



16 April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing with an update about Term 2 arrangements in our system of Catholic schools in the Toowoomba Diocese. This is to help parents and carers navigate the often conflicting messages and make sense of the information overload occurring daily. The best and most reliable source of information is your school, and particularly the school principal and staff. You can expect regular communication from your school keeping you informed about changes as they come to hand.

### **Term 2 arrangements**

As the Premier has advised, the arrangements for Term 2 will be that most students will learn from home for at least the first five weeks. The situation for the second half of the term will depend on updated health advice. During this period, all students who are able to be supervised and learn from home are to stay home, except for

- Children of essential workers on days when they are not able to be supervised at home and no other arrangements can be made. Essential worker means any worker who must continue to attend their workplace for essential business during this time.
- Vulnerable children. Vulnerable children include children identified by schools as vulnerable (ie at risk) or who
  - are currently receiving services from Child Safety, including children who are subject to a child protection order
  - are subject to a youth justice order.
- Children in designated indigenous communities.

### **On-site supervision**

Each school will provide on-site supervision for those children of essential workers who attend school. Those students will participate in the same learning programs that are delivered to students learning from home. Any child who is sick should not attend school.

If you have not already done so, to assist with initial Term 2 planning, please advise the school if you anticipate that you will need to send your child/ren to school from week 1 of Term 2. This will assist the school make appropriate arrangements for students who will be attending on-site. If the school becomes aware that a student is unexpectedly absent from either learning from home arrangements or school, parents/carers will be notified using the established Unexplained absence notification procedure.

### **Student learning**

I want to reassure all parents and carers that our staff have been planning for this situation and are ready to support all students and families with the necessary adjustments to facilitate learning from home. All students, whether at home or at school, will undertake the same program of learning. Teachers will not teach different programs at home and school. There will no doubt be challenges as we adapt to these new ways of teaching and learning, and our priority will be to make the transition to learning from home as smooth as possible.

The mode of student learning delivery will be tailored to each particular school context and student characteristics. Younger students may have a predominantly paper-based delivery whilst older students may be operating entirely from an online platform.

Students will be taught an amended curriculum from the Australian Curriculum and recommended time allocations for subject areas will be provided by the school. Your school would have already contacted you about how delivery and communication will be managed.

You are not expected to be your child's teacher at home and the school's role is to provide the necessary support and resources for your child to undertake their learning without the need for close supervision. Naturally younger children will require more regular and active supervision. Communication between you and your school is especially important during these times so if you do experience difficulties, do not hesitate to contact your school for assistance. Each school will be maintaining regular contact with students including by phone, email, SMS or digital platforms such as school apps, Seesaw journals, CANVAS, Storybook and Teams.

### **Student well-being**

Regardless of your child's age, they may feel upset or have other strong emotions in response to changes in their routine such as not being at school. Some children react immediately, while others may show signs of difficulty much later. How a child reacts, and the common signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous experiences, and how the child typically copes with stress.

Children react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and carers deal with any situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents and carers can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared. For further information about support for student well-being please contact your school.

### **Teaching and learning resources**

Teaching and learning resources are available to parents and carers and there are many sites that can be freely accessed. For example, the [Learning at home](#) site on the Toowoomba Catholic Schools website provides resources to support your child's learning. The Department of Education [learning@home](#) site has ideas to assist parents and carers with additional activities they can do with their child at home. Their [earlylearning@home](#) site provides age appropriate learning opportunities aligned to the Queensland Kindergarten Learning guidelines.

### **Senior secondary students**

This is a particularly important time for senior secondary students. The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on senior secondary schooling including any changes that might be required to external assessment. The QCAA website has responses to [frequently asked questions](#) for parents/carers and students about the removal of an internal assessment and to clarify that this will not impact the calculation of students' ATARs.

### **Easing the transition**

To assist with the initial transition period, the following advice may be helpful.

- Treat the first week as an orientation type of week. Not everything will go to plan, and it might take a while to work out how to find and use the right resources and understand what's best for you and your child. The 'how to' will come first, and then the learning.
- Remember that your child's teacher will be dividing their attention between multiple students who all work at different paces and need different levels of support. Try to keep children engaged and stimulated without becoming overwhelmed. At home, two to three hours of learning each day as a minimum may suffice in the younger years.
- Routines and consistency can be a source of comfort for parents/carers and children alike, but keep in mind that your routine doesn't have to be the same as a school routine. If you use a timetable at home, make sure it's manageable for everyone and flexible enough that you can adapt it as you learn what works.

- Home-based learning presents an opportunity for students to find out more about themselves as learners and to become more confident in self-directing their learning. Encourage your child to take responsibility for not only learning but also for staying in touch with their teacher, their class and their friends and community.
- If your child is finding a task difficult, make suggestions and answer questions, but try to let them figure things out for themselves as much as possible. Give them opportunities, where appropriate, to take control of their own learning. Contact your child's teacher if needed.

### **Outside Schools Hours Care and Kindergarten services**

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services on school sites will continue to be delivered where there is demand. Please see your school principal for further details. Kindergarten services in Roma and Warwick will continue to operate as normal. Please contact the kindergarten directors for further details.

### **Tuition fees**

As previously advised fee relief is available to families who may be experiencing financial difficulties related to the COVID-19 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. A simplified application form has been developed to assist parents/carers with this process.

A question has been raised around why parents/carers should continue to pay fees while their children are learning from home. Unlike childcare centres, the government has not made non-government schools fee free. Governments fund approximately 80% of the costs of a Catholic school, compared with 100% of the costs of a state school. Fees in Catholic schools cover the other 20% of costs. Our schools still have the full range of costs and our staff, as essential workers, are all still employed. It is important that those who can pay their fees continue to do so, to help ensure the continued strength and viability of our schools.

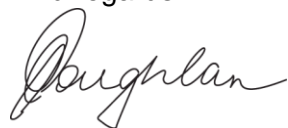
We are committed to providing an education to all our students regardless of their family's financial circumstances. It is important that parents and carers know you will be supported during these difficult times.

### **School communications**

As we start Term 2, your child's teacher, school principal or kindergarten director will continue to communicate with you through the normal channels whenever new information is available. The core messages from Government remain the same, maintain elevated hygiene practices, avoid social contact and unnecessary travel, stay at home, and look out for each other.

I thank you for your understanding and support as we work together in these extraordinary times that are placing unusual demands on everyone. Our teachers and school officers are working hard to ensure that we can continue to provide the best learning opportunities possible for your children. The professionalism of our staff at this time is exemplary, and I know that with your support we can greatly minimise any potential negative impact that this unprecedented period of time could have on the well-being and learning progression of your children.

Kind regards



Dr Patrick Coughlan  
Executive Director: Catholic Schools  
Diocese of Toowoomba