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ST THOMAS AQUINAS
COLLEGE

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Monday, 23 March 2020

Re: Our Plan For This Term

Dear Parents and Staff,

The current COVID-19 crisis affecting the nation is unprecedented. It is having an enormous impact on all areas of our lives and will continue to do so for some time to come.

At the moment we need to stress three significant pieces of information:

- Current advice from the Departments of Health and Education indicates the risks of allowing children to come to school are still acceptable and it is important we continue educating our children. We need to keep in mind that as it stood this morning Victoria's incidence of COVID-19 was 355 out of 6.3 million people. The situation is going to get a lot worse over the coming days, weeks and potentially months. By the start of Term 2, the number of cases will be several times higher than they are now. As an Education Institution we need to strive to work out a way to deliver educational services to your children during this crisis – a crisis that is likely to last many months;
- Increasingly in schools the absentee rate of our students is rising steadily. This is meaning teachers are increasingly having to create multiple learning pathways for our students. We are enormously proud of the amount of work our staff have done over the past few weeks as we have prepared for a worsening of the situation. We are very grateful to our staff for the hard work and dedication they have shown over this time. But we are conscious of the strain we are putting our staff under trying to ensure new health requirements are met, new curriculums are constructed, and missing students are accounted for;
- We are incredibly conscious of the important role we – as a school – play in the lives of our parents. Many parents need us to stay open in order to sustain their livelihoods. If we closed prematurely we could be placing vulnerable carers like grandparents at greater risk. Please see the point on the next page in regards to this.

With these points in mind, we have made the following decisions:

- Tomorrow – Tuesday 24th March 2020 – will be a Staff Professional Development Day. The school will be closed for all students on this day.
- The school is not in a position to run two different curriculums – ie one for those who come to school and one for those who don't. Therefore, we will be moving towards one consolidated approach from Wednesday that will make the job of our teachers a little less complicated.
- From Wednesday 25th March 2020, all students in the College will be working from home.
 - Primary students will be working their way through the kits sent home last week. At this stage, we foresee this happening until the end of Term One (ie until Friday the 3rd April inclusive). Primary teachers will be working from school during this time – UNLESS Health warnings change in that time – and will be striving to give parents regular updates as to what needs to be done over the timeframe.
 - Secondary students (7-10) will be provided with Weekly Planners that outline what is expected of them each week for the rest of this Term. Teachers will communicate with parents *approximately* during the times the students ordinarily have the class. Students have already taken home their books. At this stage, our intention is to have a special school day for our Secondary students next week so they can bring in concerns, ask questions and undertake assessments as required. After all, education must continue and we still must assess our students wherever possible to ensure we know what marks to give students at the end of the Semester. We will let you know when later this week.

- VCE students will be invited back into the school for a special day **on Thursday of this week**. This day will have 7 x one hour periods dedicated to each of the student's classes (minus Religion in the first instance). The relevant protocols – at that time - around social distancing etc will apply on the day. Our plan for next week is to have two of these days. We will continue to monitor health advice across the country and will, of course, cancel any events where health advice indicates such occurrences should not proceed.
- Over the course of the next eight days, the staff will be preparing our Plan for the next period of time beyond our holiday period. At the moment, we believe it prudent to maintain our current two week holiday period starting on Saturday 4th April 2020 and finishing on Sunday 20th April 2020. We are looking closely at our options beyond this point, but 4 weeks will be a long time in this crisis. Please keep in mind, we are not making this decision without relevant data. NSW schools are not due to close for 3 more weeks so we will have very valid information to look at in deciding whether to remain open or closed.
- The reasons school systems are moving towards virtual schooling at the moment is because maintaining two different approaches to teaching and learning (ie some students at school and some at home) is not feasible for teachers. It is duplicating their workload alongside numerous other stresses that exist at this time. This is not sustainable and will affect our staff's welfare over time. As the Prime Minister and several Premiers have pointed out repeatedly, they want schools to keep providing their services.

Some key points

- We want our parents to understand we do not take these decisions lightly. We do not wish to compromise our health or essential service industries at all. If you would like your child/ren to come to school to complete their work from Wednesday of this week until Friday 3rd April, **they are most welcome to come**. We will not be running normal classes for them. We will supervise them so they can undertake the activities set by their teacher. We will have a teacher or teachers present to support them through the activities. **We ask our parents to contact our Office and let us know you want your child to come to school by the afternoon of the day before. You can also let us know it will be for the rest of the week, for example. We will then cater for their needs.**
- We will be telling our staff that they, likewise, may bring their own children to school over the coming days. Staff member's children who go to other schools will be asked to stay with their parents in the space allocated to their parents. Staff member's children who go to our school will be placed in a room with the other students from our school who are attending over the coming days. We will be keeping our staff apart while we work like this.
- We ask parents to please understand that school has to continue in some form over the coming days, weeks and months. We will do what we can to support your children. Please be aware that VCE students will need to attend our special attendance days. VCE assessment can only occur at school. It is important we maintain our program to the best of our ability over the coming days. Please don't think these can be 'caught up'.
- As mentioned in previous letters home, all options are on the table including moving holiday periods into the future. We seriously considered moving the upcoming holiday period but we felt we'd get more value out of running the next week and a bit rather than coming back earlier when the situation has deteriorated further.
- Instrumental Music classes and other co-curricular activities at the College have been postponed indefinitely.
- We will continue to assess the advice we have received over the coming days and weeks. While we understand the anxiety of parents at this time, we do need to ensure we continue educating our children over the coming period.
- If anyone in our Community falls ill with COVID-19, please let us know. We will ensure relevant information is sent to parents as soon as possible.

Please understand that we have a lot of work to do over the coming days to be anything like prepared for what is coming. We will need to change the look of our educational services over the coming weeks to adjust to the crisis. While the risk at the moment is not as high as it will be in the near future, we are striving to prepare for what is to come.

We will continue to provide updates to you all as the situation develops. If any further information comes to light we will endeavour to get more information out to you as soon as possible. Please understand that the period of time we will be affected by this event will be significant.

Thanks – as always - for your continued support. God bless and keep safe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'M Stanton', is located below the text.

Mark Stanton

Deputy Principal