



Parteen National School

Parteen

Co. Clare

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### **School Community Newsletter**

**March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

It seems strange writing to you to mark the one year anniversary of our first school closure but I wish to acknowledge your work, support and the troubles everyone has faced.

Many of you will recall where you were when the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, addressed the nation from Washington D.C. Rumours had been circulating about school closures previous to that date. I recall a call coming in, from a reliable source, that in ten minutes a closure would be announced. I went to the office, on my own, and sat contemplating what was coming. When the live stream from Washington started, the rumours were no more. All schools were to close from 6pm that evening.

I left the office and went to each teacher and told them we were closing and asked them to prepare work for the next two weeks. It was a lot to take in. They reacted calmly and by 3pm that day learning activities for all classes were published on our website. We didn't know at the time that the closure would go from two weeks to the remainder of the school year.

We made use of the familiar communication platform of the school website and set up emails for correction of work and communication with teachers. Ms. Barry volunteered to run our Twitter account with unbelievable creativity and enthusiasm and all staff and families contributed to it. It was the envy of many schools. We had our Graduation online and classes closed the school year via Zoom instead of the traditional classroom parties. Sacraments were celebrated meaningfully but with reduced numbers.

In June, Ms. Guckian and I, on behalf of the BOM and with the considered feedback of all the staff and the Parents Association, created our Response Plan for reopening in September. Catherine organised the purchase of our PPE and sanitisers so we had everything in place before there was a rush on ordering. In August, our newly appointed assistant principal with Health and Safety duties, Ms. O' Rourke, with Liam and Catherine, organised for alterations to the building, perspex screens, yard markings, an extra staffroom etc. and we adjusted our Reopening Plan in light of the Department Guidelines. All teachers reorganised their rooms, got rid of excess equipment and created pods. On September 1st, with cautious excitement,

the yard was filled with smiling children, socially distanced of course. We enjoyed a fantastic four months of schooling in the new normal. Mary and Tracey, along with our new staff member Reilly, ensured the school was sanitised and cleaned every day.

In addition to reopening in September, commendably, the staff got ready for any future closure and decided to release teaching videos through Google Classroom should we have to close again. Mr. Hickey trained us all and teachers started using Google Classroom for homework so children and families would be familiar with it. Throughout that period, every staff member was committed to keeping the spirit of Parteen National School alive. The playground reopened with staff sanitising it after they used it, Colour Days happened, reading and maths initiatives were prioritised, athletics training started and Christmas concerts went online. Families were extremely careful, keeping children at home if they had any symptom until they were cleared by the doctor to return. Cases rose nationally in December which worried us all. Never did we expect to hear of over 7000 cases a day.

The closure after Christmas was expected, given the case numbers. I was so proud of you all when, on Monday January 11th, the whole school went live through Google Classroom and Zoom. The engagement was fantastic. Teachers and special needs assistants, working from home under a variety of circumstances, made sure the teaching videos were fun, interesting and engaging. Ms. Parkinson offered to run assemblies with me and the ideas and offerings from staff were novel; they, along with class Zooms brought everyone together again. Parents and guardians, under immense pressure, ensured their children engaged. You did an incredible job.

Over the last year some of you have lost loved ones, some have lost jobs, some have had to work full time while home-schooling. There is nothing to be celebrated on this anniversary, only your resilience.

I wish to thank every single staff member, Board of Management Member, Parents Association member, parent, guardian and child for the work over the last year. You are incredible and I am so proud of you all. We are optimistic about the future.

On Monday, the whole school will be together again. We look forward to it but plead with you all to follow our Response Plan so we can all stay safe.

Kind regards,

Ger