

September Newsletter 2023

Welcome Back

I wish to extend a warm welcome back to all our pupils, parents and staff especially our new pupils and parents. The return to school has coincided with some lovely weather which hopefully will last for some of this term.

Contacting the school

If parents have any query during the year they should contact the school office. The school office will be open each school day from 8.50 – 2.30 or you can email the school at **office@theheathns.com**. Parents can stay in touch with school events by downloading the school app or visiting our website www.heathns.ie

Calendar

The school calendar is available on the school website, on the school app and a copy is also located on the front door of the school. The app calendar is updated each week with school events. Parents are asked to arrange family holidays outside of dates on which the school is open and ensure children attend school unless they are unwell.

Board of Management

Our current Board of Management will conclude its term of office this November. Fr. David our Chairperson and school chaplain has been reassigned to Stradbally Parish. He will continue as Chairperson until the new board is elected. Fr. Simon will take his place as school chaplain. On behalf of everyone in our school community we wish Fr. David well in his new role and we thank him for his interest and commitment to our school over the last four years.

School Finance

Our school like all other public primary schools is funded solely by the Department of Education. For many years, primary schools have been campaigning for parity of funding with second level schools as the level of day to day funding is inadequate leaving primary schools dependent on fundraising, parental or local business donations to keep the school running.

Primary school management, principals and the INTO (primary teachers union) are calling for an urgent increase in the school capitation grant to better fund schools and reduce the burden on parents who currently have to provide additional financial support.

Primary schools receive a capitation grant of about €1 per pupil per school day to cover running costs, while second-level schools receive almost double that amount. OECD figures show that Ireland spends on average 12.5% less per student at primary level than other developed countries.

The primary capitation grant was cut from €200 (in 2008) to €176 between 2010 and 2013. The grant was partially restored to €183 in 2020. Increases in the cost of utilities led to schools receiving a 40% increase in funding for the 2022/23 school year, as a one-off payment yet despite this funding our school ran a substantial deficit of over €30,000 last year. The welcome increase to school funding last school year must continue if our school is to have any chance of meeting day to day costs.

Second-level schools receive capitation funding of €316 per head. This difference between the funding of primary and post-primary schools is not warranted and primary schools must be brought to parity of funding to reflect the real cost of running a primary school.

Prior to the pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis, schools were already struggling to meet basic expenditure. Schools must not be expected to fundraise to meet basic expenses and parents must not be relied upon to keep schools afloat. The low level of primary school funding places intolerable burdens on school principals, teachers and parents.

I believe that every child has the right to attend a school that is comfortable, bright, adequately heated and ventilated with appropriate furniture, technology and resources. I thank you our parents for ensuring through your contributions over the years that we continue to achieve this in our school. However, as we start another year I am sure that you, like myself, are tired of fundraising and having to request/make contributions to ensure our school can meet basic operating costs. I urge you to join with me in contacting our local TDs and demanding that primary school capitation is substantially increased in this budget and that government make a commitment to end the need for parental contributions once and for all.

Book Rental & Resources Scheme

The decision this year by the government to fully fund primary book rental schemes has allowed the school to reduce the cost to parents of our scheme from €140 to €80 per child. This payment covers your child's books, copies, infant stationery, photocopying, 24 hour pupil accident insurance, arts and crafts, classroom resources and school administration. In essence it means your child has all the school resources they require each day without parents having to worry about sourcing the correct items. I encourage every parent to avail of this cost saving scheme however parents are welcome to make their own arrangements. Payment for the scheme should be made by the end of September through the school app or at the school office. If you are not availing of the scheme, please inform the school office. If any parent is experiencing genuine financial difficulty please get in touch with the school office.

Making payments to the school

All payments to the school this year should be made online by school link or via the school app where possible. Our aim is to eliminate the handling of cash in the school as it reduces risk, banking costs and also provides parents with a receipt of payment. If you haven't already downloaded the app contact the school office & the school secretary will guide you through the process.

Parents Council

The Parents Council are currently producing the school calendar which will be available to purchase from the school office at the end of the month. If any parent with a business would like to sponsor a page in the calendar, please contact the school office or a member of the Parents Council.

The AGM of the Parents Council will take place on Tuesday 10th October at 19.30 in the school.

School App

The school app is the school's main means of communication with parents and provides parents with the means to carry out a range of tasks. Using the app parents can manage their contact details, keep up to date on school events through the calendar, join class birthday lists, receive school notifications, make payments, view reports, view attendance, provide reasons for absence and book times for annual parent-teacher meetings when the times are released in January. The app also reduces texting costs for the school. If you are unsure how to download the app please contact the school office.

Car-parking/Dropping & Collecting

The priority for the whole school community should be the safety of every child. When dropping and collecting your child please park and drive in a safe manner that does not create a hazard. Cars parking on the school side of the road should face the golf club while cars on the far side should face towards town. **Under no circumstances should cars attempt to turn on the road outside the school.**

One of the biggest causes of congestion in the evenings is the parking of cars outside McGraths house which reduces the width of the road. Parents are asked not to park here so that traffic flow is not impeded.

Absence from school

When your child is absent from school during the year you should complete a reason for absence on the school app. Alternatively you can send a note to the class teacher on the morning your child returns. If no contact is made with the school the absence is recorded as an unexplained absence. The school is required to report all absence of concern to Tusla. The school also reports every child who reaches twenty days absence in a school year to Tusla.

Parents should note that pupils are marked absent from school if they are not in school for roll call. The roll is called each day between 9.10 - 9.30am as per Department of Education requirements. If parents need to bring their child to an appointment, they should try to arrange times after roll call if they wish their child to be marked present.

Medicines/Nut Allergy

Parents of children for whom the school stores medication are asked to check with the school office to ensure that the medication the school currently holds is in date.

If your child requires medication in school and you do not currently have an agreement in place, you should contact the school office and request a copy of the school's Administration of Medication policy. Please note that no medicine should be brought to school in school bags. Ideally, medicine should be administered at home by parents.

Parents are also asked to remember that an increasing number of children in the school have nut allergies, some of which are severe. It would be very helpful if parents could avoid putting nut products in lunch boxes to avoid any accidental consumption.

Head-lice

Friday night is **Head-lice Check Night** for all children. Please check your child's hair using a fine comb every Friday to check for the presence of head-lice. Only a fine comb will tell if there are head-lice present. If head-lice are found, please inform the school. The best treatment is to wet comb the hair with a fine comb nightly for two/three weeks. Medicated products are available, but are becoming less effective and must be used at least twice over the course of two weeks to break the louse cycle. Further information is available at www.hse.ie

Vetting

The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 provide a statutory basis for the vetting of persons carrying out relevant work with children or vulnerable persons. The Act stipulates that a relevant organisation shall not permit any person to undertake relevant work or activities on behalf of the organisation, unless the organisation receives a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau in respect of that person. Our school is a relevant organisation and in compliance with the Acts, Department of Education circular and our Patron's guidance it is necessary for everyone working or volunteering with the school to be vetted including secondary school students on work placements. For more information, please contact the school office.

Electric Picnic Raffle

Our thanks to the parents who supported our Electric Picnic Raffle during the summer. The school raised €1800 which will be used to help fund our Music Generation Programme this year. Congratulations to our two winners Ray Killeen and Brenda Delaney, we hope they enjoyed the weekend.

Upcoming School Activities & Important Dates

- The Heath GAA will be sending a games development officer to the school every week this year. We hope that every child as a result will be provided with football coaching on a weekly basis.
 - The Cumann na mBunscol Football Leagues commence next week for boys and girls in 5th & 6th classes. Check out the school website or contact the office for fixtures. Children will travel by bus to matches and there will be a charge of €5 per trip for away matches. There will be no charge for home matches and we hope to avail of the new pathway between the school and the The Heath GAA when the weather is dry.
 - Conkers: It is that time of year, all classes should begin collecting chestnuts when they ripen and fall in the coming weeks for our October conker matches.
 - Computers: I am delighted that we will again be partnering with Riomahire Tech this year to offer weekly computer classes to children from 3rd – 6th. The classes will run for twenty-four weeks starting on Wednesday 20th September. The cost of the classes remains unchanged for parents at €50 which is based on the majority of pupils participating and is subsidised by the school. Payment should be made in one instalment of €50 on the school app at any stage up until next Easter. If you do not wish for your child to participate please contact the school office.
 - Music Generation: The school is again partnering with Music Generation this year. Nuala Kelly will provide music classes every Tuesday for Junior Infants to 4th class. The cost to the school is €5,000 for the year. This will be funded through our Electric Picnic Ticket raffle and our annual May fundraiser. Our 4th class have also been invited to perform at the National Ploughing Championships on Thursday 21st September through Music Generation. More details for the class closer to the event.
 - Hallowe'en Fancy Dress: Our annual fancy dress will take place on Friday 27th October. Further details closer to the day.
 - Swimming will commence after Hallowe'en for 1st to 4th classes with Juniors, Seniors, 5th and 6th swimming after Christmas. Further details and the cost of swimming will be communicated closer to the time.
 - Debating: 6th class will be participating in the Laois Primary Schools Debating which is commencing in October.
 - Green Day: The rugby world cup starts today and to show our support for the Irish team we will hold a Green Day on Friday 22nd September, the day before Ireland play South Africa. Children should wear an Ireland jersey or other suitable green clothing.
 - The date for Confirmation is Friday 23rd February at 12.00 in the parish church.
 - The date for Holy Communion is 20th April at 12.00 in The Church of the Assumption, The Heath.
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In conclusion I wish everyone involved in the school community a healthy, safe and rewarding year. Working together as a community I have no doubt but that we can provide a safe and enriching learning environment for our children. If at any stage during the year you have any query or concern, please do not hesitate to contact us and we will try to assist you.

David O'Brien (Principal)
