

BROUGHSHANE
ROAD
BALLYMENA
Co ANTRIM
BT43 7DX

Principal:
Mr. J. Brady
B. Ed. Hons, M. Ed, PQH
(NI)

20th March 2020

Dear Parents,

Once again I write in the midst of an unprecedented situation which is as ever-changing as it is concerning. I wish to take this opportunity to outline the St. Brigid's response to the Education Minister's recent decision to utilise schools as childcare facilities for the benefit of those parents who are key workers. We at St. Brigid's are keen to play our part in supporting those in the front line of the fight against Covid-19. Please see outlined below our contribution to this effort.

The Minister's statement of Thursday 19th March instructed schools to close from this coming Monday. This is still the case. Pupils must stay at home from Monday until such times as we are given permission by the Department of Education to open again. It is worth reminding ourselves of the reasons why this decision was taken in the first place – to try and control the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This objective is still as valid and important now as it was when the decision to close our school was taken. The most recent scientific evidence on limiting the spread of the virus is clear. If children can stay safely at home, they should. This will limit the chance of the virus spreading. This is why the government has asked schools to close and only open in exceptional circumstances for those pupils who absolutely need to attend. The fewer children making the journey to school leads to fewer children in schools which in turn lowers the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

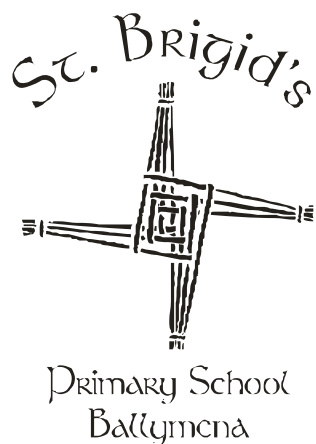
Following Mr. Weir's statements yesterday and today St. Brigid's PS will be operating as a childcare facility from Monday 23rd March;

ONLY FOR THOSE CHILDREN WHO HAVE 2 PARENTS WHO ARE KEY WORKERS AS DEFINED BY THE MINISTER (a list of key workers follows at the close of this letter) and **HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS.**

We will also offer this facility for children who are regarded as vulnerable.

When making a decision about whether or not to send your child to school from Monday you must consider the following:

- Both parents/ guardians (or 1 parent/ guardian in the case of a single parent family) must be key workers as defined by the list below. Our advice states that, "Only children with BOTH parents working as key workers and only when both parents are working AT THE SAME TIME should their children attend school for childcare.
- Children must only attend school as a last resort. Parents must explore all alternative arrangements before deciding that school is the only avenue available to them for childcare. This includes consideration of family / friends etc. as childcare providers. This is to ensure that we limit the number of children and adults together in the school to help assist with social distancing. If we are your only option for childcare we will gladly assist in order that you can continue with your important role.



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- School normal opening hours will apply depending on the age of the child. This will either be 8.55am to either 2.00pm or 3.00pm.
- Please be advised that schools will be providing childcare provision rather than teaching as not all teachers are available to teach the various age range of the children.

Children must bring a break time snack and a packed lunch as the school canteen is not operational. We have not received guidance on children who are entitled to Free School Meals and will update parents of children who attend and are in receipt of FSM as details become clearer.

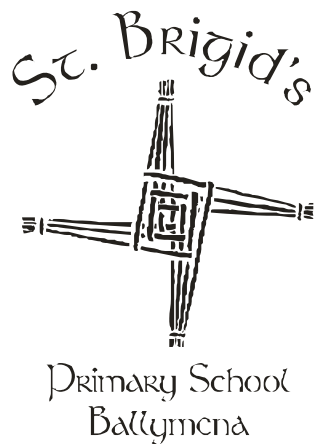
As you can imagine this is a difficult time for all of us and the school has already noticed a decrease in staff availability for work as a result of the Covid-19 virus. The childcare service we will be providing will be dependent on the availability of school staff to offer it and we will keep you informed should any issues concerning its continuation arise in the future. The situation is very fluid and details and arrangements may well change. For example, the suggestion that we have central school hubs to cater for need in a particular area has previously been mentioned as a possibility. Should any such changes become apparent we will let you know.

If, having read the information above, you feel that you are a key worker and you have no alternative but to use the childcare service we need to hear from you. Please contact our school vice-principal (Mr. Kieran Killough) on 07927895281. He will require you to ring him rather than text. This will allow him to ascertain if you meet the criteria as laid out by the Education Minister and to discuss your needs.

Once again we wish to reiterate our support for those parents who, like ourselves at St. Brigid's, fall into the key worker category. We hope and trust that your work continues to support efforts to contain the virus and bring us through this crisis.

Yours sincerely,

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List of Key Workers:

Health & Social Care: This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, home carers, and staff required to maintain our health & social care sector.

Education & Childcare: This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who will remain active during the Covid-19 response.

Public Safety & National Security: This includes civilians and officers in the police (including key contractors), Fire & Rescue Service, Prison Service and other national security roles.

Transport: This includes those keeping air, water, road & rail transport modes operating during the Covid-19 response.

Utilities & Communication: This includes staff needed for oil, gas, electricity and water (including sewage) and primary industry supplies to continue during the Covid-19 response, as well as key staff in telecommunications, post and delivery services and waste disposal.

Food & Other Necessary Goods: This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, and sale, as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (eg: hygiene, medical etc.)

Key National & Local Government: This includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the Covid-19 response.

