



5 May 2020

Dear parents and carers and all members of our school communities,

COVID-19 response update for Cairns Diocese Catholic schools

I would like to provide this fortnightly update to our school parents and carers to inform you on the current status of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly though, I would like to congratulate and thank all members of our school communities for your response to the first two weeks of our 'continuity of learning' adjustments. Despite a few early teething issues, it has gone well. Our students have shown great adaptive skills in adjusting to learning from home, with our teachers reporting very high levels of participation and engagement. Some schools have even reported that combined at-home and school physical attendance has in fact exceeded normal school attendance figures. When we look at the silver linings that will emerge from this crisis the recognition that we have all learnt new skills will be very high on the list. We will also be recognising our young students for the committed and resilient young learners that they are.

We know all families have suffered disruption in the last two months, some much more than others. The additional pressure of having children not attending school and learning from home has been an added pressure on families but it has been gratifying to see how families have worked together to make learning at home happen. Thankyou.

I would like to provide some notes on several topics.

1. Return to school

Yesterday the Queensland Government announced a staged return to face to face schooling this month. Kindy, Prep, Year 1 and Years 11 and 12 will return to school on Monday 11 May. There will be a further review on Friday 15 May and if a low transmission rate of the virus continues, all year levels will be back on Monday 25 May. Our schools will continue to be available for children of families in essential services and for children in vulnerable circumstances. This timetable depends on the continuing downward trend of COVID-19 cases and public adherence to social distancing and other virus management strategies. It will not be a return to school as usual because we will be continuing to implement and enhance a range of safety measures for our school communities.

Our schools will return to classroom teaching but will use a variety of methodologies including the consolidation of many of the digital learning practices that have been applied this term. For students unable to return to school in line with the state decision, schools will provide support through digital or hard copy resources, although we encourage students to return to school to access the best learning outcomes.

Our staged return to classroom teaching in schools follows the advice of the Queensland Chief Medical Officer. We have always indicated that our decision to re-open our schools for face to face learning would be based on this advice and in support of the state's COVID-19 plan. You may have read in the media of a Commonwealth offer to advance school funding in return for an earlier return to school –



Catholic schools in Queensland rejected this offer outright, maintaining that any return to school decision will be based on medical advice only and not other inducements.

We will continue to give the highest priority to the health and safety of our students and staff with strict hygiene practices in place, enhanced school cleaning protocols, maintaining practical social distancing for students, and managing at risk students and staff. For example, we will be looking at how we manage parent access to the school grounds (likely to be restricted) and how we manage the school 'drop and go' zone to prevent the gathering of parents, students and staff. Your school will provide details on parent access protocols as part of a range of local safety enhancement measures.

While we are aware of health authority advice that the 4 sq metre and 1.5m distancing rules are not entirely practicable for students, we will be seeking to maintain and enhance practicable measures that encourage social distancing in schools.

Parents continue to be our first line of defence. If your child is at all unwell, especially with cold or flu-like symptoms, please keep them at home. And now the medical advice is that anyone experiencing cold or flu symptoms should be [tested](#). Access flu injections if you can.

We are acutely aware that any relaxation of the restrictions is based on the knowledge that the restrictions may be quickly re-introduced in the event of COVID-19 community outbreaks. We are planning for the possibility of future school closures (single school, cluster of schools, all schools) if this were to eventuate as a government direction.

2. Attending school in the interim

The current advice for this week and for Years 2-10 from next week is that children should not attend school unless they are the children of essential service providers who have no reasonable supervision option, or they are vulnerable children.

We know there is an enormous amount of public discussion about this issue and recently some differing advice from the Commonwealth, but the State Government is responsible for schools, so our actions will reflect their recommendations. Despite wide ranging opinions, Australia's responses have so far been shown to be among the best in the world – our best way forward is to stick with the plan.

So, if you can, please keep your children at home. The end is in sight.

3. COVIDSafe app

One of the best ways we can individually help in the fight against COVID-19 is to download the Commonwealth COVIDSafe App. We are encouraging all our staff and school families to register on the app as it will greatly help limit the impact of an outbreak in our schools and the community. Your older children with their own phones are also encouraged to download the App.



You of course will make your own judgment on this, but our advice is that the benefits for families and in our case, our schools, far outweigh any perceived risks. Reading the app's [FAQs](#) should help allay any concerns.

4. Cybersafety and our use of digital platforms

You may have read southern media reports about unauthorised persons 'bombing' Zoom group meetings. This is a concern, but we are confident we have introduced a range of security protocols to mitigate the risk of unauthorised access. We will continue to monitor this. There have been no reports of unauthorised Zoom bombing at our schools. We would like to keep it that way.



We encourage parents to discuss the importance of responsible ICT usage with your children and for you to monitor their use of ICT devices at home. If you have any concerns, please discuss with your school.

Our [response to the Zoom bombing issue](#) is on our Cairns Catholic Education website and advice on cybersafety for school children can be found on the [eSafety Commissioner](#) website.

4. Semester 1 reporting

We are aware of concerns in schools regarding assessment and reporting for Semester 1. These matters are being actively addressed with the State and Commonwealth Governments – we will advise when we have some guidance. The current advice is that there will be some flexibility on our reporting obligations.

5. Fee relief Term 2

As we have mentioned in previous correspondence, all our schools have extended their eligible [Health Care Card tuition fee discounts](#) from 70% to 100% for Term 2 on presentation of the card. Please aim to do this by Week 4 if possible when Term 2 invoices will be issued. Schools will, however, be able to apply the discount retrospectively if the [HCC Tuition Fee Discount form](#) is not able to be lodged prior to fee invoices being generated. Eligibility includes the new Jobseeker category. 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.

In the interim, for those who do not yet have a HCC card or confirmation and need to request fee concessions, a [Hardship concession form](#) may be completed, however this form is not essential as a phone call or email to your school will suffice.

For those experiencing financial hardship but who are not eligible for a Health Care Card, please contact your Principal. Fee relief is available for those in need.

Schools are looking at adjustments to their levies for activities that will not be provided this term. This mostly affects excursion and camp costs. Individual schools will provide details.

Our response to financial hardship has been to extend relief to those most in need and to encourage those who are relatively unaffected by the economic changes to continue to pay their fees. This is the response that is most consistent with the values of the modern Catholic school.

6. Boarding schools

Families with boarding students at Cairns diocesan schools will be advised by their colleges on return to school measures. Our colleges are working through a range of matters including the safe transport of students, protocols for accessing remote communities and management of the boarding facilities to maximise safe practice.

7. Communications, information and Raise digital magazine

You may have seen the first two editions of our weekly on-line digital coronavirus special editions of Raise magazine, with the third issue publishing tomorrow. These are shorter versions of the magazine published last year that will be published for at least the first five weeks of this term. They include positive information to help support families in home-based learning with wellbeing and other issues relating to our current self-isolation practices.

You can access all digital editions of Raise from the [Continuity of Learning](#) page on our website.

If you have not already accessed, consolidated information and resources for our school communities are on our website [Coronavirus COVID-19](#) page which is continually



being updated; or follow the green COVID-19 button on your school or the Cairns Catholic Education website landing page.

There is also our [Emergency Communications Facebook page](#) that we are currently using to provide regular communication on our responses.

Finally, I think we are starting to see the light at the end of our long coronavirus tunnel and that is the staged return to school from next week. Our nation and our communities appear to have been spared the worst impacts of this virus that have been experienced by many countries. That has been achieved through supporting government led strategies based on the best medical advice. Despite the fact that this has had so many impacts on our school families there is much to be thankful for and a collective need for us all to continue this journey, maintain our vigilance and adhere to the governments' directions. That is our way forward.

Thank you for your support. We have been monitoring our social media and other sources of feedback and greatly appreciate the kind words of support and encouragement for our schools, principals, teachers and school officers. Your recognition of their efforts means a lot.

With our best wishes,



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

