

## **Section 5 COVID Response Plan GVETNS- reviewed in line with HSPC guidance 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2021**

### **5. General advice to prevent the spread of the virus.**

At Griffeen Valley ETNS we will manage the risk of COVID 19 by doing everything practical to avoid the introduction of COVID-19 into the school. If infection is not introduced, it cannot be spread. The risk of spreading the infection once introduced exists in all interpersonal interactions; pupil-pupil, teacher-teacher and teacher- pupil and must be managed in all settings.

A range of essential control measures have been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 virus and to protect the safety, health and welfare of staff, pupils, parents and visitors as far as possible within the school. The control measures shall continue to be reviewed and updated as required on an ongoing basis. Updated advice from the HSE is available on its website - <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>

The Department of Education and Skills will ensure all updated advice is circulated to schools. Griffeen Valley ETNS will arrange for this advice to be circulated to staff, pupils and visitors in a timely manner.

It is critical that staff, pupils, parents and visitors are aware of, and adhere to, the control measures outlined 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*):

- Staff and pupils that have symptoms should not to attend school, phone their doctor and to follow HSE guidance on self-isolation;
- Staff and pupils should 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
- Staff and pupils should 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.
- Staff and pupils who develop symptoms at school should bring this to the attention of the class teacher and Principal promptly;
  - Staff and pupils know the protocol for managing a suspected case of COVID-19 in school (*details at Section 8*);
  - Staff and pupils should 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;
  - Physical distancing (of 2m) should be maintained between staff and visitors where possible.

### 5.1) Know the Symptoms of COVID-19

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 it is important to know and recognise the symptoms. They are:

- ✓ High temperature
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- ✓ Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

Infection with the virus that causes COVID-19 can cause illness, ranging from mild to severe, and, in some cases, can be fatal. It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of [cold](#) and [flu](#).

Common symptoms of coronavirus include:

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above).
- a new cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry.

- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties.
- loss or change in your sense of smell or taste - this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

Any staff member displaying these symptoms should immediately inform the Principal teacher. They will not be permitted to attend work if they have any of the symptoms listed below:

- High temperature
- Cough
  
- Shortness of breath or breathing difficulties
- Loss of smell, of taste or distortion of taste

Staff must inform the Principal of this situation as soon as possible. The following advice is provided to inform school staff and pupils how to reduce the chance of getting infected by the coronavirus:

If you have any common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus), [self-isolate](#) (stay in your room) and phone your family doctor straight away to see if you need [a COVID-19 test](#). Other people in your household will need to [restrict their movements](#) (stay at home).

Getting an early diagnosis means, you can get the help you need and take steps to avoid spreading the virus, if you have it.

For the complete list of symptoms, please refer to the HSE [Website](#).

### **COVID-19 Tracker App**

COVID Tracker app is a free and easy-to-use mobile phone app that will:

- alert you if you have been in [close contact](#) with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus)
- keep other app users safe by alerting them if you test positive for COVID-19
- give you advice on what to do if you have symptoms

You can download the free app from [Apple's AppStore](#) or the [GooglePlay store](#)

## 5.2) Hand Hygiene

### **Wash your hands frequently**

Staff and pupils should understand why hand hygiene is important as well as when and how to wash their hands.

At Griffeen Valley ETNS we promote good hygiene and display posters throughout the schools on how to wash your hands. Follow the HSE guidelines on handwashing:

<https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/how-to-wash-your-hands.html>

Hand hygiene can be achieved by hand washing or use of a hand sanitiser (when hands look clean).

The use of hand hygiene facilities including wash hand basins are managed so as to avoid congregation of pupils and staff waiting to use wash hand basins and hand sanitisers.

Children and staff will access hand washing facilities after activities that are likely to soil hands, for example playing outside or certain sporting activities as hand sanitiser does not work on dirty hands.

Hand sanitiser dispensers are deployed more at exit and entry points of the school and classrooms and care is taken to clean up any hand sanitiser spills to prevent risks of falls.

Wash hand basins, running water, liquid soap and hand drying facilities are provided in all toilets, kitchens and any food preparation areas.

Hand washing facilities should be maintained and cleaned regularly during the day. They are in good condition and supplies of soap and towels are topped up regularly to encourage everyone to use them.

Posters displaying hand washing techniques and promoting hand washing are placed on walls adjacent to washing facilities.

Hand sanitiser is suitable for use for hand hygiene when hands are not visibly soiled (look clean).

When hand rubs/gels are being used in school care is taken to ensure that pupils do not ingest them as they are flammable and toxic.

Young children should not have independent use of containers of alcohol gel.

## Frequency of Hand Hygiene

Pupils and staff should perform hand hygiene:

- On arrival at school;
- Before eating or drinking;
- After using the toilet;
- After playing outdoors;
- When their hands are physically dirty;
- When they cough or sneeze.

The Department has arranged for a drawdown framework to be established to enable schools purchase hand-sanitisers and any other necessary PPE supplies for use in the school. The Department will provide funding for the costs associated with hand sanitising and PPE requirements in schools. Griffeen Valley ETNS maintains a monitored stock of PPE and sanitation products which is monitored by the Principal, caretaker, secretary and LWR's.

### **5.3) Respiratory Hygiene**

Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your bent elbow when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and safely into a nearby bin.

By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and Covid-19.

Good hygiene practices and washing your hands properly and regularly can help stop the spread of the virus. It is, therefore, crucial that all staff and pupils adhere to this advice and adopt the following practices as strictly as possible.

#### **Do**

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze
- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands.

#### **Do Not**

- Touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- Share objects that touch your mouth - for example, bottles, cups, cutlery, etc.

## **Maintain social distancing.**

All classes will operate within a bubble and pod system. Hand sanitiser will be available at entry points, in all classrooms and on corridors - outside support rooms.

Classes Junior Infants - 2nd class will not be advised to social distance. Children will be sitting in pods. Each pod will be made up of four children. Each pod will be separated by 1 metre where possible. The DES recommended seating arrangement is being followed in these classes. The SNA will sit at the pod closest to the child that they are supporting. Each pod will be at least 1 metre from the teacher's table. Teachers will wear a mask at all times where social distancing of 2m cannot be maintained.

Classes 3rd - 6th class will be adhering to social distancing of 1 metre apart. Children will be sitting at a table of two children, spaced by 1 metre apart. Each table will be spaced by 1 metre wherever possible. Tables will be at least 1 metre from the teacher's table. SNA will sit nearest the table to the child that they are supporting.

Class bubbles will not mix. Staggered lunch breaks will be in place to ensure that class bubbles do not mix. Children will play with the children from their own class.

There is a one-way entry and exit system in place in the school. This is monitored by staff during drop-off and collection. Parents are encouraged to accompany children to the school gate and allow them to walk to their class. Younger children can be accompanied by older siblings. Children will no longer line up in the yard in the morning. Instead, they will come directly to their classroom using the allocated access points. Teachers / SNA's will monitor that children from different class bubbles are distancing on entry and exit to the school.

Physical distancing can be usefully applied in primary settings allowing for some flexibility when needed. It must be applied in a practical way to recognise that the learning environment cannot be dominated by a potentially counterproductive focus on this issue. Physical distancing will look different across the various ages and stages of learning. Care will be taken to avoid generating tension or potential conflict and some flexibility in the implementation of measures may be required at times.

It is also recognised that it is not always possible for staff to maintain physical distance from pupils and it is not appropriate that they would always be expected to do so where this could have a detrimental impact on the pupil i.e. if a child sustains an injury and requires first aid.

**However, where possible staff should maintain a minimum of 1m distance and where possible 2m. They should also take measures to avoid close contact at face to face level such as remaining standing rather than sitting beside/crouching down.**

Physical distancing falls into two categories:

- Increasing separation
- Decreasing interaction

### ***Increasing separation***

To maintain physical distancing in the classroom, Griffeen Valley ETNS has,

1. Reconfigured class spaces to maximise physical distancing

To support primary schools and special schools in the implementation of physical distancing in the classroom, the Department has developed a suite of illustrative classroom layouts of potential options which are in accordance with the public health advice, and assumes

- Room is clear of any unnecessary furniture/shelves etc. on the walls
- A variety of classroom sizes.

**The teacher's desk should be at least 1m and where possible 2m away from pupil desks.**

### ***Decreasing interaction***

The extent to which decreasing interaction is possible in a primary or special school will depend on the school setting and a common-sense approach is required recognising the limits to which this can be achieved between pupils.

In Griffeen Valley ETNS a distance of 1m should be maintained between desks or between individual pupils. It is recognised that younger children are unlikely to maintain physical distancing indoors. Therefore achieving this recommendation in the first four years of primary or special schools, is not a pre-requisite to reopening a primary school.

Where possible work stations are allocated consistently to the same staff and children rather than having spaces which are shared.

In an effort to reduce the risk of infection we have structured pupils and their teachers into Class Bubbles (i.e. a class grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as possible) and discrete groups or "Pods" within those class bubbles, to the extent that this is practical.

Generally speaking the objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as the latter will not always be possible.

The aim of the system within the school is that class grouping mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. The Pods within those Class Bubbles is an additional measures, to limit the extent of close contact within the Class Bubble.

Pod sizes should be kept as small as is likely to be reasonably practical in the specific classroom context.

To the greatest extent possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles although this will not be possible at all times.

Different Class Bubbles do where possible have separate breaks.

Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided/minimised where possible.

Staff members who move from class bubble to class bubble should be limited as much as possible.

***Additional measures to decrease interaction include:***

Limit interaction on arrival and departure and in hallways and other shared areas.

Social physical contact (hand to hand greetings, hugs) should be discouraged.

Where pupils need to move about within the classroom to perform activities (access to a shared resource) it should be organized to the greatest degree possible to minimize congregation at the shared resource.

Staff and pupils should avoid sharing of personal items.

We encourage pupils to avoid behaviours that involve hand to mouth contact (putting pens/pencils in the mouth).

Where teaching and learning involves use of keyboards or tablets, the contact surface of the device should be cleaned regularly and hand hygiene encouraged.

**Physical Distancing outside of the classroom and within the school**

***School drop off/collection***

Arrangements for dropping off/collecting pupils should be arranged to encourage physical distancing

Walking to school is encouraged

Parents and carers are asked to maintain a distance of 2m between parents and guardians and between parents and guardians and school staff.

Staggered drop off/pick up times are in place where practical and feasible.

Children do not line up on yard from 8.30am and instead head straight to their small group designated learning space/classroom.

### ***Staff***

A distance of 2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching such as the staff room and arriving to work.

Where 2m cannot be maintained in staff groups, as much as distance as is possible and updated guidance on face covering should be observed.

Physical distancing should be observed between staff members within the staff room through the use of staggered breaks etc.

Staff meetings are held remotely or in very small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing.

We have implemented a no hand shaking policy.

Minimise gathering of school staff at the beginning or end of the school day.

Staff can rotate between areas/classes but this should be minimized where possible.

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### ***Corridors and Stairwells***

Briefly passing someone in a hall is very unlikely to contribute significantly to the spread of infection if people do not have physical contact and avoid informal group discussions.

### ***Yard/Supervision***

The risk of transmission from contact with outside surfaces or play areas is low.

We have adjusted play time/outdoor activities to minimise crowding at the entrance and exits.

It is not possible to maintain physical distancing when pupils in primary schools playtogether outdoors, but we do keep children in their separated class bubbles on yard

We have staggered break times and outdoor access.

Children are encouraged to perform hand hygiene before and after outdoor activities.

### **Ventilation**

The Department has published guidance setting out the practical steps for good ventilation in accordance with public health advice '*Practical Steps for the Deployment of Good Ventilation Practices in Schools*'. The guidance sets out an overall approach for schools that windows should be open as fully as possible when classrooms are not in use (e.g. during break-times or lunch-times (assuming not in use) and also at the end of each school day) and partially open when classrooms are in use. The guidance provides that good ventilation can be achieved in classrooms without causing discomfort, particularly during cold weather. Griffeen Valley ETNS follows this advice.

### **5.4) Use of PPE in Schools**

The Department has published "[Guidance to Primary and Special Schools on PPE consumables and equipment](#)" on [www.gov.ie/backtoschool](http://www.gov.ie/backtoschool)

This provides schools with the information needed on the appropriate quantities of PPE consumables and equipment to support the full and safe reopening of schools.

The updated advice from the HPSC to the Department of Education has recommended that face coverings should be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils. The Department has accepted this recommendation. Accordingly, it is now a requirement for face coverings to be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils. (Please see note re medical grade masks on page 24)

PPE will also need to be used at certain work activities or work areas. These might include roles such as:

- Performing intimate care
- Where a suspected case of COVID-19 is identified while the school is in operation
- Where staff are particularly vulnerable to infection but are not in the list of those categorised as people in very high risk groups, or may be living with people who are in a very high risk category
- Administering first aid
- Parent Teacher meetings that cannot be facilitated remotely - urgent /sensitive cases

Where staff provide healthcare to children with medical needs in the school environment they should apply standard precautions as per usual practice.

### **Reception Areas**

Consideration should be given to the use of Perspex in reception areas where it is not possible for staff to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff or pupils. Minor works funding grant can be used for this purpose.

### **Face Coverings/Face Visors/Masks**

Cloth face coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Cloth face coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

In childcare and educational settings, the implementation of mandatory face-covering usage is challenging, as it is known that children will have a lower tolerance and ability to use the face covering properly, and use of face-coverings by teachers and staff caring for very young children may cause undue stress to the children.

It is not recommended that children attending primary school wear face-coverings.

It is now a requirement for face coverings to be worn by staff members where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff, parents, essential visitors or pupils.

In certain situations the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with pupils with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties. Griffeen Valley ETNS has made medical grade face clear visors available to staff.

Cloth face coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Primary school children
- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

All staff wearing face coverings should be reminded to not touch the face covering and to wash or sanitise their hands (using hand sanitiser) before putting on and after taking off the face covering.

Information should be provided on the proper use, removal, and washing of cloth face coverings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6ZqdpLfSqw>

Cloth face coverings should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.

Face coverings should not be worn if they are wet. A wet cloth face covering may make it difficult to breathe.

Schools should consider having additional disposable face coverings available for staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

Whilst staff may wish to utilise their own face covering on a day-to-day basis, schools should have available a stock of additional disposable or multi-use face coverings, or if appropriate face visors, available for staff in case a back-up face covering is needed throughout the day or where required on an ongoing basis.

### **Medical Grade Masks**

Griffeen Valley ETNS provides medical grade masks in the EN16483 category to all SNAs and teachers that need to be in close and continued proximity with pupils with intimate care needs.

On the use of face masks by staff, schools should consider the specific circumstances where the use of medical face masks, to EU Standard EN 14683, may be more appropriate for staff (for example where staff by necessity need to be in close and continued proximity with pupils with intimate care needs such as SNAs or School Bus Escorts).

Wearing a face covering or mask does not negate the need to stay at home if symptomatic.

### **Gloves**

The use of disposable gloves in the school by pupils or staff is not generally appropriate but may be necessary for cleaning, intimate care settings and when administering first aid. Routine use does not protect the wearer and may expose others to risk from contaminated gloves.

Routine use of disposable gloves is not a substitute for hand hygiene.

### **Aprons**

Aprons may also be appropriate in certain circumstances including for intimate care needs or for staff assigned to cleaning an area where a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 was present.