****

**Gaelscoil Aodha Rua**

97, Bóthar Dhomhnach Mór,

Dún Geanainn,

Co. Thír Eoghain.

BT70 1HD

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1 Eanáir 2021

A Thuismitheoir dhil,

Beannachtaí na bliana úire daoibh uilig!

Happy New Year to you all!

As you will have seen in the media, the Minister for Education has decided to delay the return of face to face learning in all schools until Monday 11th Jan 2021. Minister Weir has come under huge criticism for consistently leaving decisions of this sort to the last minute, when a contingency plan could easily have been put in place before Christmas. It is very difficult for school staff to plan for such last minute u-turns and we fully empathise with parents, who we know will also find this last minute change of plan inconvenient and difficult to work around. As always, our school staff will do everything in our power to support families and to ensure that learning and pastoral support of pupils continues.

However inconvenient the timing of this announcement was, given the massive rise in positive cases of Covid-19 throughout the six counties and indeed the arrival of this new strain of the virus, a short delay in our return to school will give an extra layer of protection to our pupils, staff and indeed whole school community against Covid-19. It will grant us a ten day period of limited interaction from New Year, when the most significant amount of mixing / social interaction may have been taking place in our community. It also means, that anyone who caught the virus over the Christmas or New Year period will, for the most part, already know that they have the virus and will be able to self-isolate on an individual / whole family basis, instead of returning to school and causing the whole class to have to isolate.

**Post Christmas Return Dates**

In line with the guidance received from Minister Weir and from the EA yesterday evening, we at Gaelscoil Aodha Rua will implement the following plan for our post-Christmas return to school:

**Wednesday 6th Jan** – staff planning day (remote learning tasks to be collated, distributed and arrangements put in place for supervision of key worker / vulnerable children)

**Thursday 7th Jan & Friday 8th Jan** – supported home learning for all classes – details to follow (supervision of key worker / vulnerable children will be provided).

**Key Worker & Vulnerable Children**

On **Thursday 7th & Friday 8th Jan**, the children of key workers and those children who are definied as ‘vulnerable’ will be supervised in school. Supervisory arrangements for these children have yet to be finalised, as we do not know how many families will require this service. Whilst in achool, the children will carry out the same tasks as their classmates who are learning at home, but will be accommodated on school premises.

The objective of this delayed return to school is to keep children safe and to reduce the number of children interacting with each other on school premises during this period of high risk, which will in turn lessen their chance of contracting the virus and carrying it home. Therefore, if your children can be safely accommodated at home, please do not send them to school. Please only send your children to school if you have to work outside your home on Thursday and Friday, in an essential key worker job and have no other safe alternative child-care solution.

Key Workers are defined as those who work in the following jobs: medical, education, social security, retail, home-care, fire / ambulance / police services. A full list of ‘key-workers’ can be found on the Department of Education website.

‘Vulnerable’ children are defined as those children who have a statement of Special Educational Needs, who are ‘looked after’ or who are involved with Social Services.

If you need to request supervision for your child / children in school on Thursday & Friday of next week, please e mail me at [gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie](mailto:gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie) by Monday 4th Jan @6pm, so that a supervisory rota can be arranged.

**ICT Devices**

To date, we have supplied 9 families with digital devices and wifi vouchers to support them with home learning. These devices were collected back in before Christmas so that an update could be carried out on them. If you did not return your device, please do so on Tuesday 5th Jan. We will be returning all devices on Wednesday 6th Jan to those families already availing of this support. If you are struggling to get access to a digital device, please e mail me at [gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie](mailto:gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie) by 6pm on Monday 4th Jan and we will endeavour to support you. Children who are entitled to Free School Meals will be prioritised. It is very important that all families engage with the remote learning tasks. We understand that many parents will be working around their own work commitments and may complete the tasks in the evenings.

**Transfer Test**

I will be hosting a zoom call next week with the parents of those children due to sit the Transfer Test. I will also be drafting a letter to support a request for ‘special circumstances’ for all children due to sit the test, due to the various periods of self-isolation that they endured before Christmas. Múinteoir Seán will be in touch with the next set of practice papers early next week.

As principal of our school, I feel a huge responsibility for keeping everyone in our school community safe, both staff and pupils alike. Please adhere to the PHA guidance to ‘stay at home’ and to only go out for essential reasons. Covid-19 is rife in all communities at the moment and we need to work together to try to keep it out of our school community as best we can.

Please contact me via e mail on [gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie](mailto:gaelscoilaodharua@yahoo.ie) if you wish to request supervision for your child in school next Thursday and Friday, if you need ICT support or if you need to inform me of a positive case of Covid-19 in your immediate family.

Le mórmheas,

Móna