



18 March 2020

## **Open letter to parents and carers**

I am writing to provide an update on the latest coronavirus advice and how Toowoomba Catholic Schools are preparing for changes to school routines, including the possibility of school closures. Our overall priority remains the safety of all staff and students and the continuity of student learning. Your principal will communicate directly with you any local decisions.

### **School closures**

Our national and state authorities continue to make it clear they will look at appropriate measures to slow transmission rates to limit the pressure on our health system as necessary. It is clear that broad school closures will (and are) being weighed up as a part of the containment strategies. We will continue to closely monitor and be guided by the advice of our state and national authorities which (to date) have not proposed broad school closures. The two most likely eventualities are

- school specific (spot) closures as a health response to a critical incident (eg a school is closed for 3 days after a student or staff member returns a positive test); and/or
- potential broader school closure as part of an emergency or disaster management response (likely coupled with other community restrictions).

Parents will be advised immediately by the school in the event of an imminent school closure.

### **Continuity of student learning – pupil-free day**

If a school is closed for an extended period, students will be asked to continue their learning from home. A pupil-free day has been scheduled across the Diocese of Toowoomba for **Friday, 27 March 2020** to allow staff to prepare necessary work and undergo training for the possibility of a school closure. I apologise for any inconvenience this may cause. Please contact your school for details of any Outside School Hours Care services available on this day. I have no doubt that this day will benefit all students in the long-term.

### **Local school excursions and events**

I have advised principals to cancel school excursions and social events and they will let you know what this means for your school.

### **Travel**

Please reconsider any unnecessary overseas travel in the coming months. While we understand that in some cases this travel might be unavoidable for family circumstances, overseas travel for holiday purposes should be postponed. Overseas travel arrivals now require two weeks mandatory self-isolation on return to Australia and overseas destinations are adding similar requirements at their end. Two weeks self-isolation means a significant loss of learning time for your children.

### **Financial difficulties**

I am aware that some families may be experiencing financial difficulties related to the pandemic. If this is the case, I would urge you to make a confidential appointment to discuss a range of available options including a fee concession with your school's principal.

### **Some tips for keeping your children safe and well**

- If your child shows symptoms of a cold or flu, keep them home. If those symptoms persist, and the symptoms are more than a 'cold', you should seek medical advice.
- If your child is well, they should attend school. It is likely the pandemic will be with us for months, not weeks.
- Talk to your children about hygiene and model the recommended behaviour at home – hand washing and sneezing protocols in particular.
- Respond appropriately to issues relating to student anxiety. Some tips for talking to your child can be found [here](#). Please talk to your child's teacher or the principal if assistance is required at school to manage anxiety levels.
- Reassure your Year 12 student that he/she will not be disadvantaged by assessment changes due to coronavirus.

We greatly appreciate the support and goodwill already shown by our parent community. If you have any further concerns or questions, please contact your child's teacher or the school principal.

Kind regards



Dr Patrick Coughlan  
Executive Director: Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Toowoomba