**Parents,**

**this article about Road Safety will appear in the Christmas edition of ‘The Outlook’ newspaper. It provides an excellent summary of the road safety issues at school and how they can easily be solved with the co-operation of all our road users in 2019. Thank you all for your support in this important matter. Working together we can ensure the safety of our children.**

PARENTS with children at a Hilltown primary school have been urged to exercise extreme caution and park in the correct areas when they are leaving them to or collecting them from school.

Police have attended St Patrick's Primary School on a number of occasions to speak to parents and guardians about the dangers of parking on the footpath close to the school building.

Indeed, this sentiment is echoed by the school's principal, who also encouraged people to park in the suitable areas provided.

Miss Una Lawless said the safety of the children was paramount.

“Keeping our children safe is one of the highest priorities in our school. This includes when they are not in our care and are out and about on the streets,” she said.

“Road safety is of extreme importance and we educate our children about road safety through a carefully planned programme from P1 to P7, which equips children in confronting the many issues and situations which arise on or near our roads.”

She said one of the “key aims” of their road safety education programme was to “encourage parental responsibility and to educate everyone that actions have consequences and that their behaviour should reflect this”.

“We regularly remind parents and carers about our school safety rules,” she said.

“We work collaboratively with the PSNI and with the NI Roads Service to get these messages across to parents.

“Parents should not park in the school lay-by, they should not park at the school gate and they should not park along the main road.

“We are grateful to the PSNI who have visited the school on numerous occasions at home-time and have spoken to parents, helping to educate them on basic road safety issues.”

Sergeant Paul Connolly said they were working to “address concerns” about the parking.

“We are aware of parking issues outside schools and have been working with our partners to try and address concerns,” he said.

“Parking on the footpath causes an obstruction which forces pedestrians out onto the road and restricts the view of drivers approaching.”

He added the PSNI would “continue to monitor areas where issues are highlighted”.

“We will offer advice to parents and caregivers however, if the problem persists it is likely that tickets will be issued,” he said.

“In general I would ask all motorists to park safely. Show respect and courtesy to others and adhere to parking restrictions. Let’s all work together to ensure our roads are safe for everyone, pedestrians and motorists alike.”

Miss Lawless said staff from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) had carried out some work in the vicinity of the school to highlight areas where people should not be parking.

“The NI Roads Service have recently refreshed the yellow zigzag markings outside the school and have clearly identified the lay-by as a designated area for buses. These areas are not for parking,” she said.

“It is obvious to everyone that if cars park along the main road, half on the footpath and half on the road, they are causing an obstruction for traffic in both directions and causing danger for children and parents who wish to use the footpath.”

Indeed, Miss Lawless confirmed the road markings at the school are to be extended.

“Early in 2019 NI Roads Service will extend the yellow zigzag lines as far as the church car park. This means that the PSNI will be able to take action against car drivers who are breaking the rules of the roads by parking along a main road and causing an obstruction.

“They will issue fixed-penalty fines and this will deter careless drivers. We have only a handful of drivers who cause these road safety difficulties. The vast majority of parents and grandparents follow the rules of the road with no difficulty.”

Miss Lawless added that, thanks to the efforts of the Parent Association, there was a very safe entrance to St Patrick's.

“We are immensely lucky at St Patrick’s P.S. Hilltown, in that we have a large, clearly signed car park which is available for all our parents to use,” she said.

“This is connected to the school by a secure pathway well away from the traffic on the road, so our children are completely safe walking to the school if their parents leave them at the gate of the church car park.

“Our Parent Association supplied bollards along this path some years ago to make it completely safe for the children. The Parent Association also paid for the ‘in’ and ‘out’ signage in the church car park, the yellow box at the top and one-way system directional arrows.

“This makes the drop-off and pick-up times very safe, if parents follow the rules of the road. Very few other primary schools have this facility available and we are grateful to the church for allowing us to use their excellent car park.”

Miss Lawless added: “At St Patrick’s we have very thorough practices in place to ensure safety of pupils at home-time. All pupils in P1 to P3 must be collected from the school playground where they are handed over by the teacher to the person with parental responsibility.

“If parents judge that their child has sufficiently developed road sense they can choose to allow pupils in P4 to P7 to walk to the church car park or to walk home. The school grounds are fully supervised until every child has left school.

“A member of staff supervises children as they get on to the school buses and ensures that they have their seatbelts fastened before the bus departs. Parental responsibility resumes when the children leave the school grounds.

“We are delighted that all our P7 pupils have the opportunity to take their Cycling Proficiency test each year and this is a fantastic and highly enjoyable way to finish their road safety education at our school.”