



2 March 2020

Dear members of our Cairns Catholic School communities

Update on coronavirus preparedness

The coronavirus (COVID-19) is continuing to be a growing concern for health authorities worldwide and we are seeing examples in a number of countries of its health, social and economic impacts. Catholic Education in Cairns is actively planning to manage the impact of this virus in our schools and our wider school communities if and when this occurs. While we hope to be spared the worst aspects of this health emergency, we must nevertheless be prepared for the challenges ahead.

In addition to the advice of our State and Commonwealth health authorities we would like to advise the measures we will implement for Cairns Catholic schools as part of our duty of care and commitment to the safety of all members of our school communities. We will update this information as circumstances change in line with the professional advice we receive.

Please consider the following advice:

Health and hygiene

Over the coming weeks we will be heavily promoting hygienic practices at all schools. There will be renewed emphasis on washing hands several times a day, the availability of hand sanitisers, and the correct protocols for sneezing and coughing. A range of material will be supplied to schools in support of this.

Our school cleaners will be issued updated protocols for school cleaning practices that prioritise human contact areas – benches, handles, handrails, toilets etc. We will share this information with families to encourage matching behavior at home. Please talk to your children about the importance of the recommended hygiene practices.

Overseas excursions and staff work-related overseas travel

We are working through a range of contractual and insurance issues but our duty of care for the safety of our students and staff means that we cannot approve overseas travel



for our staff and students for the foreseeable future, with the exception of New Zealand. This is subject to review but at this stage we do not have the necessary certainty that the risks are acceptable. This decision also affects student exchange programs (both ways) and staff professional development, conference or sabbatical leave.

Families of staff and students will make their own call for private overseas travel in the Term 1 school holidays, but to be aware changing circumstances might mean periods of quarantine in an overseas or Australian location, or self-isolation when returning home. This may impact on attendance at work or school.

Financial impacts

Our schools are aware that with a local economy heavily dependent on tourism and travel as well as international education that there are already significant local economic impacts. If your family is suffering financial distress as a result, we strongly encourage you to discuss this with your school Principal. Our schools will continue to provide support, including fee relief, for families in genuine financial distress.

Impact on school operations

You will have seen media reports of schools being closed in areas where there have been coronavirus outbreaks. We hope that this would be a very unlikely event in our part of the world but as part of our contingency planning we are looking at how we might continue education delivery in the event of temporary school closures. This is likely to involve the use of on-line education and business apps to link our teachers with their students. The planning will address issues such as access to devices and home internet connectivity.

Our best behaviour

There have been very isolated reports of unacceptable behavior in our local community, in particular towards people of Chinese origin. We must all be better than that type of behavior suggests and ensure our schools are places of acceptance, good will and inclusiveness. Prejudicial behavior towards any member of our school communities will not be tolerated.

Ongoing communication

We have a variety of means of communicating with school families including SMSs and emails. We use these broadcast media during emergencies such as cyclones. We will use these channels to communicate with our school families as the coronavirus situation unfolds. Please look out for further communication from us and accept that this communication is an important part of keeping our school communities safe. While an initial SMS was sent to alert you to this email communication, further emails will not be preceded with an SMS unless urgent. We will update information provided as required. These email communications will also be accessible on your school parent portal.

We have established a dedicated Facebook page for use during issues such as cyclones and coronavirus. Should you wish to follow this page, search Cairns Catholic Education



Emergency Communications, like the page and follow 'first' rather than 'by default' to ensure posts appear at the top of your news feed.

If you have any concerns, please discuss them with your child's teacher or Principal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Dixon', written in a cursive style.

Bill Dixon
Executive Director
Catholic Education Services, Cairns

