

## KINDERGARTEN REOPENS WITH A NEW NORM

By Corporate Communications Division, Ministry of Education

Starting on the morning of 17 January 2022, kindergartens nationwide resumed their operations in providing early childhood care and education as part of the nation's second stage of school reopening. In this second stage of school reopening of educational institutions, only schools that have been permitted to operate by the Ministry of Education through the Department of Private Education can welcome kindergarten students physically. The school is required to comply with strict guidelines and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to ensure the schools are ready and safe for kids to attend.

Teachers welcomed their students by adhering to their schools' strict SOP and guidelines as preventive measures against COVID-19. The kindergarten will only operate with 30 per cent premise capacity and to practise safety protocols including wearing masks at all times, temperature check upon entering the premises, good ventilation, provision of Antigen Rapid Test (ART) kit every week and staggered school hours to reduce congestion as parents (with green or yellow BruHealth code) drop off and pick up their children.

### Children's Safety Are Top Priority

Sharing her school's SOP and guidelines was Datin Hajah Zainab binti Haji Abdul Wahab, the Principal of Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah. She said, "All students need to take the Antigen Rapid Test (ART) once a week. Only healthy students with negative ART results are allowed to enter school premises. Those who are unwell must stay at home. Parents and guardians are urged to contact their children's class teachers to inform them about their absence."

According to Datin Hajah Zainab, upon entering the school premises, students and parents are required to undergo a temperature check and BruHealth QR Code scan. Only a parent or guardian with a green or yellow BruHealth code, who has received two doses of COVID-19 vaccines, is allowed to send their children to their respective classes.



Kindergarten students and teacher of Jigsaw Primary School pose for a photo

"While in school, it is compulsory for all kindergarteners to wear face masks. Teachers only allow them to remove their face masks for eating and drinking sessions during break time, with social distancing measures in place," she said.

"Teachers also ensured students follow all school's SOP and guidelines as well as practising and maintaining cleanliness and personal hygiene such as washing hands before and after eating, playing, using the toilet and so forth," she added.

Additionally, teachers and non-teaching staff also follow the same SOP and guidelines. A kindergarten teacher from Jigsaw Primary School, Cikgu Nur Amalina Hasanah binti Haji Mohammad Jamil, said, "All staff members are expected to maintain cleanliness in the classroom and practise social distancing during the physical teaching and learning session."

In the effort to maintain social distance, kindergartens are only allowed to operate at a maximum of 30 percent of their premise capacity. This was said by Rommel V Concepcion, Assistant Headmaster of Learning Tree School. "Students will be divided into groups and each group will go to school once a week. Those who do not attend physical learning will continue to learn through Home Learning Pack (HLP)", he added.

Despite physical learning for students in kindergartens being scheduled, Cikgu Pengiran Samsiah binti Pengiran Haji Hashim of Jigsaw Primary School "aspires to carry out face-to-face teaching effectively while maintaining strict SOP to ensure safety for the students and school community."



A kindergarten student and his parent undergoing ART procedure prior to entering Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah

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Photos show kindergarten students eating and drinking during break time (left) and a teacher guiding a kindergarten student to wash her hands after break time at Taman Asuhan Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah

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Meanwhile, kindergartens at Sekolah Rendah Sultan Hashim have been settling well into school life. Cikgu Limawati Galawat, the school's Acting Headmistress, said, "It has been a few days since the reopening of kindergarten class. All went well and the students are happy to be at school to experience face-to-face learning and interaction with teachers and friends.

"Our school will always diligently practise all the important measures and standard operating procedures (SOP) from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education at all times. We will also be working closely with parents to ensure their children's education is well taken care of at home during Home-Based Learning as well as when they attend school physically," Cikgu Limawati added.

## Early Childhood Learning Crucial for Children's Overall Development

Kindergartens apply unique teaching methods, such as learning through play, music and projects, and are set up specifically for young children. The institutions are critical settings in supporting children's overall learning and development. Hence, they are among the first to be considered for reopening in many countries, including Brunei.

According to Cikgu Marilyn Kok Lee Chin of Sekolah Rendah Sultan Hashim, she has been using many types of plays as each type serves a different role in meeting the specific developmental needs of every child. She said, "For instance, we do role-playing, which allows children to imagine they are doctors or pilots where I encourage them to participate in a natural conversational style.

"Students can also engage in a social play where they interact in a group and blend in. This helps develop children's communications and interpersonal skills.

Cikgu Marilyn Kok believed that the fundamental key elements in teaching young children are tenderness, love and care. "Working with young learners requires us to spend time by listening, talking and doing things with them. I hope with the reopening of schools this year will result in fruitful learning for my students," she added.

*Karni Norhafidzah binti Haji Abd Karim, whose daughter is attending kindergarten at Chung Hwa School, lauded the Ministry of Education's decision to reopen kindergartens. She said, "The reopening of kindergartens also helps in providing support for us as working parents who work from the office whereby helping the children in home-based learning would not be possible."*

## Support for Parents and Guardians

The reopening of kindergartens not only support parents to help take care of their children but also offers support to parents who need to return back to work. As COVID-19 restrictions are beginning to ease in many workplaces during this endemic phase, young children will need urgent care.

Karni Norhafidzah binti Haji Abd Karim, whose daughter is attending kindergarten at Chung Hwa School, lauded the Ministry of Education's decision to reopen kindergartens. She said, "I am grateful and happy that my child can finally attend school physically. I believe face-to-face classes and practical learning are more effective for my daughter's early education especially when she is attending a school that has three languages as their school subjects.

"The reopening of kindergartens also helps in providing support for us as working parents who work from the office whereby helping the children in home-based learning would not be possible," she added.

With comprehensive SOPs and guidelines being put in place in kindergartens, parents can rest assured that the learning environment is safe for their children. Moreover, the reopening of such institutions aimed to further mitigate disruptions in early childhood education due to COVID-19 with hopes that these young learners' early learning experiences will build strong mental foundations in allowing them to reach their full potential and aid their growth in all aspects of life.