

27 May 2020

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

COVID-19 response update for Cairns Diocese Catholic schools

We are delighted to welcome back all our year levels to face-to-face learning this week. I would like to thank all our school families for your understanding and support during this difficult period - if nothing else, this current crisis has ably demonstrated the strength of our school communities, within which our families and our dedicated staff have played a major part.

Although our schools will operate differently over the coming months with social distancing and enhanced hygiene in place, our return to 'near to normal' school has exceeded all expectations, due in no small part to our collective commitment to sticking to the plans of our national and state governments. We are still not clear of this threat but with your ongoing cooperation we can continue to keep our schools as safe places for our students, staff and families. Please continue to work with us to achieve this objective.

We know some students (and parents) may experience heightened anxiety for some time to come. I remind you of the [wellbeing support resources](#) on our website. You may notice changes in your children, or may not be sure how to manage some of the changes and questions your children have. This can have long term effects on wellbeing, and therefore, learning. Assistance is available, please do not hesitate to contact your school for further support.

Our response to the COVID-19 threat has emphasised timely and frank communication with all members of our school communities, which includes this regular letter to parents and carers. At this stage in our recovery, this will be our last letter to all parents and carers. Unless circumstances change to warrant further communication from this office, future updates will come from your school.

We provide the following updates.

Fee Relief

We remind all families that fee concessions for Term 2 are available for families experiencing financial hardship. Invoices for Term 2 have now been issued, however if you have not yet arranged a [Health Care Card tuition fee discount](#) the discount can be applied retrospectively for Term 2. For those experiencing financial hardship who are not eligible for a Health Care Card, please contact your Principal. Fee relief is available for those in need.

I sincerely thank those of you who are unaffected by the COVID-19 financial downturn and are continuing to pay your fees. By honouring this commitment, you allow us to extend relief to those most in need, as financial hardship should not impact any child's education.

New families

We realise there may be lingering financial stresses after the pandemic crisis. We would not want new families to delay a choice for Catholic education for their children because of short-term financial constraints. Please assist us by sharing this message to those you know who may be considering a Catholic school for their child. Fee arrangements will be made sensitively and confidentially; please ask them to contact their intended school's Principal.

Changes to how we operate

As we start to return to some normalcy, despite changes in the way we operate, we must remain vigilant, adhering to governments' direction and practising good hygiene measures and social distancing, to manage the ongoing COVID-

19 risk as our nation begins the rebuilding process. Best practice standards of hygiene are being observed in our schools and colleges and social distancing guidelines and advice are being followed. Our COVID-19 response plan is based on best advice from government and health officials. I refer you to [advice issued to parents and carers on returning to schools](#) issued by the state's Chief Health Officer.

Thank you for supporting your school's social distancing measures for parents, including drop-off and pick-up protocols. Complying with these new arrangements, practising good hygiene and downloading the government's COVIDSafe app are ways we can all help to keep our schools safe.

COVIDSafe app

The government has always stated that lifting of restrictions is dependent upon the transmission rate of the COVID-19 virus remaining low. Now more than ever, the COVIDSafe app can help with contact tracing to contain potential cluster outbreaks quickly and decisively, so that restrictions do not need to be reapplied. The COVIDSafe app helps protect you and your family to know if you have been in contact with someone who has been positively diagnosed, who may not know you and therefore be unable to identify you as a potential contact. I encourage all in our community to download and register the COVIDSafe app on their phone. [Information about the app](#) should help allay any concerns. But this is a matter for your judgment and we respect your decision.

Keep your child home if unwell

Importantly, if your child is at all unwell, especially with cold or flu-like symptoms, please keep them at home. Medical advice is that anyone experiencing cold or flu symptoms must be [tested](#), and flu injections are encouraged.

Reporting

Your school will be providing information on end of semester reporting. You will still receive a report on your child's progress at the end of this semester, but this will be in a modified and simplified format to reflect the changed circumstances in which our schools have operated in recent months.

Communications, information and *Raise* digital magazine

The [fourth](#) and [fifth](#) instalments of our weekly on-line digital coronavirus special editions of *Raise* magazine during the five weeks of learning from home have now been published. Included are my thoughts on our learnings from this crisis, from an education system perspective. You'll find the article on page 6 of Edition 5.

All digital editions can be found on the [Continuity of Learning](#) page on our website.

We hope you found them interesting and useful but would value your feedback in our review of future digital and/or print editions of *Raise*. Please assist us by completing our brief [online survey](#). All survey participants will go into the draw for one of five \$100 gift vouchers at IGA, Coles or Woolworths.

Stay up to date with information and resources on our website [Coronavirus COVID-19](#) page and our [Emergency Communications Facebook page](#).



With our best wishes,

Bill Dixon
Executive Director
Catholic Education Services, Cairns

