

St. Anne's School
Ballymany Cross
The Curragh
Co. Kildare
Ph: + 353 45 441 494
Fax: + 353 45 441737
R56 VH67

Email: office@stannesthecarragh.ie

Principal: **Pauline Dempsey**

Roll No. 19277B

19th October 2021

Dear Parents/guardians

As we are all very aware, these are unprecedented times which have affected us all. Thankfully the school has come through them safely so far and the arrangements and procedures we have in place have proven to be successful.

Like most schools we are experiencing high levels of staff absences, this is to be expected within the current climate. We have been fortunate in that we have a group of reliable substitutes to call upon, however as the term progresses, even they are not able to attend due to illness. A lot of time is invested in sourcing substitutes and ensuring that they meet all the criteria for placement in our school.

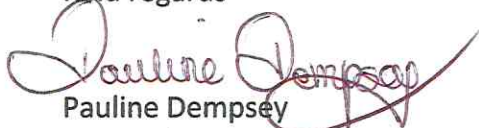
It is unfortunate that I have to advise all parents/guardians that we may not always be in a position to cover your child's class safely and that in those instances your child's class may have to be closed. This is always our last port of call and so far we have only had to close one class due to lack of staffing. It is impossible to guarantee that this will not happen.

I am asking for your understanding and support in this and as ever I am very appreciative of the way you all have supported us all through this so far. You will be notified by text as soon as it becomes apparent that we cannot open your child's class. If you receive this text – please do not place your child on the bus you will be called and asked to take your child home. This decision is not made lightly and it is for everyone's wellbeing.

More importantly I am asking that you keep your child at home if they appear unwell, many of our pupils are very vulnerable and infections can spread around the class rapidly. We want to keep classes and our school open, we can only do this with a full staff.

Please read the document below explaining our efforts to cover staff absences before the decision is made to close classes

Kind regards


Pauline Dempsey
Principal

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Procedures for Providing Appropriate Staff Cover in the Event of Unusual Patterns of Absences/sick leave

St. Anne's School strives to provide an appropriate learning environment for all of its students, this also involves providing suitable staffing levels as described within DES guidelines and recommendations. On a typical school day we are able to deliver this however, there are occasions when this proves to be more difficult.

Such an occasion arises when managing and providing cover for staff absences. We have a large staff and absences occur on a daily basis. We have a plan in place supported by a backup list substitute teachers and several special needs assistants who are on call at short notice to cover such absences. This can work well and there can be minimal disruption to classes.

However, there are times when even our substitutes are not available and cover is impossible to get. If this eventuality occurs in tangent with a high level of staff absences, we have to consider a different approach to safely provide for our pupils. This current school year has seen an unprecedented level of absences for which we were unable, on occasions, to access substitute cover. The difficulty in obtaining teachers is a national issue for which there is no immediate solution, this problem is compounded when placed within a special school setting like ours.

Below we have detailed the action we will be required to take in the event of multiple absences without appropriate substitute cover:

Every effort will be made to source appropriate teacher and special needs assistant cover within the guidelines of Department of Education and Skills Circulars and school policies.

In the event of no SNA substitute being available -

- An SNA may be taken from another class. This will depend on the needs of the class affected by the absence, the numbers of pupils present and the needs and attendance of the class from which the SNA is being removed.
- If multiple SNA's are absent and no substitutes are available then existing staff will be organised to cover as much of the daily schedule as possible. It is likely that some aspects of your child's day may be reduced or not implemented at all.

The final decision will be made by the deputy principal (in consultation with the Principal) regarding absolute allocation of the SNA's.

In the event of no substitute teachers being available:

- We can no longer divide a class between several others as we have in the past. There is an approved staffing ratio which is essential for the children's education, safety and wellbeing. This is compounded by current health advice.

- In the event that teachers are unable to attend school, every effort will be made to secure substitutes. We are part of a cluster group of 15 schools that are able to access specific substitute teacher support specifically for those schools. This has worked well for us and we will continue to avail of this service when available.
- In such circumstances where a substitute is unavailable, that class *will **not** attend and will stay at home on that day or until a substitute can be sourced*. If that is the case, as much notice as possible will be given to parents. This will be through Text-a-Parent as it is the most efficient way to pass on information at short notice.
- Decisions around how long a class will be closed and how we cover individual rooms will be made fairly to ensure one class is not continually affected by the closure. This will be done in line with current advice
- This arrangement may be spread over several classes to ensure that one particular class group is not disadvantaged for longer than is absolutely necessary.

The decision to do this will be at the discretion of the Principal/Deputy Principal.

Closure of Classes

- Should we find ourselves in a position whereby we may have to close classes, the parents/guardians of children in those classes affected will be notified, as soon as is reasonably possible, by text that their child's class is closed
- If you receive this text, please do not put your child onto the bus, this decision is not made lightly and you will be requested to collect them from school.
- The school will maintain contact with those families who may be affected by this decision on a regular basis to keep them informed.

The Board of Management and the school apologise in advance for any inconvenience caused in making this decision. We would like to advise parents that it was made in full consideration of the schools capacity to safely meet the needs of the pupils at certain times. This decision was informed within all the requirements as outlined in DES Circulars.