



23 March 2020

Dear parents and carers, and all in our Catholic school communities,

Update on coronavirus preparedness

We would like to provide a further update on how our schools are responding to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This letter updates the information provided in our previous letter to parents on 17 March. We will continue to make decisions based on the direction and advice of Commonwealth and State health authorities and the operational needs of our schools. This ensures that what we do is part of the national strategy to contain the spread of this virus. There is a great deal of speculation and commentary in the media and wider community at present, much of which is conflicting and misinformed. Our actions will continue to be consistent with the best advice of the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments. Our dual commitments are to the safety and wellbeing of all members of our school communities, and the ongoing learning of all our students.

While acknowledging the circumstances are changing daily, here is our current advice:

1. All our schools are open and will remain open until the end of term. The current advice of the State and Commonwealth chief medical officers is that there is no reason for schools to close.
2. There are some circumstances where we ask you not to send your children to school:
 - If they are unwell,
 - If they have returned from overseas or have been in close contact with a person who has positively tested, or is being tested for COVID-19, they should self-isolate for 14 days, or until tests prove negative,
 - We also ask for 14-day self-isolation, from today, for students returning from domestic travel (by any means) from interstate or Southeast Queensland,
 - If your child is immunocompromised or has a vulnerable health condition for which your doctor has recommended not attending school. A similar consideration may apply if a member of your household is in a vulnerable health category.
3. If a member of your household is self-isolating your children can still attend school. But we ask that you be vigilant – if the self-isolating person develops symptoms your family should self-isolate until you have medical advice to the contrary. If a member of your household is in quarantine because of a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 you should follow the medical advice provided.
4. As per the advice of the Commonwealth Government we respect the decision of families who wish to withdraw their child from school at this time. Please advise your school of this decision. But we would stress the following:
 - There is no advice from the Commonwealth and State chief medical officers that children should not attend school,
 - This pandemic will continue for several months – withdrawing your child now from school means they may not attend school for a long period of time. This may have a significant impact on their education,
 - While we are putting considerable effort into providing resources for continuing learning at home, our best efforts will not compare with the advantages of face-to-face learning at school,



- Our resources for home based learning will not be generally available until Term 2. Some limited resources may be available from some schools in the final fortnight of this term,
 - In the event that children are withdrawn from school, parents must be responsible for the conduct of their children, including ensuring their engagement in education and not putting others at risk.
5. As mentioned above all our schools are putting in place measures for continuity of learning for student absences and in the event of possible school closures. We have never done anything on a similar scale before and our teachers and school leaders have been responding magnificently to the challenge. We are using our available technologies and apps and looking at how we can best include all students including those with limited connectivity and without ICT devices at home. Be assured we will be doing our best – your child’s teachers will greatly appreciate your support as they transition to remote delivery options.
 6. You will have seen that NAPLAN testing has been cancelled this year. This is a good move and takes a lot of pressure off schools. We will continue to have discussions at the State level about Year 12 assessments – uppermost in our mind is to ensure our Year 12s are not disadvantaged by COVID-19 adjustments.
 7. All our schools are implementing practices to maintain social distancing. Assemblies and large gatherings have been cancelled, as have camps and excursions. Additional measures are in place for student breaks, lunch time interactions, and school sport. At home please reinforce the important messages about hygiene and social distancing.
 8. Please reconsider any travel plans over the coming school holidays – this includes road trips. As the Queensland Premier has said, we all need to stay in our homes and ‘villages’ this holiday period. Any unnecessary travel carries the risk of spreading the virus.
 9. As advised in our earlier letters we are acutely aware of the financial stress on many members of our school communities because of the economic impact of COVID-19. Many businesses are struggling, and many families have been without an income for several weeks. **If your family is experiencing financial stress, please contact your school’s Principal as fee relief is available.** These arrangements will be strictly confidential.
 10. Our schools are gearing up their additional support for families and community members in need. For families unaffected financially at this stage this may be an area where you can assist.

Unless there is a major change in circumstances we plan to update our school families with consolidated information on a regular basis – probably weekly. But we will provide updates through our [Emergency Communications](#) Facebook page and on [Cairns Catholic Education](#) and school websites and portals – please check regularly.

Finally, at times like this we are reminded of the values that underpin the existence of all Catholic schools – compassion, understanding, care for others including the most vulnerable, and being grateful for the selfless contributions of so many people in our communities – in particular our health and medical workers, teachers, cleaners, those at our supermarket checkouts and the truck drivers delivering stock to our shops and markets. Our quiet words of support and encouragement will be well received.

Yours sincerely,



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

