and** are pregnant

The advice for this group is available from the HSE. Staff who are in this group 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 and 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.

9. 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 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.

The following control measures have been put in place:

a. *Return to Work Form*

Staff will be required to complete a RTW form at least 3 days prior to their return to the school facility. 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.

b. *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.

c. *Hygiene and 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, staffroom 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.

Handwashing facilities and hand sanitisers are available at multiple locations within Scoil Naomh Mhuire including in each classroom.

d. *Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*

With the exception of medical grade masks (standard EN16483), PPE will not be required to be worn within the school facility according to current occupational and public health guidance. However, for a limited number of staff, PPE will need to be used occasionally or constantly due to the nature of certain work activities or work areas.

Such include roles where:

- Performing intimate care or first aid
- Where a suspected case of Covid-19 is identified while the school is in operation

Appropriate PPE will be available for dealing with suspected COVID-19 cases, intimate care needs and for first aid. This will be updated in line with advice from the HPSC (Health Protection Surveillance Centre)

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

e. *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.

f. *Cleaning*

Arrangements for more regular and thorough cleaning of areas and surfaces within the school have been made in line with public health advice on cleaning of schools.

Regular and thorough cleaning of communal areas and frequently touched surfaces shall be conducted, in particular, sinks, toilets, door handles, tables and chairs.

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.

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

g. Access to the school building /contact log

Access to the school facility will be in line with agreed school procedures as detailed at Section 7.1 above.

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 will be maintained.

The school will also maintain a log of staff and students contacts.

h. First Aid/emergency procedure

The standard First Aid/Emergency procedure shall continue to apply in Scoil Naomh Mhuire.

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.

10. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19

The following outlines how Scoil Naomh Mhuire will deal with a suspected case that may arise during the course of work.

A designated isolation area has been identified within the school building.

The possibility of having more than one person displaying signs of Covid-19 should be considered and a contingency plan for dealing with additional cases put in place. The designated isolation is behind a closed door and away from other staff and pupils.

If a staff member/pupil displays symptoms of Covid-19 while in Scoil Naomh Mhuire, the following are the procedures to be implemented:

1. If the person with the 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 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.

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 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. Public transport of any kind should not be used
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.

11. 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:

- Adhere to the School Covid-19 Response Plan and the control measures outlined. The cooperation 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
- download the HSE COVID-19 tracker app to assist Public Health for contract tracing purposes both in and out of the school setting.
- Coordinate 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 or attend school if they have symptoms of Covid-19 under any circumstances. If they develop any symptoms of Covid-19 whilst within the school facility, they should adhere to the procedure outlined above
Not return to school if they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of Covid-19 or if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus.
- 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
- Must complete Covid-19 Induction Training and any other training required prior to their return to school
- 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
- Must be aware of, and adhere to, good hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices
- Undergo any COVID-19 testing that may be required in their school as part of mass or serial testing as advised by Public Health
- Keep informed of updated advice of the public health authorities and comply with same.

12. Covid related absence management

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

13. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme

The Board of Management aims to protect and support the health and wellbeing 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 wellbeing 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 wellbeing and shall continue to make health and wellbeing 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.

The Department recognises the need for school staff wellbeing and collective selfcare. 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 staff 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 freephone 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).

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 COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of primary and special schools. A series of weekly webinars and live talks to promote staff wellbeing in schools is current available on the wellbeing portal.