



**Catholic
Education Services**
Diocese of Cairns

Learning with Faith and Vision

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Dear parents and families in our Cairns Catholic school communities,

It is my hope that you have had a well-deserved and restful break. This new year will again, no doubt, require us to be nimble in our response to the ever-changing COVID situation. We are looking forward to welcoming everyone back for the new year, with a special welcome to new families and our prep and year 7 students for 2021.

Although we left Term 4 with open borders and the promise of restriction free travel, many of us have had to cancel travel plans or have been caught with restrictions from the snap COVID control measures. Still, from a health perspective, our region has once again escaped the worst of it, as we approach the new term.

If the rapid changes over the holidays have taught us anything, it is that although we are in a good position here in Far North Queensland, we need to remain vigilant. It is important for us to continue to ensure we maintain good hand hygiene, cover our coughs and sneezes, maintain physical distancing from other adults, and we and our children stay home if we are sick.

From an economic perspective, our region continues to be amongst the hardest hit in the nation, particularly the tourism and hospitality sectors. The tuition fee discount for holders of eligible concession cards will continue at 100% for terms one and two of the 2021 school year. The tuition fee discount for holders of eligible concession cards in terms three and four will be published prior to the start of term two.

For those who have recently gained a concession card, or their concession card expired last year, we ask that you present your new card to your school early in term one to allow the tuition fee discount to be included on the term one invoice to families. For those yet to receive their cards, schools will continue to accept, as proof, the digital version of the card from the MyGov app or a printed confirmation page from Centrelink.

Families not eligible for a concession card but experiencing financial hardship should contact their Principal – fee relief will continue to be available and all requests will be treated with respect, sensitivity, and confidentiality. It is important that families that received fee relief in 2020 and who require support in 2021, contact the school early in term one to discuss fees.

It is important that families who want to access Catholic Education for their children are not excluded because they do not have the means to pay fees. It is our policy and practice to assist any family in this situation. The expectation continues that those families not experiencing financial hardship continue to pay their fees. This supports our schools' commitment to continue to provide high quality education for your children and assists our capacity to provide assistance to families in genuine need.



Schools will be generating family invoices by week four of term one. To ensure the term one family invoice is accurate it is important that concession card data and financial hardship concessions are correct.

In 2020 we saw our teachers and students adapt to new ways of learning, and many of these changes have had a positive impact on the way we continue to teach into 2021.

A strong part of the culture of our schools is that parents are seen as an integral part of education but due to the ongoing COVID restrictions we want to ensure that the parents of our Prep, Year 1, Year 7 and new students are welcome at the school on the first day of Term 1. This year, COVID permitting, parent attendance will be encouraged, however, the organisation of first day attendance will be determined by each school, to comply with COVID measures, and may involve limiting attendance to one parent/caregiver. Principals and school leadership will be reviewing room sizes, occupancy limits and other COVID measures to determine how the first day of Term will proceed for parents' attendance within each school, and you will hear from your Principal on these decisions in the coming week. This will be a difficult balancing act between managing expectations, whilst ensuring the wellbeing and safety of our school community, which will continue to remain our top priority.

For parents who attend the school, this may look very different, and may involve additional measures, including wearing of masks. We ask that you comply with your school's on site COVID measures. They are there to protect everyone.

Schools are also reviewing their capacity to allow parents and caregivers on site at pick up and drop off times throughout the year. Although we would love the freedom to have many people onsite, we have a responsibility to carefully manage physical distancing and venue density requirements at pick up and drop off times. Again, due to different layouts, entry points and available space, not all schools will be able to accommodate this. Until you hear from your principal, you should continue to follow guidance from your school from Term 4.

With states being quicker to respond to any potential COVID outbreaks, and with vaccines hopefully rolling out soon, we are looking forward to a happy and healthy 2021, and we wish you the same.

Yours sincerely



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

