17th July 2020

**For the attention of ALL PARENTS, Years 8 to 14**

Dear Parent/Guardian

I hope you and your families are all well.

I would like to begin this letter by thanking you all for your support over the last few difficult months. I would also like to congratulate our students, the majority of whom have engaged very positively with the online learning set during lockdown.

Over the past number of weeks, we have been planning for the return of students after the Summer holidays, using the most up-to-date information and guidance available to us, particularly the guidance released by the Department of Education, which can be accessed at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/latest-department-education-updates-relation-covid-19-coronavirus> .

**Please note that all the arrangements outlined in this letter are in line with current government guidance, and are therefore subject to change if the guidance from the Dept of Education, the Public Health Agency and other government agencies changes in the coming weeks.**

Based on government guidance, our current plan is for **all students in Years 12 and 14 to return from Monday 24th August**, and for all **students in all other Year Groups to return from the week beginning Tuesday September 1st** (arrangements for these Year Groups’ return to be confirmed in August).

We plan for students in Years 12, 13 and 14 to attend school on a full-time basis from the start of the year. However, Years 12 and 14 will not be in school on Friday 28th August, as we are carrying out Year 8 induction on this day. Monday 31st August is a Bank Holiday and the school will be closed on this day. We will write to you again in August with more detailed arrangements for the start of the school year for each Year Group.

Current guidance on social distancing does not make it possible for us to bring in all students in Years 8 to 11. Therefore, we plan to split all Form Classes in these Year Groups into two halves. One half of each Form Class will attend each week. Those students will then follow a programme of  blended learning to include both paper based and online learning from home the next week, while the other half of the class attend school.   Work will be set for students for the week they are at home, and they should follow their school timetable in the completion of this work. We hope to return to full-time attendance for all Year Groups as soon as possible, but we must follow Department of Education guidance on this.

To minimise movement around the school, we will be rooming Form Classes in Years 8 to 10 in one classroom for the whole school day. Teachers will move between classes. We have also rearranged the school timetable, so that almost every lesson is a double period. This means that almost all classes will just have four teachers each day. Form Classes in Years 11 and 12 will also be roomed in this way for their ‘core’ subjects (English, Mathematics, Science, RE, Learning for Life & Work and PSE), although it will be necessary for them to re-group for their optional subjects. Again, lessons have all been arranged in double periods as far as possible, to minimise movement around the school.

On arrival in school each morning, students should go immediately to their Form Class’s classroom. Break times and lunch times will be staggered for junior and senior students, again to minimise contact. In addition, the end time of the school day will also be staggered. We ask all returning students to support our school community on our return to school by following all the prevailing public health advice in and around the school.

Online learning will still be an integral part of our lessons, both in school and at home, in the new school year. **It is therefore essential that all students ensure their tablet is fully charged overnight and that they bring it to school each day. It is also essential that students bring ALL requirements they will need (ie, pens, pencils, eraser, sharpener, colours, ruler, calculator, etc) to school each day, as we cannot allow students to borrow materials from one another, or from teachers**. Any student who is having difficulties either with their tablet or with their MySchool/email login should make the school aware of this as soon as possible after the start of August, by emailing info@stpatricks.ballymena.ni.sch.uk . Alternatively, parents or students can telephone the school after 3rd August to notify us of any problems.

We hope that all Year Groups will be able to access PE lessons when we return to school. However, on the day that your son/daughter has PE, we would ask that they arrive to school wearing their PE uniform, trainers and suitable jogging/tracksuit bottoms, sweatshirt etc. They can then remove the outer layer for the PE lesson and put it back on afterwards, and wear these clothes for the remainder of the day. This will remove the need for changing rooms to be used, as maintaining social distancing would not be possible in changing rooms. On all other days, students should wear normal school uniform. Access to hand sanitiser and handwashing facilities will be widely available throughout the school.

Year 14 students will be able to receive their results on Thursday 13th August. We hope that it will be possible for us to bring you into school to receive your results, but we will not be able to confirm this with you until early August. We will also be contacting Year 12 students and parents in early August, with details about receiving GCSE results on Thursday 20th August, and also about meetings for admission to Sixth Form.

We have not yet received guidance on how school buses will be operating in the new school year, but we hope to have received guidance before we contact you again in August. We would stress again that all of the arrangements outlined above are subject to change if government guidance changes.

These remain challenging times for us all. However, I hope that all of our students have a restful and enjoyable Summer break, and we look forward to your return, and to the resumption of school life in the new school year.

Yours faithfully



Dr Martin Knox

Principal