

Ballina Primary School COVID-19 Response Plan (updated February 2021)

Introduction:

A revision of the COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools is necessary to ensure that it is 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 Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health with guidance documents provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). The "Work Safely Protocol" is a revised version of the "Return to Work Safely Protocol" and contains many of the elements and features of the original guidance but has been updated to reflect the latest advice issued by Government and National Health Emergency Team (NPGET) to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Each workplace is required to have a COVID-19 Response Plan. In addition to being places of learning, schools are also places of work.

This COVID-19 Response Plan for Ballina Primary School is a working document that initially was used for our Summer Provision Programme and was then altered to incorporate the most up-to-date guidelines as issued by the Department of Education on July 27th 2020. Due to the latest "COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable operation of Primary and Special Schools" Document (V3 February 2021), this response plan is being reviewed again. This 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 Ballina Primary School. It is important that any proposals and recommendations in relation to the resumption of school-based teaching and learning and the reopening of school facilities comply with national protocols and minimise the risk to students, staff and others. As the advice issued continues to evolve, the protocols and the measures used by the Board of Management and staff 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 "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 Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents. The assistance and cooperation of all staff, pupils, parents/ guardians, contractors, and visitors is critical to the success of the plan.

This document aims to provide details of:

- 1. COVID-19 School Policy**
- 2. Planning and Preparing for Return to School**
- 3. Lead Worker Representative**
- 4. Safety Statement and Risk Assessment**
- 5. Dealing with a suspected case of Covid-19**
- 6. Special Education Needs**
- 7. Staff Duties**
- 8. COVID Related Absence Management**
- 9. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme**

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. Ballina Primary School COVID-19 Policy Statement

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

COVID-19 Policy Statement

Ballina Primary 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 Board of Management 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;
- 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 handwashing techniques;
- Agree with staff, a worker representative who is easily identifiable to carry out the role outlined in this plan;
- 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;
- Keep a contact log to help with contact tracing;
- ensure staff engage with the induction / familiarisation briefing provided by the Department of Education;
- Implement the agreed procedures to be followed in the event of someone showing symptoms of COVID-19 while at school;
- provide instructions for staff and pupils to follow if they develop signs and symptoms of COVID-19 during school time;
- Implement cleaning in line with Department of Education advice.

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

Signed: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Lead Worker Representative: Adrian Ó Donnabháin

Assistant Lead Worker Representative: Mark O' Sullivan

2. Planning and Preparing for Return to School

The Board of Management aims to facilitate the continuation of school-based teaching and learning and a safe working environment for staff. The operation of the school must be done safely and in strict adherence to the public health advice and any guidance issued by the Department of Education.

The Board of Management, In-School Management Team and Staff of Ballina Primary School have reviewed current processes to ensure that the following has been given serious and ongoing consideration in light of updated guidelines in February 2021:

- 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, pupils, parents and others as required;
- Ensured that staff have reviewed the training materials provided by the Department of Education (See Section 4.1 of the Guidelines);
- Provided staff with access to the Return to Work (RTW) form (See Section 4.2 of the Guidelines);
- Identified a Lead Worker representative and Assistant Lead Worker representative (See Section 4.3 of the Guidelines);
- Displayed posters and other signage to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19 (See Section 4.4 of the Guidelines);
- Made the necessary changes to the school or classroom layout if necessary to support the redesign of classrooms to support physical distancing (See Section 4.5 of the Guidelines);
- Removed unnecessary clutter to facilitate ongoing cleaning of the school taking into account the importance of having educational materials to create a stimulating learning environment;
- Updated the health and safety risk assessment (See Section 4.6 of the Guidelines);
- Made necessary arrangements to limit access to the school to necessary visitors and maintain records of contacts to the school (See Section 4.7 of the Guidelines);
- Reviewed the school buildings as recommended by the guidelines after each period of closure.

Induction Training

All staff have undertaken and completed 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 of any changes to the control measures or guidance available from the public health authorities.

If a staff member is unsure about any aspect of the COVID-19 Response Plan, the associated control measures, or his/her duties, he/she should immediately seek guidance from the Principal, who is supported in this role by the Board of Management.

3. Lead Worker Representative.

The COVID-19 Return to Work Safely Protocol is designed to support employers and workers to put measures in place that will prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Protocol provides for the appointment of a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) in each workplace. The LWR will work in collaboration with the employer 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.

The purpose of this section is to set out the provisions in respect of the LWR in schools.

Collaborative Approach

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 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 Work Safely Protocol will only be achieved if everyone has a shared responsibility 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, he/she should contact the LWR who will engage with school management.

Role of the Lead Worker Representative

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 the implementation of measures to suppress COVID-19 in the workplace in line with the Return to 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.

What can a Lead Worker Representative (LWR) Do?

The LWR may consult with, and make representations to, school management on any issue of concern in relation to COVID-19. These include issues in relation to:

- Cleaning protocols and their implementation
- Physical Distancing
- Implementation of one-way systems in the school to ensure social distancing including when entering and exiting the school
- Hand Hygiene facilities including their location and whether they are stocked and maintained
- Hand sanitising
- Staff awareness around hand hygiene in the school
- Respiratory hygiene
- Personal Protective Equipment
- At Risk Groups
- Visitors/Contractors

Lead Worker Representative

Every school will appoint one Lead Worker Representative.

Assistant Lead Worker Representative

In schools with 30 or more staff, an Assistant Lead Worker Representative will be appointed in addition to the LWR. The role of the Assistant LWR will be to:

- assist the LWR in their duties as set out above; and
- deputise as LWR where the LWR is absent.

Selection of Lead Worker Representative/ Assistant LWR

The school staff are entitled to select staff members for the LWR and Assistant LWR positions as appropriate. The LWR and Assistant LWR represents all staff in the workplace regardless of role and must be aware of specific issues that may arise in respect of different staff cohorts. In this regard, if a teacher is selected for the role of LWR, then the Assistant LWR should be selected from the non-teaching staff where feasible and vice versa.

The process for the selection and appointment of the LWR/ Assistant LWR as appropriate should be arrived at by consultation and consensus at school level, through the seeking of volunteers to act in that capacity. Where there is more than one volunteer, all school staff should vote to select the LWR/ Assistant LWR.

The LWR/ Assistant LWR will, following selection by the school staff, be formally appointed by the employer. The LWR and Assistant LWR will be required to confirm, prior to taking up the role, that they have completed the provided training and that they are fully aware of the requirements of the role.

Supports for the Lead Worker Representative/ Assistant Lead Worker Representative

The LWR and Assistant LWR shall be entitled to:

- Receive information and training in respect of their role;
- Be consulted by school management on the control measures being put in place by the school to minimise the risk of being exposed to COVID-19;
- Regular communication with school management on issues related to COVID-19;
- Be informed of changes in practice arising from COVID-19 response measures.

Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is a teacher (including a postholder), the 10 Croke Park hours which can currently be used for planning on other than a whole school basis will be utilised by the LWR and Assistant LWR to carry out their duties in that role.

Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is an SNA, 10 of the “72 hours” will be utilised by the LWR and Assistant LWR to carry out their duties in that role.

Where the LWR/ Assistant LWR is a Secretary or Caretaker, a re-prioritisation of duties by school management should be carried out to afford the staff member sufficient time to carry out their duties in that role.

Procedure for dealing with issues that arise

Where an issue of concern is identified by the LWR (or is notified to the LWR by a staff member), the LWR should bring this to the attention of the Principal. Action points for addressing the issue should, where possible, be agreed between the LWR and the Principal. Staff should be informed of the outcome. If agreement cannot be reached, the LWR may notify the Board of Management (Chairperson of the Board of Management in the first instance) of the issue. Action points for addressing the issue should where possible be agreed between the LWR and the Board of Management. Staff should be informed of the outcome.

4. 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 has been completed. The school will continue to review 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. The school will continue to review existing risk assessments to consider any new risks that arise due to the school's COVID-19 Response Plan. Any changes to the school's current risk assessments will be documented.

In line with the updated Guidelines (February 2021), the following have been considered by the Board of Management, Principal, and Staff and will remain under constant review:

- Control Measures – To prevent Introduction and Spread of COVID-19 in Schools
- Know the Symptoms of COVID-19 (See Section 5.1 of the Guidelines)
- Respiratory Hygiene (See Section 5.2 of the Guidelines)
- Hand Hygiene (See Section 5.3 of the Guidelines)
- Physical Distancing (See Section 5.4 of the Guidelines)
 - Increasing Separation
 - Decreasing Interaction
 - School drop off/ collection
 - Staff
 - Staffroom
 - Corridors
 - Yard/ Supervision
- Ventilation (See “Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools”)
- Use of PPE in Schools (See Section 5.5 of the Guidelines)
- Impact of COVID-19 on certain school activities (See Section 6 of the Guidelines)
- Hygiene and Cleaning (See Section 7 of the Guidelines)
 - 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, sinks, tables, chairs, door handles, and staffroom. Cleaning will be performed regularly. 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.).
- 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/appointment 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 will maintain a log of staff and students contacts. In addition, a visitor contact log will also be maintained.

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

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

How to Minimise the Risk of Introduction of COVID-19 into Schools:

Promote awareness of COVID-19 symptoms (details at Section 5.1):

- Advise staff and pupils that have symptoms not to attend school, to phone their doctor, and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation;
- Advise staff and pupils 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 pupils not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
 - if they are identified by the HSE as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19;
 - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus;
 - 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.
- Advise staff and pupils that develop symptoms at school to bring this to the attention of the Principal promptly.
- Ensure that staff and pupils know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school (details at Section 8).
- Advise staff and pupils 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 contact point.

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

A designated isolation area should be 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 area should be behind a closed door and away from other staff and pupils.

If a staff member/pupil 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 pupil, the parents/guardians should be contacted immediately.
- 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 away from the symptomatic person and also making sure that others maintain a distance of at least 2m 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.
- Remember that the virus is spread by droplets and is not airborne so physical separation is enough to reduce the risk of spread to others even if they are in the same room.
- If it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2m, a staff member caring for a pupil 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 if one is available. He/she should wear the mask if in a common area with other people or while exiting the premises.
- Assess whether the individual who is displaying symptoms can immediately be directed to go home/be brought home by parents who will 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 (See Section 7 of the Guidelines).
- 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 pupil 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).

6. Special Education Needs

Additional considerations for those with Special Educational Needs

For children with special educational needs (SEN), maintaining physical distancing in many instances will not be practical or appropriate to implement. The focus should therefore be on emphasising that parents/guardians should have a heightened awareness of signs, symptoms, or changes in baseline, which suggests illness/COVID-19 infection, and where symptoms are present children should not attend school.

Similarly, staff should be aware of their responsibility not to attend work if they develop signs or symptoms of respiratory illness.

Hand hygiene

Children who are unable to wash their hands by themselves should be assisted to clean their hands using soap and water or a hand sanitiser (if their hands are visibly clean), as outlined previously.

7. 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 COVID-19 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.
- 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 practices.
- 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 to or attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 under any circumstances.
- Not to return to or attend school in the event of the following:
 - if they are identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19;
 - if they live with someone who has symptoms of the virus;
 - 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.

8. 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.

9. Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Programme.

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 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 engagement with the service. A series of weekly webinars and live talks to promote staff wellbeing in schools is current available on the wellbeing portal.