****

**Naíscoil Aodha Rua**

**Covid-19**

**Policies and Procedures**

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**Céad Míle Fáilte!**

We are delighted to finally be welcoming our new pupils and their families to Naíscoil Aodha Rua. Our staff have been working very hard to get the Naíscoil ready for your arrival and we are looking forward to hearing the laughter of children in the setting again soon!

The lockdown period was difficult, but we hope that it will be remembered by our children as a unique time in their lives, when families had the chance to re-connect and spend precious time together.

Thank you for your ongoing support and patience during the summer months, whilst we were trying to navigate a plan for re-opening in line with the ever changing government guidance.

We fully understand that for some children, the worry of separating from parents and guardians, especially after such a long period at home, will be upsetting for them. We want their first experience of life at Naícsoil to be a positive experience and pledge that we will work in partnership with parents and carers to help lessen any anxiety that the children, or indeed parents may be feeling.

We will do our utmost, in the early days and weeks to settle the children into the Naíscoil routine on a gradual basis and to ensure that they feel safe, secure and content. Anxious children find it difficult to learn, so we will be primarily focussing on building the children’s emotional well-being and will re-assure them that we have done everything in our power to keep them safe at Naíscoil. If your child is particularly anxious or nervous about coming back to school, please ring the school and ask to speak with the class teacher, so that we can provide some extra scaffolding for them on their return.

Due to the coronavirus crisis, we have had to make a number of changes to the Naíscoil setting and have had to adjust the way that we usually operate. However, the dedication and commitment of our staff remains a constant and we guarantee that you will be warmly welcomed by all! We know that parents have differing opinions on the risks associated with coronavirus in schools and indeed you may well have differing opinions on the measures which we have had to put in place to ensure the safety of all. We are aware that some children in our school have particular health conditions or are living with people who may be at risk. Therefore, please be assured that every decision we have made has been based on the most up to date guidance from the Departments of Education & Health and has been discussed and agreed by both the staff and committee of the Naíscoil, with one aim in mind – the health, safety and well-being of all in our school community.

We understand that some of the safety measures that we have had to implement will cause a certain amount of inconvenience and we ask you as parents to try your best to be as positive as possible, as the children will pick up on your positivity and approach their first few weeks at Naíscoil in a more hopeful fashion. The success of our post lockdown return to school will depend on us being patient and flexible and we ask you to please bear with us, as we navigate through the first number of weeks, especially if we have to make further changes or adjustments to previously agreed plans. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need to discuss any individual family circumstances. We will do our best to support you and to work around any challenges you may be facing.

Please read the guidelines enclosed and do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or concerns.

I wish you and your child every success in the new school year. I look forward to working together as a school community, to ensure a smooth transition for all children, as they begin their journey at Naíscoil Aodha Rua.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Móna Uí Dhochartaigh Carmel Uí Cheallaigh

Príomhoide Ghaelscoil Aodha Rua Naíscoil Supervisor

**Summer Preparations**

As you are aware, the Minister for Education issued guidance at the very end of June which advised schools & pre-school settings that a ‘blended’ approach to learning would be implemented in September. This dictated that children would attend Naíscoil for 40% of the week (2 full days / 4 half days) and would experience ‘remote’ or digital learning at home for the other 60% of the week.

The staff and committees of both the Naíscoil & Gaelscoil spent several weeks in July agreeing a plan for this part-time approach and decided that to maximise the children’s exposure to Irish, our pupils would attend school for a half day every day. We also committed to making the plan as family friendly as possible, with all siblings following the same time-table. We spent considerable time arranging the children into groups – matching siblings in various classes & those beginning Naíscoil, those who attend the same child-minder, those who rely on the bus etc etc. Then, just as we were just about to formally launch that plan, we were informed that the Minister was due to announce a full-time return of full classes to school – so it was back to the drawing board to prepare for this new plan!

To say the least, we have had a busy summer navigating the various pieces of guidance and getting the school ready for the return of our pupils and their families. We are looking forward to welcoming you all back!

Although it is hard to believe that August has now finally arrived, we are confident that we have everything in place, ready to greet the 23 new pupils of Naíscoil Aodha Rua and the 142 pupils of Gaelscoil Aodha Rua on their return to school!

**How will we minimise the risk of coronavirus entering our school community?**

Our main aim is to work in partnership with parents to minimise the chances of coronavirus entering our school community. To this end, we will take the following precautions:

* Parents are asked to check children’s temperatures and general well-being before sending them to school & are advised that children with a high temperature or other covid-19 symptoms (a new cough / loss of taste & smell) should remain at home & seek medical advice / a covid-19 test.
* Parents are advised to keep their children at home and seek medical advice if anyone in their household shows symptoms of covid-19, or if they have been in contact with anyone who has tested positive for covid-19.
* Families who have been on holidays will be reminded that their child should not return to school until the 14 days quarantine is up.
* We respectfully encourage staff and families to act responsibly in their daily lives and to keep up to date with the revised government guidelines regarding indoor and outdoor gatherings / wearing of facemasks in public places / hand washing & respiratory hygiene procedures etc. This will minimise the risk of anyone in our school community contracting covid-19 and of spreading it throughout the school, resulting in the potential closure of the school for up to 14 days.
* We respectfully encourage all families to download the PHA ‘track and trace’ app, so that people / families who may have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus can seek medical advice / a covid-19 test before returning to school.
* We thank everyone who has returned the online ‘Parental Declaration’ form and ask that anyone who has yet to do so, would complete the form and return it to us before their child re-commences school.

**Social Distancing – to do or not to do?**

**Guidelines on Social Distancing for Children**

The new pre-school guidance clearly advises that social distancing guidelines have been relaxed in settings and that children no longer have to stay 1m apart. We always felt that that regulation would be very difficult to implement and that it would be wholly unnatural for young children to keep a 1m distance away from each other, especially as we place such an emphasis on collaborative play.

However, minimising close interaction with other people who do not live in your family home is still one of the most effective ways to curb the spread of coronavirus and to this end we will be putting the following precautions in place:

* Excess furniture and resources have been removed from the Naíscoil to maximise the space available for the children’s learning environment.
* We have changed the layouts of our setting, so that for the most part, children will not be sitting directly opposite each other during play, so that they don’t sneeze or cough on the person facing them.
* Children will be encouraged to respect the personal space of other children and to avoid physical contact. This will be done in an age appropriate way and ‘encouraged’ as opposed to being enforced.
* Families will be encouraged to approach the Naíscoil building one at a time and ‘spacing spots’ will be placed on the ground to assist with queuing on arrival at the main doors.
* You will be greeted by a member of staff at the main porch and your name (the name of the person who dropped the child at Naíscoil) will be recorded on a spreadsheet.
* We have scheduled staggered snack times and children will eat their snack in small groups of 4.
* A specified amount of children will be allowed to play at a given activity at any one time, dictated by the number of ‘bracelets’ at the station, which the children will wear to identify where they are playing.
* We will do our best to utilise all outdoor space (weather permitting) including the playground, play-park and community walking track.

**Guidelines on Social Distancing for Adults on School Grounds**

Guidelines for social distancing for adults remain in place in both the guidance from the Public Health Agency and Dept. of Education and adults are advised to stay a distance of 2m from each other.

* Staff in the Naíscoil have been advised to maintain a 2m distance between them and if staff meetings are due to last any longer than 15-20 mins, all members of staff will wear facemasks.
* Staff have been advised to keep a 2m distance between themselves and the pupils. Whilst we will be making adjustments to our classroom layout and delivery of play, we will never allow this piece of guidance to compromise the care that will be given to a distressed / sick / injured child and our staff will remain compassionate and sensitive to the needs of the children at all times.
* Parents are asked to respect the social distancing guidelines whilst on school grounds. Please adhere to the drop-off and collection arrangements and to the times allocated for staggered arrival and collection.
* We know that parents may not have seen each other in months and are keen to have a catch-up, but we ask that you model good practice to the children, by adhering to the 2m social distance advice. Signage and ground markings will be in place to assist with this.
* Parents are asked not to enter the Naíscoil building, unless they have made an appointment. Please ring the school office on 028 877 26870 to leave any urgent messages, or to make an appointment to meet with a staff member after the session is over.

We know that the above guidelines go against the usual ‘open-door’ policy in the Naíscoil and we too will sorely miss the warm relationship that we usually share with parents. We are working on strategies that will facilitate communication between staff and parents and will update you on these as we get settled back into routine. Please do not hesitate to phone the Naíscoil if you are concerned about your child and be re-assured that we value your role in your child’s education.

**Hygiene Procedures**

* Our domestic staff will be implementing an increased cleaning regime and will be cleaning high touch areas on a regular basis.
* Hand sanitising stations have been installed around the Naíscoil and staff and pupils will sanitise their hands, on arrival to school every day.
* Staff and pupils will be encouraged to wash their hands with soap and warm water on a regular basis throughout the school day. If your child needs to use special soap, please send in a bottle of your preferred brand to the class teacher.
* Parents are asked to ensure that children wear a clean uniform to school every day. If you need a spare uniform, please speak with Carmel and she may have a spare jumper / t-short which was donated by a parent from last year.
* Visitors to the Naíscoil will be kept to an absolute minimum and will be asked to sanitise their hands and to wear a mask / visor / latex gloves as appropriate. Any area they have worked at during their visit will be sanitised after they leave. Appropriate records of all visitors will be kept, to assist with ‘track and trace; procedures in the event of a covid-19 case.
* Parents are asked to provide a box of tissues and two bottles of hand sanitiser for their children to use at Naíscoil.
* We will minimise the resources shared by the children and each class will have a ‘quarantine box’ for resources used during the school day, which will need to be sanitised before being re-used.
* Arrangements will be put in place in each class for the distribution of materials between home and school, in particular with respect to the children’s work. Further details will follow.

**The Practicalities of the School Day**

**Arrival to Naíscoil**

* In order to avoid congestion in the school car-park, we ask that only parents of children who are in the Naíscoil / Ranganna 1&2 classes should drive down into the school car-park.
* Or, if possible, use the hurling club car-park and walk with your child down to the Naíscoil. Please keep hold of their hand at all times.
* If parking in the main school car-park, please ensure that you reverse into a parking space and drive out, to ensure the safety of all.
* Parents should walk with their children through the car-park and deliver their child safely into the care of a member of Naíscoil staff at the front door to the Naíscoil.
* We need to record the name of the person who has dropped each child off at Naíscoil. This will be recorded by a member of staff at the front door. If someone new is dropping your child off, they will be asked to give their name.
* We have been advised to limit access to the building. But, as always, we will be flexible and will work with you if your child is particularly distressed.
* Children can arrive at Naíscoil each morning from 8.45am – 9am.

**Collection Arrangements**

During Week 1, your child will remain at Naíscoil until 11am. From week 2 onwards, they will remain for the full session, ie. until 12 noon.

When collecting your child, please park your car outside the main green gates, as the Gaelscoil children may be using the car-park as a playground.

Please come to the front door of the Naíscoil, where you will be greeted by a member of staff.

Again, the name of the person collecting your child will be recorded by a member of staff. If someone new is collecting your child, you should inform the Naíscoil staff in advance. If the Naíscoil staff have never met this person before, they will be asked to show ID, to prove their identity.

Please pass the information about arrival and collection on to childminders / taxi drivers etc.

**Provision of Snack**

* All children will be provided with a break-time snack every day at Naíscoil. This will consist of a range of fruit, bread products (toast, sandwich, pancakes etc) and a drink of milk or water.
* We ask parents to contribute £20 per month (approx. £1 per day) to cover the cost of the snacks.
* Children will eat their break-time snack in a small group of 4 children.
* Children are not permitted to bring any food or drinks into the Naíscoil.

**WE ARE A NUT-FREE SCHOOL AND HAVE A NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH SEVERE NUT ALLERGIES!**

**PLEASE AVOID GIVING YOUR CHILD NUT-BASED BREAKFAST CEREALS / BARS AND MAKE SURE TO WASH THEIR HANDS AND TEETH AFTER THE EAT THEIR BREAKFAST.**

**THIS COULD BE A LIFE OR DEATH SCENARIO FOR ANOTHER FAMILY!**

**What will happen if my child is sick at school?**

If your child becomes unwell at school and is showing any of the reported symptoms of Covid-19, we will bring them to a safe, comfortable place and make contact with a parent / guardian immediately.

Contrary to the guidance issued by Mr Weir, we will never place a child alone in isolation! Children who become unwell at school will be brought over the office block and will remain in the care of a member of the Naíscoil staff, who will take their temperature (on their wrist) and will re-assure and comfort them until a parent / guardian arrives. The staff member will wear appropriate PPE whilst they care for the child and the area will be sanitised after the child goes home. The child will be kept comfortable and calm throughout. If one child in your family displays symptoms of Covid-19, all siblings in the family will be gathered from their classrooms in the Gaelscoil and you will be advised to seek medical advice / a covid-19 test for your family. If a parent / guardian cannot be contacted or if they cannot make it to the school within 15 mins, we will contact a person nominated on the Collection Policy.

**Covid-19 symptoms**

If your child looks particularly hot / flushed (not due to physical activity etc), becomes lethargic / complains of a sore throat / develops a new continuous cough / complains of a loss of taste and smell, we will contact you immediately. We recognise that small children can have a temperature / feel unwell for many reasons, not always associated with Covid-19. This will be especially true during the winter months. However, we will err on the side of caution and contact you if your child becomes unwell.

PHA guidance advises that:

* people who test positive for Covid-19 should self-isolate for 10 days from when the symptoms began
* people who are contacted via the ‘track and trace’ app and are informed that they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, should self-isolate for 14 days

There is a possibility that we may have to recommend that the whole Naíscoil class should self-isolate for 10/14 days, if we have a child / a number of children who test positive for covid-19. If that child has siblings in other classes at Gaelscoil, they too may have to self-isolate. If we have a number of positive cases among staff / pupils in various classes throughout the school, we may have to close the school for a given period and return to remote / connected learning at home. We advise parents to have a ‘contingency’ plan in place for child-care in the case of such a scenario.

We wish to avoid all of the above scenarios and respectfully ask that parents take every precaution possible to avoid their families contracting covid-19 and to avoid spreading the virus in the school. We need to work in honest partnership with each other to ensure that the Naíscoil can re-open and stay open! It is impossible to hypothesise about every possible scenario, so we will take each day as it comes and deal with each scenario as it arises. We will seek advice from EA and from the PHA

in all cases and follow their guidance.

**Medical Conditions**

If your child has a medical condition, such as asthma, or if they have an allergy towards a particular food etc, please notify a member of the Naíscoil staff as a matter of urgency.

Please also ensure that they have been issued with a fresh prescription from their GP for any necessary medication, so that all inhalers / epipens etc are in date. You will also need to complete a care-plan for the new school year.

If you feel that your child or anyone in your household is at an increased risk from Covid-19, please notify us by e-mail and we will give you a call to discuss.

**Communication with Parents**

The lockdown has forced us all to embrace the world of digital communication and as we enter this new school year, we aim to minimise the amount of paper-based communication which will be sent from Naíscoil to home. However, we recognise the importance of maintaining regular contact with parents and will continue to use a range of platforms for sending messages, letters, policies and general updates.

We have found that the closed Facebook page has been invaluable to us in getting vital information out to parents quickly and efficiently. It was also a great way for us all to still feel connected as a school community. We have decided to continue with the page for the coming term and ask that all parents would join the group.

The Gaelscoil website will also be updated regularly and will contain a copy of any documents placed on the Facebook page.

The Gaelscoil text service will continue for sending short messages / reminders and parents of children in the Naíscoil have granted us permission to add their numbers to this service.

Any paper-based products being sent home will be kept to a minimum and sent in a poly-pocket which you can wipe on arrival to your home.

Please do not hesitate to ring the Naíscoil on 028 877 26870 or to drop me an e-mail on naiscoilaodharua@outlook.com if you have any queries or concerns.

**Positive Mental Health**

Our main priority in the early weeks of September will be to ensure that every child feels safe, secure and content at Naíscoil. We know that ‘separation anxiety’ will be a real issue for some children, having spent such an extended period away from school, at home with family. For some, this may the first time they have left the care of parents / guardians. We are committed to ensuring that every child is supported to settle into the school routine on a gradual basis. We will discuss Covid-19 and ways to stay safe in an age appropriate manner, however, we will not be dwelling on these issues, as we know that it may cause distress to some children. If your child suffered a bereavement during lockdown or if they witnessed a family member who was very ill, please let us know, so that we can be sensitive towards their feelings.

**Constant Review**

The situation with Covid-19 is ever evolving and the number of cases and the infamous R number are changing almost daily. We will be keeping abreast of all guidance issued by the Departments for Education & Health and will implement any new measures required, in response to the general situation in society.

We have worked very hard to formulate a comprehensive ‘Return to School’ plan and we are confident that we have put sufficient precautions in place to safeguard everyone in our school community. However, all of these arrangements will need to be kept under constant review and we may need to amend or tweak certain procedures and protocols as we navigate the first few weeks of the new school term. We ask you to be patient and to be flexible and to work in partnership with us to keep our pupils and staff and their families safe and to avoid any potential future closures of the school for particular / all classes.

**A Final Note ….**

The practicalities of life at Naíscoil may have slightly changed and we may have new signs and new sanitising stations and new arrangements in place. However the commitment and dedication of our staff remains the same and we will continue to care for every child in the school in a compassionate manner. Although we may not see as much of parents as we used to, we want you to know that we are here to support you and your child and are merely a phone-call or an e-mail away. We hope for a successful school year and pray that our school community will be safe from any ill effects of Covid-19. We look forward to working in partnership with you as you and your child commence your educational journey here at Naíscoil Aodha Rua!

**Go n-éirí linn agus go raibh maith agaibh!**