**Ballymoney National School,**

**Ballineen,**

**Co. Cork.**

**Phone: 023-8847583**

 2nd September 2020

Dear Parents,

It was wonderful to finally welcome all our pupils last week after almost six months. We are all delighted to be back in our school again. There have been a lot of changes to our classrooms and to our routines. We are very impressed with the pupils' maturity and acceptance of the new social distancing guidelines that have been applied to the senior classroom. We are satisfied that we have control measures in place to ensure that this has been a safe re-opening.  It will take some time for all of us to get used to the “new circumstances” as we become familiar with the new routines and procedures designed to keep everyone safe and to prevent the spread of the virus.  There will, undoubtedly, be some unforeseen challenges and we will deal with these as they arise.

We would especially like to welcome our new pupils. Aaron Quin, Sadie Brookes and Leah Hurley who have started junior infants. Oisín Hurley has joined first class.We hope that they and their families will be very happy during their time in Ballymoney National School. We are also delighted to welcome Ms. Ann Dennehy who will be teaching the senior classroom on Fridays this year while I am working in the office.

**Letter from Dr. Ronan Glynn**

There is a letter attached to this e-mail from the Acting Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ronan Glynn. Please take the time to read it. We know that sending your children back to school has been a cause of anxiety for many of you. There are a lot of reports in the media about senior pupils in schools being unable to social distance due to a lack of space. Each of our pupils has been given their own table. There is a two metre gap between the pupils' tables and a 1.7metre gap between the seats and the row in front of them. All the windows are open and all the internal doors are kept open throughout the day. Your children may need to bring an extra jumper to school, even on sunny days, as ventilating the classrooms is a priority.

**School Grounds and Polytunnel**

Thank you to all the parents who came into the school grounds and cut the grass and weeded during the summer. Thank you to Ian and Jack Eady who built raised beds for our polytunnel this week. Humphrey and Ian hope to be able to fill them with soil next weekend so that we can spend lots of time out there this school year.

**Book Rental**

Usually book rental books are handed out in June but this was not possible this year. Their book rental books are in the resource room waiting to be handed out upon receipt of payment. The cost of book rental for the school year is €8 per pupil in the junior classroom and €20 per pupil in the senior classroom.

**Spellings for Me**

This year 3rd - 6th class will be using an individual spelling programme called 'Spellings for Me'. This will involve a series of online activities to assess your children and find their spellings weaknesses. Each child will have their own spelling list and activities to complete. The cost of the workbook is €9 per pupil. This book was not on your booklist as it is not available in bookshops and must be ordered through a school. The pupils will be shown how to operate the programme in school before they start their spelling work at home.

**Friends for Life**

We have been talking about the pupils' experiences of Covid-19 so far. Whilst they expressed delight and relief at returning to school, they also expressed fear and anxiety about returning to school and increased exposure to so many people. We will be following the 'Friends for Life Programme' in the senior classroom. It is a programme aimed at assisting pupils to identify the signs of anxiety, to give them coping skills and to build their resilience. If there are any situations which are distressing your child, please e-mail or ring the school so that we can deal with the situations as soon as possible.

This is going to be a very unusual school year. There have already been many changes and there will be further changes ahead as we follow the HSE advice. Parents have always played a central role in school life. We have always had an open door policy where we welcomed parents to come in and talk to us after school. This is no longer possible as we try to limit the number of people entering the building to limit all of our social contacts. Please feel free to ring us after school anytime or to talk to us outside. We look forward to working with you to support your children and assist them to reach their individual potential.

Kind regards,

Shireen Rountree