



24 March 2021

Dear parents and families in our Cairns Catholic Diocese school communities

This is just a short note before our schools close for the Easter/Term 1 holidays to firstly thank you for your continuing support. I also want to advise of ongoing measures in place to support families affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19; and, to provide advice regarding the issue of consent and relationships education that is currently front and centre in our community.

Regarding ongoing fee relief, this advice is particularly important as we await the cessation of the Jobkeeper scheme on 28 March.

As you know we have already put in place automatic 100% tuition fee discounts for the holders of eligible government concession cards for Terms 1 and 2 this year. **We have now made a decision to extend this automatic discount until the end of 2021 – that is, for the entire school year.** Contact your school as soon as possible if you have recently become eligible for a concession card or have had a card renewed. We accept, as proof, the digital version of the card from the MyGov app or a printed confirmation page from Centrelink.

We are also renewing our advice that similar support is available for families without an eligible card, but who are in financial stress – please contact your school's Principal. These decisions reflect the widely shared view that many businesses in Far North Queensland are facing tough times and that for many the recovery may be slower than elsewhere.

We maintain our commitment to policy and practice that no child will be denied a Catholic school education because of family financial hardship. In making this commitment we also ask that all families who have been spared financial hardship continue to pay their fees in order for our schools to provide a quality education for all the children in our care. This is what our schools do best – look out for each other, especially those in need of support.

We hope that the roll-out of the vaccine program will progressively diminish the threat of COVID outbreaks in our community but the situation in Papua New Guinea to our immediate north is a reminder of an outcome we must continue to guard against.

In relation to the issue of consent and relationships education, Cairns Catholic Education welcomes steps taken by Queensland Education Minister, Grace Grace and the Federal Education Minister, Alan Tudge to act on student sexual consent issues following reports by young people of their experiences in state and non-government schools.

The minister's department has committed to working across the non-government and state education sectors, P & Cs and school communities to explore whether current Australian curriculum and respectful relationships education adequately address all issues, including consent and reporting.



Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cairns currently engage students in a range of programs, including Love Bites, which covers the topics of healthy relationships and consent and is nationally recognised and created by NAPCAN, the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

A consistent approach across sectors which engages students, parents, and the community generally, will go a long way to changing attitudes in our society. We take student wellbeing and student protection and reporting processes very seriously and, like Minister Grace, I urge victims of sexual violence, including our students, to make a report to police and seek support or advice.

While both state and non-government schools can do their utmost to address attitudes in the classroom, it will take the joint efforts of parents, community leaders, governments and young people to call out and change unacceptable attitudes and behaviour towards sexual consent.

We are not immune from problems and issues in the community and aim to educate our students on the importance of healthy and respectful relationships, in line with our ethos and values of a Catholic School. We see the importance of being in partnership with our families as vital to the success and wellbeing of our students.

Your school Principal will have outlined the particular approach and programs that are currently in place at your school, we are currently reviewing some of those programs to ensure that the content and delivery is based on a current evidence base as we wait for the outcome of the State and Federal reviews.

Once again, thank you for your support of our schools, please maintain your COVID-safe practices in hygiene and travel over the coming holidays as we look forward this year to a better second term than we experienced last year!

Be safe, take care and keep your family close this Easter.

God bless.



Bill Dixon
Executive Director

