



26 March 2020

Dear parents and caregivers and all members of our Cairns Catholic school communities

Update on Cairns Catholic school responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

We would like to provide an update on three important aspects of our schools' response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Tuition fee relief measures for Term 2, and
2. Arrangements for Pupil Free Days for next week
3. QCAA changes to year 12 assessments in 2020

1. New tuition fee relief measures for Term 2

As the economic impacts of the COVID-19 response are being increasingly felt by our school communities, Catholic Education in Cairns is fast tracking a range of fee concessions to commence from the start of term 2.

- For those with an eligible government health concession card the automatic discount on tuition fees will increase from 70% to 100%.
- Two new concession card categories will be eligible for the 100% discount – the Job Seeker Payment (JSP) and the Farm Household allowance (FH). In addition, all Carer, Disability and Mobility card holders are now eligible regardless of their relationship status.
- For those yet to receive their cards, schools will accept as proof the digital version of the card from the MyGov app or a printed confirmation page from Centrelink.
- The concession will be automatic on presentation of the relevant concession card. Families should present their card or evidence to their school or college administration as soon as possible so that records can be updated before Term 2 invoices are issued. Invoicing will be delayed until week 4 of Term 2 to allow for this. If an eligible concession card is presented after term two invoicing in week four the concession card discount will be applied retrospectively for term two tuition fees.
- Although families are encouraged to pay their fees on time if they have the capacity to, schools will not insist on payment within 14 days so families may delay their payment until their circumstances allow them to do so.
- Processes for the collection of unpaid fees have been suspended.



- Families without a concession card but who are experiencing financial stress are encouraged to contact their school Principal – fee concessions are available. These discussions will be strictly confidential and respectful.
- These arrangements will be reviewed again late in Term 2 for the remainder of the year.

The fee concessions will be a considerable cost on school and system budgets and will be funded out of reserves and cost savings, without compromising the provision of quality education for all our students. For those families who have secure government or other employment we ask that you continue to support us in our shared commitment to families in need.

We know many of our school families are facing very tough circumstances at present. We want you to know that you are part of a caring school community and that whatever the circumstances we are committed to the ongoing education of your children. We re-iterate our policy commitment that no child will be denied access to a Catholic school education because of genuine family financial stress. We hope for families currently facing financial difficulties that finding the money for fees might be one less worry.

Please contact your school administration to make the necessary arrangements as soon as possible.

2. Arrangements for Pupil Free Days next week (Week 10 - 30 March- 3 April)

Catholic schools in Cairns will follow the Queensland Government decision to declare the last week of Term 1 as Pupil Free Days. This provides consistency across the State education sector.

The final week of term will be used by our teachers to fine tune continuity of education arrangements for Term 2. Normal teaching will not be provided but schools will be open for the children of families employed in essential services, which in this circumstance applies to those who have a job and are required to be at work on these days (this is the definition applied by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments).

Your schools will work out their own supervision arrangements for this week. Outside School Hours Care will be operating during week 10 as usual at Catholic schools that offer OSHC. At this stage we expect schools to commence Term 2 Monday 20 April, subject to changes in government advice, although it is highly likely this will involve a modified school curriculum delivery.

3. QCAA changes to year 12 assessments in 2020

For families with students in Year 12 this year the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority has just provided the following advice:

"After considering a range of scenarios and possible responses, along with feedback from students, parents, teachers and the wider school community, the QCAA Board resolved that an



immediate response is required to alleviate the stresses being felt in school communities.

We have decided to remove one internal assessment from the total of four prescribed in each syllabus. This will provide some relief for students as they contend with uncertainty and disruption while working towards their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) in 2020. It will also support teachers to manage reduced classroom time.

In the next few weeks, the QCAA will provide schools with direction on how they should adjust what is taught and the nature and timing of other assessments. There will be some flexibility to accommodate the specific needs of subjects — both General and Applied — but across-the-board adjustment is necessary to ensure the assessment experience is as equitable as it can be for all students.

Students can be assured that they will still receive fair subject results based on fewer than the four assessments mandated in syllabuses. Their parents and carers, and their teachers, can draw comfort from the QCAA's commitment to listen and respond to their concerns as we negotiate the ongoing challenges this year will bring."

We will provide further updates on this as they become available.

You will appreciate we are responding to government decisions and directions that are regularly changing. We will continue to keep you informed as further updates are provided, but we hope these three announcements today will give you a measure of certainty for the coming weeks ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Bill Dixon
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Catholic Education Services, Cairns

