**Knockavoe School and Resource Centre**

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**Principal: Mrs Sharon Cassidy B.A. (Hons), PGCE, PG Dip, PQH (N.I.)**

29th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we approach the end of January and our fourth week of the new term I want to thank you all for your continued support. Also, I want to keep you informed of recent developments in relation to the management of special needs provision currently across N. Ireland and also those specifically relating to Knockavoe School.

* Special schools are open to all pupils as requested by our Education Minister with support from our Cross Organisational Link Officer and Specialist Support Officer. We have been open for pupils since Thursday 7th January 2021 with few amendments to provision.
* Remote learning and support is being provided for those pupils who are currently not in school and are learning from home. For parents/carers of pupils who are remote learning please continue to communicate with your child’s teacher.
* Parental choice regarding placement continues and we have a unique attendance code for learning from home.
* Risk assessments with detailed safety mitigations are essential to the provision of a safe environment for pupils and staff. In Knockavoe our whole school risk assessment is reviewed on a daily basis to ensure the highest level of safety for everyone.
* Staffing concerns and shortages are affecting provision in some special schools which you may have seen reported on the media. Presently we are experiencing staff shortages and consequently have had to close two classes this week. Staffing problems may impact on future provision. Higher than usual staff sickness and a shortage of suitably trained substitute staff. This is managed on a daily basis where we aim to keep familiar staff within class bubbles. Movement between bubbles through the week is not advised in order to protect everyone and minimise contacts.
* Health and wellbeing of pupils, families, staff and the wider community is a concern as this lockdown continues. There are many supports available and we can signpost you to appropriate supports should you need any help. Parentline N.I. information on our website.
* Keeping abreast of Public Health Advice and guidance in relation to possible Covid cases and the management of actual cases. Thankfully in Knockavoe we have had very few actual positive cases and none this term.
* Testing in special schools is currently being planned for staff and pupils and we await more information on this.
* The Minister has put a case forward for priority vaccination for pupils and staff but as yet we have had no information when this will happen.

These are the issues and some of the challenges we face on a daily basis and I feel it is important to keep you informed. Consequently, it may become necessary to close classes at short notice due to unsafe staffing levels or other factors. A dynamic risk assessment will determine if provision is safe and we will continue to monitor staff and pupil numbers on a daily basis.

Underpinning these challenges however, within Knockavoe, there is an ethos of inspiring kindness, positivity, and commitment to our pupils. The staff are working tirelessly and have shown dedication, courage and resilience that I am extremely proud of.

Thank you for your understanding should we have to make changes at short notice and please be assured that we endeavour to provide minimal disruption to the usual routine and structures that we know our pupils need and benefit from.

Kind regards

Sharon Cassidy