



14.08.20

Dear Parent,

I hope your family are well and excited about the start of our new school year.

Last week the Minister of Education announced that all primary school children should return to school in protective whole class bubbles and following receipt of the guidance document, I am pleased to be in a position to confirm our plans. Every family will have had different experiences during the period of school closure and as a result some children may be experiencing anxiety at the thought of returning to school, while others are looking forward to being back in the classroom.

Please be assured that your child will return to a warm and welcoming environment and although there will be some changes for health and safety reasons, we are hopeful the children will find that many aspects of school are similar to before. Our aim is to provide all pupils with a positive return to school life, with safe practices in operation, creating the right conditions for learning and pupil well-being.

The first few days of term will provide a phased return for all pupils, initially in smaller groups, to ensure that the children see a familiar face on their first morning, have the opportunity to get to know their new teacher and have time to re-engage with their classmates. In addition, significant time in the early days will be given to ensuring that school is a safe environment for pupils and staff by establishing hand washing and sanitising routines, teaching new classroom routines for the use of equipment and making children aware of new arrangements for drop off and pick up, use of toilets, playground, movement around school etc. The majority of primary schools in the North Down area will also be operating a phased return to school.

Return to School Dates

In June, I outlined arrangements in Plan B which were based on whole classes returning to school. This plan has now been reviewed with some changes made to bring all children back more quickly, whilst still providing small groups' induction. Please accept my apologies if this affects your childcare arrangements based on our earlier plans.

Week 1 remains unchanged for P2-6 with changes made to week 2.

Week 1 has been changed for P7 but week 2 remains the same.

Week beginning	Year Group	Date/ Times
24 th August	P7	Group A – Mon 9am-12 noon Group B – Tues 9am-12noon Full classes – Wed –Fri 9am -12 noon
	P2/P4/P6	Group A – Tues 9am-12noon Group B – Thurs 9am-12noon
	P3/P5	Group A – Wed 9am-12noon Group B – Fri 9am-12noon
31 st August	P7	Full classes - Mon-Fri 9am - 2pm
	P2-P6	Group A – Mon 9am-12 noon Group B – Tues 9am-12noon Full classes – Wed –Fri 9am -1pm
7 th September	P7	Full classes – Normal Timetable (outlined in class 2020-21 letter)
	P2-P6	Full classes – Normal Timetable (outlined in class 2020-21 letter)

Seesaw 2020-21:

Thank you for signing up to your new 2020-21 Seesaw account as this is how you will receive information from your new teacher/s with video clips for the start of the new term and your Parent Information video.

Drop off/Pick up arrangements:

All schools have been asked to put in place staggered drop off and pick up arrangements to minimise the number of children and parents around the school grounds at any given time. As we are a large school this is particularly important and we would ask parents to avoid congregating at school gates or in the playground and be mindful of social distancing at all times.

In order to minimise the number of children and adults around the school grounds at any time we will be operating a staggered drop off and pick up for each year group.

Every class/year group will enter the building by a different door. We will also review our three entrances regarding a one-way system. Class teachers will provide more detail via Seesaw next week. I will also be sending a letter next week with further information regarding drop off and pick up times.

School Uniform & Equipment:

As already outlined, school summer uniform will be worn as usual at the start of term. We request that all children from P1-P7 have a school bag (small/A4 size) which is washable and will fit onto the back of their chair. We would ask parents to sanitise bags each evening. This will hold break/lunch and necessary belongings for school. You received a list of the required classroom stationery in June which should be sent to school with your child on their first day. All personal school equipment will be stored in their personal tray to ensure no sharing of items.

Medication:

Children with epipens, inhalers or other essential medication should bring these with them to school on their first day along with a copy of the current care plan, where appropriate. Please check that medication is in date. All medication should be clearly labelled with the child's name and will be stored safely in school.

Canteen:

The school meals' service will be liaising with me next week regarding the provision of school dinners. I will send further information regarding school dinners next week. We encourage all those who were eligible for Free School Meals or think they will now be eligible, to complete the EA online application process on eani.org.uk (Home-Financial Help-Free School Meals). This will ensure you can access Free School Meals from the start of term.

As school meals will not be available until 1st September all P7 pupils will require a packed lunch on Monday 31st August.

Breakfast Club:

In order to keep children in their protective class bubbles, there will be no breakfast club provision during the first few weeks of term. Further advice has been sought on the operation of Breakfast Clubs and this decision will be reviewed when we have more information.

YMCA After-School Club:

YMCA have worked throughout the summer with our children and will continue our After-School provision at the end of each school day. YMCA have been informed today of our re-start dates/times and will operate usual pick-ups from the playgrounds. Please contact them directly regarding places for your children.

Nursery and P1 Induction & Start:

Individual Visits have been organised for all Nursery and P1 children & parents (parents must wear a mask during their conversation with the teacher while their child plays with the classroom assistant). We are reviewing their staggered start in light of the Department of Education Guidance and will verify 2020-21 plans with you next week.

Further information:

I will send a letter next week to all parents with further information about the return to school, including health advice in relation to the management of anyone with symptoms of Covid 19 in the school setting.

The well-being of our pupils remains our priority, which is why the Rathmore staff team are returning back earlier than scheduled. We will continue to implement current guidance to our school context and review it weekly, communicating updates of practice and procedures with you regularly. We will be relying on your support more than ever.

I hope the details provided to date will give you confidence that your child will return to school in a safe environment, with a child-centred approach. Our re-start plans allow the children valuable focused time with their new class teacher in face to face sessions in small groups. This very short period of time will be invaluable in settling the children back into the formal structure of school, and teaching them the new protocols and routines in place.

Thank you in advance for your continued support. I hope you all can enjoy the last of this summer sun before term starts again.

Yours sincerely,

Julie M Hardy

Principal