



9 April 2020

Dear Parents and Caregivers

The conditions we are living through are having a major impact on us all. I feel for the many members of our College Community who are experiencing uncertainty in their family financial situation at the moment. While our country is fighting COVID-19, we are all in a situation of short-term pain for long term gain. A few parents have questioned if we will be offering across the board fee reductions. Some schools have done this, under the assumption that schools will be functioning remotely in Term Two, though currently we are still not aware of what the situation will be next term. There is an indication that we should know on Tuesday next week.

We are a Not for Profit organisation and, as such, we are not in a position to make rash decisions with regards to income. Our College has always carefully managed our finances in order to offer the best educational opportunities, learning facilities, and teaching expertise; whilst keeping our tuition fees as low as possible. We take the expenses of our College community seriously. Some schools have released fee reductions and others have added additional charges for online learning. I am not in a position to comment on what other schools can or cannot offer but please remember that not all schools are equal, either in their educational offerings or in the funding they receive. We are all trying to do what is best for our communities and the continued existence of our schools. In order to maintain our accreditation and continue to receive government funding we are obliged to make well researched, sustainable decisions. Of course, our own expenses have not reduced because salaries still need to be paid, grounds and facilities need to be maintained and software licenses paid. Additional expenses are also incurred due to the necessity to deliver all of our learning online, Saint Stephen's College has addressed these upgrades already and will continue to do so as needs dictate.

We need to ensure that when these unprecedented times come to an end, Saint Stephen's is still in a position to function as the quality school that we are. In order to do this, we will need to maintain our staff and this, of course, relies on our income. However; the Board is currently in the process of examining ways in which we can further support our parents and as soon as decisions are made, I will communicate these to you.

Be assured that all decisions that are made are learner-centric; thus, putting your children first. The College Board will be able to come to a decision once we are informed of the government directive early next week with regards to social distancing and other announcements that are being released as days pass by.

Just as the majority of organisations across the world are having to do, Saint Stephen's is grappling with some significant decisions and it is because we are a close-knit community that the Board has endeavoured to consider the entire community in its decisions. As with many organisations, the running costs unfortunately do not change because the physical doors are closed.



Developing character, inspiring hope

More so in a school because retaining teaching staff who remain fully engaged and continue to be in a position to create lessons is critical in our ability to serve the Saint Stephen's community. Our initial feedback has indicated that we are running our online learning at a higher standard than many schools and we are working hard to make this even better. We are blessed with committed staff and while we understand there is currently a burden on both parents and students, particularly in the junior years, to dedicate additional time to educate their children, it has taken and continues to take even more time than usual for these staff members to deliver programs in this environment. We understand it has taken significant changes to your family to facilitate this learning too. We are so blessed that our parents have taken this in their stride and stepped up to the challenge of the 'home classroom'. Your comments and photographs of your learning have been so warming to receive. Please keep them coming in! To be honest, were it my choice, and provided that our teacher's safety were not compromised, I would prefer for all teaching to be face to face, but it isn't and we will adhere to guidance from both State and Federal authorities on this matter.

Today we received a directive from the Minister of Education, Dan Tehan, which indicates that we should provide physical classrooms for children of those parents who require it, at the same time as informing us that we should comply with government directives. We have not been informed by either the State or Federal Government of the expectations of schools for Term Two, and as soon as we are aware of our circumstances - if we will be providing on-campus or off-campus teaching and learning - we can determine how best we can support all our families, but especially those in need.

Whether we are on or off campus next term we remain committed to educating our students to the highest standards possible in whichever forum we are able. If this means Off-campus Learning, new concepts will be taught in Prep to Year 3 through online face-to-face lessons, videos and PowerPoints which the teachers have been working on and will continue to create in line with their Term Two planning. There are further adaptations to the Years 4 to 12 programs as well and these will be expanded upon prior to the start of the school term. This is phase two of our online program. Our teachers have been working hard on this and the learning engagement they have prepared for next term is exceptional to say the least. I have been floored by the expertise of our teaching team under such challenging circumstances.

These are tough times indeed and we recognise how stressful it is for parents, after all many of our teachers are juggling teaching from home and supervising their own children too. We have taken on board feedback from parents and are developing methods of delivery, as stated above, which will ease the burden of at home learning if it is to continue. It is a challenge for our country to do this, but in order for our people to stay safe I understand that it is necessary for this to happen.

I reiterate that if any family requires fee assistance please contact us; we are here to work with you to come up with solutions on how best we can support you. All discussions are conducted in a sensitive and supportive environment and in total confidence.

As I stated above, this is short-term pain for long-term gain. I pray that the term is short and the pain is minimal and we can get back to things at Saint Stephen's College as we knew it. The spirit of the Saint Stephen's Chargers lives within us all and let us remember that we are one team and that we were all 'Born to Love'.

Wishing you and your children a blessed and relaxing Easter.

Yours sincerely



Kim Cohen
Principal