

Dear Parents / Guardians

You are aware by now that schools are instructed to close from 6pm this evening. This applies to all schools and colleges. The proposed reopening date is March 30th. A statement today from the Department of Education reads as follows:

An announcement was made this morning by the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD of the closure of schools, pre-schools and further and higher education settings, for a period until 29 March 2020, to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19. This will take effect from 6pm this evening, Thursday 12 March. This is in line with the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team.

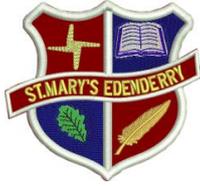
All pupils and students, from pre-school to third level are urged to practice social distancing, and to minimise physical contact with each other, to help avoid the spread of Covid-19. This should include minimising social contact, avoiding meeting up and keeping physical space between them. Parents and guardians are urged to support their children to maintain this approach.

In order to minimise the impact on teaching and learning all schools will be asked to continue to plan lessons and, where possible, provide online resources for students or online lessons where schools are equipped to do so. Schools are asked to be conscious of students that may not have access to online facilities and to consider this actively in their response.

Schools are asked to prioritise supporting exam classes to continue to prepare for State examinations.

On behalf of the entire St Mary's Secondary School Community I want to wish you and your family well over the coming days and weeks. The welfare of our students, staff and their extended families is our primary concern. It is essential that each one of us does what we can to minimise the risk of acquiring the Covid 19 virus and of spreading that virus to other people. We have met our students to re-enforce the advice of the Chief Medical Officer with respect to washing hands, coughing into the elbow, keeping a social distance and so forth. We know that by acting as a community we can do our part to control the virus. It is our civic responsibility. We urge everyone to take the advice that has been issued or will be issued through official state agencies.

We are also very aware of our responsibility to support our students in their learning. All students have been supported in setting up access to Office 365 and other learning platforms that will allow communication between teachers and students to facilitate learning remotely from home. The TEAMS app on Office 365 will be the primary vehicle to promote the teaching and learning remotely. It is our expectation that every student who has internet access and is of good health will engage in this learning process. Teachers will be spending time each school day to create lessons, assignments and so forth for each of their class groups. The focus will be on those students facing state exams this summer. However, all students can expect assignments from time to time and all students are expected to engage in the learning for a few hours each day. Communication between students and teachers on the TEAMS platform will be closely monitored. Inappropriate commentary or content will be noted.



Students without internet access are asked to do what they can to communicate with class colleagues and follow a programme of revision. We understand that they may not be able to complete online assignments.

Of course, all of the above learning is predicated on the student and his/her family being in good health. If any one is not feeling well and is unable to attend to lessons, he /she must put his/her energy into recovery and containing the virus. It will be perfectly understandable if, in these circumstances, no attention is given to schoolwork.

Please note that official notifications will be issued through our school APP. It is imperative that every parent / guardian has uploaded the current version. If you receive notification earlier this week it means you are correctly registered. We will also post up important information on our website from time to time. There will not be access to the school at any time.

There are many issues that will have to be sorted at a national level. These include postponement of Oral exams, practical exams, LCA interviews and so forth. We will publish on our website any details that become available in due course. I expect these matters will be resolved and that all students in the country will be treated equally and fairly.

Finally, I want to wish you well in these extraordinary circumstances. We look forward to resuming normal activity in the school in the near future. Good health and God's blessings to all.

Yours sincerely,

R Halford
Principal

12th March 2020