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25 1 2021

Dear Parent/s,

I hope you are all well and keeping safe. The Primary and Nursery schools will likely remain closed until after the midterm 22nd February 2021 at least. I appreciate that this is an extremely difficult time for families, particularly since we had been able to re-open the schools from September right up until the Christmas break. I think we all appreciate though now, that the priority for Government is to ensure that schools re-open so that the children's learning and lives are not disrupted.

All our teachers and staff are disappointed that we were unable to reopen after the Christmas Holidays and we look forward to welcoming the pupils back as soon as possible.

In the meantime, our pupils have been using Google Classroom to continue their learning, this seems to have been a much easier experience than the first closure, as we had established Google Classroom across all year groups in September. However, if you are experiencing any difficulties, email the school or message the teacher within Google Classroom and we will try to solve problems by the next working day.

My advice remains the same about home learning. Try and establish a routine, follow the teacher's advice within the classroom and work within the limits and lessons set within the classroom. We are not in a normal situation, and I am confident that we can help the pupils cover any gaps on our return. This week, the teachers have been ringing families not accessing remote learning to try and support families and to see how they can help. If you have difficulty accessing a suitable device or wifi, please email me and I will see if I can provide access.

The DE have asked schools to mark pupils absent if they are not completing remote/home learning at this time, so it is very important that all the children are doing their best.

The Nursery pupils have also access to remote learning and Mrs Shelley is contacting the parents directly.

The school is open for emergency provision to vulnerable pupils and to pupils of critical/key workers only. If you need support, please email me to discuss. There are definitions on the Departments (DENI) website. This is important, as I have a duty of care to all pupils attending

and to all the staff. The DE has written to schools to remind us that schools must remain shut and that staff or other pupils must not attend unless involved in the provision of supervised learning or preparation of remote teaching.

Free school meal payments are being made directly to families. If your circumstances have changed and you think you may be entitled to these payments, you can access more information on the Education Authority NI (EA) website.

<https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/school-meals/contact-us>

I have also included links on the school website for help and support for families.

Applications for Primary and Nursery Places for next year are open at present on the EA website - <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/admissions>

I have links and a video on the school website which will help you apply. Follow the instructions carefully and if you need assistance please email me. Applications close on the 29th January 2021.

Applications for secondary school will not open this year until 1st March which is a much later date. I will contact the P7 parents nearer to this time.

Fr. Paul will celebrate an online Mass for the pupils on Friday 29th January 2021 at 10am via the Parish Webcam - I look forward to the times when we can bring the children down to celebrate a school mass.

In the meantime, keep safe - try your best and if you need any help or support with school, please email me at info@stpatricks.castleberg.ni.sch.uk

Kind Regards,
Brian McGurk
Principal