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COLAISTE MUIRE,
COBH,
CO. CORK.

Lunchtime and Covid

23rd.Oct.2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

NPHEt's reporting on low transmissions in educational settings confirm that schools are generally safe. I reassure you that we remain careful in Colaiste Muire.

I am asking we take an extra step for the sake of everyone in our community, and for those in the health system.

There has been an issue regarding the lack of implementation of basic Covid precautions by students at lunchtime outside the school grounds. For the reasons given below, the Management of the school have made a decision on how we can better support the health and safety of the vulnerable members of the community of Great Island.

There is a tradition of Colaiste Muire students going home for lunch. However, in recent times, many students who leave the school gate do not go home. Many go to a friend's house (which is now going against guidelines). The draw of downtown remains strong. An earlier arrangement for a local supplier to deliver lunches to school proved difficult to implement. As a result, a significant number of students still purchase their lunch.

We do not know for sure if students are following Covid precautions once they are away from the school for lunchtime. I have doubts. For example, some local businesses are popular with our students. I have monitored the queues for the past few weeks. A substantial minority of our students do not wear masks when left to their own devices. There is widespread close contact. Podding by year is non-existent. There are individuals not associated with the school who are also present. Many of these are not wearing a mask.

Shops do an excellent job inside their premises. However, from standing with the students I believe there is no chance of organising the queue outside.

Some other points I wish to make:

- thankfully there has been no contact from the HSE regarding cases in this school. We cannot assume this will not change
- there has been a wholehearted buy into the Response Plan and the school's Covid procedures from students, parents and from staff. The principle that we all have a statutory duty to take care of our health and the health of others is firmly embedded in how we manage ourselves and our students. The worry is that our efforts since may be undone during unsupervised time
- it is worth checking a Cobh Hospital Facebook post from 9th October. The residents were holding whiteboard messages asking the community to take basic steps to protect everyone's health. Seeing

the faces of the most vulnerable members of the community of Great Island makes one think. We also have high risk and very high risk students, parents and teachers.

It is now the view that this issue has potential to amplify transmission.

We have spoken to the staff, the Parents' Council and to the Students' Council on shortening lunch from 55min to 30mins. They agree. They view it as a necessary, but temporary, measure. The Board of Management have also been informed.

We will be implementing Covid measures across the lunchtime. Supervision will be increased. Students will be outside in podded yards if dry, inside if wet. If wet, students can remove their mask only for the duration of their meal. They will be in their base classrooms at 1m but can go onto the corridor for extra space, once podding is maintained. We will not be having entire classes of students with their masks off for the duration of break.

Therefore, from Monday week, (2nd November) classes after lunch commence at 1.35pm and finish at 3.35pm, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesday's classes still finish at 1.05pm.

Every student remains on the campus for the day. I am asking for your support in this regard.

Students who are used to going to a shop to purchase their lunch will need to be more organised to have lunch with them.

We return to previous lunchtime arrangements once the danger has passed.

Regards and stay safe,

Fergus O'Brien
Principal