



5 May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Update on COVID-19 responses for Cairns Catholic schools

I would like to thank every staff member in Cairns Catholic Education for your outstanding efforts in the first two weeks of this term in negotiating new approaches to deliver 'continuity of learning' to our students. Our teachers have done a fantastic job, some of you having dived into on-line digital learning in a big way for the first time. It has been very apparent from the comments we have received that your efforts have been greatly appreciated by your students and their families. Knowing the skills of our teachers and principals, we had expectations that this would go well, but the positive response has greatly exceeded even those initial high expectations. Thank you.

Also, thank you to our school officers and other school support staff. We have had feedback from all our principals that the willingness and adaptability of our school officers and support staff have made a huge positive impact on our schools' capacity to respond. Many of you have taken on new roles and there has been an infectious enthusiasm to provide help where it is most needed. Our special thanks to you also.

I would like to provide an update on several key areas:

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. Existing arrangements for essential services families and children in vulnerable circumstances remain in place. 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.

This follows the advice of the Queensland Chief Medical Officer. We have always indicated that our decision to fully re-open our schools will be based on this advice and in support of the state's COVID-19 plan.

You may have seen media coverage in recent days regarding a Commonwealth offer to advance school funding in return for an accelerated re-opening of schools. We have rejected this offer because it would compromise our obligation to make these decisions based on the advice of government medical authorities and our integration within State and Commonwealth strategies.

As our students physically return to schools there will be a return to classroom delivery as the single mode of delivery for those year levels at our schools. This will encompass a variety of pedagogical practices which will include further application of the digital learning platforms that have been actively applied this term. We encourage our schools to further enhance these practices and consolidate the gains we have collectively made in the digital



learning space. Schools will need to continue to support students in the returned year levels who are still learning from home, through the provision of digital and/or hard copy resources. This is best managed at a school level in accordance with each school's situation.

The attendance categories currently in use would continue to be applied: Present - in class (onsite), Present - work/study (offsite, participating in remote learning), Absent – illness, Absent - personal family

2. Safety in schools

We have provided Principals with a summary of our required and recommended WHS responses for the operation of schools. School leadership will be using this to maintain and further develop workable practices and protocols for individual schools.

In summary, these measures incorporate maintaining strict hygiene, enhanced cleaning protocols, practical measures to maintain social distancing and measures to restrict access to school property. We may also receive government advice and direction on monitoring and testing protocols for our schools and will respond accordingly.

We know this is a difficult and often emotional issue for our staff. We have noted the advice of Commonwealth and State medical authorities that COVID-19 does not significantly impact our school age cohorts which are also not seen as high-risk transmitters of the virus. Further, that the benefits of having our schools open far outweighs these reduced risks. While we are accepting that advice in our decisions, we are also actively looking at ways we can further reduce risks for our school communities, particularly staff.

3. The 1.5 and 4sq metre rules

Social distancing for students is still important but given the lower transmission rates for those under the age of 19, health advice is that social distancing measures need only be maintained where practicable. Staff must still adhere to social distancing and venue density rules when gathered together with adults.

While we do not have to comply with these distances as a hard and fast rule for our students, our schools will continue to maintain and improve practical ways in which we can maximise social distancing. These might include the organisation of learning areas, the use of other school areas, the timing of activities, the staggering of breaks, protocols for the start and end of the school day etc.

We understand the more significant risk is adult-to-adult contact and we will be addressing ways this social distancing can be maintained. This will include how we manage staff rooms and other shared spaces, team meetings and so on.

Additional protocols will be put in place to limit and manage parent and other access to school sites and to manage the contact points like 'drop and go' zones.

4. Staff who are at increased risk

Our schools have been identifying and providing support for staff and students in the 'at risk' categories. These relate to age, background and underlying health conditions and these are generally now well known but that information can be accessed [here](#).

If you have health or other concerns, including those that may not meet these criteria, please seek your own medical advice and then discuss your concerns with your Principal, as early as possible, so that we can put some adjustments in place. This may include working from home or moving to a different work location within the school.



We repeat our ongoing advice that if you develop cold or flu like symptoms you should stay away from school and seek testing as soon as possible, in accordance with [Queensland Health advice](#). We remind you also that [additional leave provisions](#) are in place to support you in managing health issues for yourself or family.

Please be assured your school and Catholic Education Services will respond to your particular needs and concerns in a compassionate and supportive manner.

5. The COVIDSafe app

Our view is that our school communities have more to gain and little to lose by signing up for this new app. Many of us have already registered and our thanks to those who have. We acknowledge this is a personal decision for individuals to make but we encourage you to download this app and further encourage others to do the same. It will help make our schools and community safer. The app can be downloaded to phones from the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android). [FAQs](#) should allay any concerns.

6. ICT security and zoom bombing

We have initiated a range of protocols to manage the risk of unauthorised access to our digital learning platforms. Provided we act consistently with these protocols we can continue to use Zoom and other platforms with confidence as a very important link with our students online. We are also advising parents to be vigilant in supervising their children's online activities.

7. 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.

8. Enterprise Bargaining 9

We had hoped a new EB agreement would be put to a vote in the first half of Term 2, but our COVID-19 responses have postponed this. We are currently finalising the documentation to put this to a vote, hopefully in the second half of Term 2, depending on COVID-19 circumstances. Thank you for your patience and support – we would like to finalise the EB as soon as possible. Please refer to [EB Staff Update 15](#) for additional information.

I close this memo with the positive message that I started with. Our schools have done a fantastic job in the first fortnight of Term 2 and the preparatory work leading up to it, and acknowledge that many Principals and staff contributed further over the Term 1 school break. This has been an immediate and considerable challenge to the way we operate our schools. At the very least, the outcomes have been both extraordinary and impressive.

Thank you for your support and commitment.

Yours sincerely



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

