
Website Notice to Parents and Guardians/Students

Dear Parent/Guardian

I hope you had a nice Christmas break and may I take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very happy new year in 2021.

We were very hopeful before the Christmas break that school would reopen on 6 January 2021 and that school-life could continue like it did prior to Christmas. The students and staff of the school were simply remarkable in how careful and respectful each and everyone of them have been with minimising risk of infection and looking after one another in our community.

The Minister for Education Norma Foley TD and Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion announced on Wednesday 30 December that the school Christmas break would be extended by three days, with schools reopening on Monday 11 January.

That decision was made so as to allow every member of the school community to follow public health advice closely and minimise their contacts before people return to school.

However, the Government has since changed its stance on this due to surging Covid-19 infections with several thousand positive cases a day now compared to less than 300 per day before the Christmas holidays.

While transmission of the virus in school-going children is still below average it has, since Christmas day started to increase sharply every day since and at a very fast rate. There has been a significant recent deterioration in all of the key disease indicators (case numbers, hospital admissions, ICU occupancy etc.) and the potential impact of new, more transmissible, variants of the virus.

If schools were to open, this could lead to an even higher level of ongoing transmission.

On Thursday 7th January 2021, the decision was taken that ALL students will be supported to learn remotely and that school buildings are to remain closed.

How we will support your child/children

We appreciate how challenging the Covid-19 crisis has been for families, and particularly students. Please rest assured that we are working hard to support all students and parents/guardians in our school community as the pandemic evolves. We have learned a lot since March 2020 and this will stand to us all as we work through the next few weeks.

We gleaned considerable best-practice from your feedback, that of our staff and our interactions with students when schools were forced to close last March. Our patron, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board has also supported us very well since the pandemic struck, and we have weekly meetings of the region's Principals and Deputy Principals to share best-practice and strategies that can support teaching and learning and student care. The last period of school closure presented many challenges, but the resolve of our students, staff and

parents/guardians to engage in every effort to upskill and adapt to Remote Teaching and Learning was truly inspirational. Everyone in our school community is fully prepared for Remote Learning in an effort to fulfil a continuity of learning in the coming days.

Our staff meetings and staff Professional Development days have focused on upskilling everyone to be more proficient and comfortable with the school's excellent Learning Management System (LMS) - G Suite for Education (Google).

Our students are very familiar with this Learning Management System .

Assessing Teaching and Learning in our School

Our School's Digital Learning Hub- Google Classroom-, which students are familiar with, is the main portal for accessing on-line classes and feedback from teachers. Our staff has received support and guidance from Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board on the most effective strategies to manage on-line learning. Our staff have been appraised of the relevant advice, guidance and peer support on managing learning, teaching and assessment in the current pandemic and we are hopeful that this will help to mitigate the loss in class contact time and 'Face to Face' time while the school is closed.

The next three weeks

We will focus our efforts for the three weeks of school closures on teaching, learning and the provision of effective feedback to students.

To this end, we plan on holding an on-line staff meeting and staff subject planning meetings on Monday, 11th January 2021 to coordinate the most effective work-stream for the ensuing week period and to provide for enriched feedback to your child/children.

Students are asked to attend a remote Class Tutor Meeting at 12.00 on Monday 11th January for updates from their Tutors on the plan for the weeks ahead.

Your child will have a blend of on-line 'live' classes, 'flipped learning' lessons, assignments and homework. Teachers will communicate this information to students.

We advise that students get up early each morning and connect with their learning as per their school timetable.

It is also important to ensure students get exercise and take a break from schoolwork and study. Additional advice on strategies to look for personal wellbeing are available on our website.

Students in Sixth Year and Third Year

We are especially mindful of any school closure and how it affects students in Sixth Year and Third Year regarding the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations.

Our school is represented at national level at the Stakeholder Group meetings with the Department of Education by Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, and we will ensure that challenges that arise will be addressed by the group.

The State Examinations Commission has been requested to look at all of the timelines and elements of the practical examinations, submission of project work and the oral examinations. You will get more information about this in time via its website and we will communicate any updates to students and yourself as we are apprised of same: www.examinations.ie.

The Department of Education and the State Examinations Commission are making every effort to support all students through this challenging time.

Students facing examinations are asked to keep focused and to keep working in preparation for the exams. More details will be forthcoming in the near future regarding the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations and we will bring this information to your attention without delay.

Wellbeing including physical activity

NEPS, the Department's National Educational Psychological Service, has developed advice and resources for keeping Children and Young People well during Covid-19. These resources aim to support children and young people's learning and wellbeing at this time.

In the context of wellbeing, NEPS has included a reference in its advice for young people and for parents of young children for the need for physical activity as part of everyone's daily routine while schools are closed.

There is an excellent range of supports available on www.loveparenting.ie specifically for parents to help with this. These resources have been created specifically for parents to use with their children and cover these areas;

- Having the chats
- Routines
- Managing your child's anxiety
- Parent Self-Care
- Maintaining Routines

For information, the relevant text can be found at the following links:

Advice for Young People:

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/advice-to-young-people-while-schools-are-closed.pdf>

Advice for Parents:

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/guide-for-parents-supporting-children.pdf>

Supporting Students with Additional Education Needs

The National Council for Special Education has developed resources for parents of children with additional needs who may benefit from specific advice during the period of school closure. All resources are available on the NCSE

website and publicised through education partners and Twitter. The NCSE visiting teacher service continues to provide direct telephone/skype support to families and students. The NCSE resources can be accessed at: www.ncse.ie/online-resources and include;

- resources for parents and teachers such as class\age level activities
- practical advice on how to take care of Assistive Technology in the Home and a suite of Occupational Therapy and
- Speech and Language Therapy resources (including a social story animation on attending a Covid-19 test Centre prepared by the HSE).

Contacting the School during Closure

Please do not hesitate to contact us at the school via this email address info@desmondcollege.ie and we will do all we can to address your query as soon as possible.

In the meantime, please follow the advice of the HSE and the Government re Health and Safety.

Additional Information

A considerable number of announcements regarding schools will all be available on www.gov.ie as well as regular updates from us in the school.

Thank you for your continued support of our school and we look forward to being in contact with you soon again.

Yours sincerely,

Vourneen Gavin Barry

Principal
