Wednesday 8 April 2020

Dear Families and Friends of Geelong Grammar School,

COVID-20 (Novel Coronavirus) – Update #20 as at 1.00pm on Wednesday 8 April

In the 12 days since the last Update, much thinking and planning have been undertaken by various teams at GGS. The Executive has met daily since the close of Term 1, well supported by our Leadership and Critical Incident Management Teams. This period has also included two extraordinary meetings of Council and various Council Working Party sessions. Our endeavours have been guided by a set of Principles that seek to uphold GGS’s Philosophy and Values, as expressed through our Character and Strategic Imperatives. The health, wellbeing and safety of students and staff remains paramount.

**Guiding Principles for Decision-making in a COVID-19 Context**

Our decision-making has been contemplated deeply, and with due consideration of what is in the best interests of our community, especially given its distinctive characteristics. We have developed key principles which will guide our decision-making as the situation evolves and as we seek to respond to these unprecedented circumstances:

- **Safety considerations to reasonably mitigate risk;**
  - as informed by World Health Organisation (WHO), Federal and State Government Health and Education Department advice, GGS’s Senior Medical Officer, WorkSafe and applicable Occupational Health and Safety legislation, and GGS’s Policies and Procedures.

- **Provision of purposeful and timely learning for students and work for staff;**
  - learning and essential work prioritised as relevant to the contexts of on and off-campus scenario planning.

- **Wise and proactive choices enabling a sustainable future;**
  - focus on considered short-term actions that safeguard positive long-term outcomes for our students, staff and School.

- **Clear, courageous and compassionate community connections;**
  - consistent, decisive, hopeful and appropriately transparent communication.

- **Embed the intent of each Strategic Imperative across all decisions;**
  - the principles of ethicality, collaboration, inclusivity, progression and substantiation applied to inform, filter and reflect thinking.

- **Engage with complex opportunities in a rapidly changing world;**
  - proactive and reasonable responses that model critical thinking, collaboration, and problem posing and solving behaviours.
Term 2 Commencement
The COVID-19 pandemic continues to rapidly evolve and escalate, as do the associated State and Federal Government guidelines and advice. Following yesterday’s Victorian Government announcements and last night’s Council meeting, we are now able to confirm arrangements for Term 2.

Focussing on the safety, health and wellbeing of our students, staff and their families, the School has prioritised a sustainable and effective delivery of our learning programmes for Term 2 with the continued provision of Remote Learning @ GGS, available to all students across our four campuses from Wednesday 15 April. Heads of Campus will be in contact to outline arrangements for Day 1 and will update students regularly regarding expectations.

As Term 2 unfolds, we will continue to work purposefully and proactively towards the resumption of on-campus learning. In undertaking this work, we will also continue to seek the guidance and advice of medical experts and, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), develop plans which identify, manage and mitigate the risks unique to our context and relevant to our students, staff and wider School community. Until then, we are striving to provide the best remote learning opportunities we can.

Remote Learning and Remote Wellbeing
Across the break, and as informed by national and international collegial sharing of experience and practice, we have been evolving our approach to Remote Learning @ GGS. We invite you to view the Principles established to steer our direction, as well as our advice and behavioural expectations. We have similarly developed a Framework for Remote Wellbeing.

Supervision of Remote Learning @ GGS
As determined by the Victorian Government on Tuesday 7 April, “all children who can learn at home must learn from home – with exceptions only in extremely limited circumstances”. Consequently, on campus supervision “will only be available for children whose parents cannot work from home and vulnerable students without access to a suitable learning environment at home”.

- To assist “parents who cannot work from home” and “vulnerable children” during this difficult period, we will provide on campus appropriate adult supervised access to our Remote Learning @ GGS programmes at Bostock House, Corio and Toorak campuses from Thursday 16 April, from 8.15am until 4.00pm, Monday to Friday. Timbertop students who meet the above requirements are welcome to access our Corio and Toorak campuses.

- In this complex environment, and with respect to equity of experience, we are unable to offer dual modes of instruction; hence, the service provides supervision of students participating in the Remote Learning @ GGS initiative.

- This service for “parents who cannot work from home” and “vulnerable children” will be able to operate as long as we have staff who volunteer to fulfill this supervisory role. As per DHHS guidelines and advice, any campus would need to close immediately upon the reported infection of students, staff or parents.

- It is very challenging, as you would acknowledge and understand, for schools to balance the educational and medical needs of communities that have been or may be directly and indirectly
impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) is developing guidelines about how staff in schools can protect themselves, manage social distancing requirements and safely care for and supervise those students who are on campus. You can be assured that we will be following these guidelines and introducing a range of measures in the interests of the safety and wellbeing of our community, including managing student and staff numbers on campus, staggering timetables, closely monitoring student health and providing a nurse on duty.

- To minimise numbers on any campus, for the reasons outlined above, we need to prioritise those students who are 12 years of age or under, as well as vulnerable children and those who have additional needs.

- Arrangements for this service will comprise Update #21, to be published on Tuesday 14 April.

Please complete the Registration Form for Supervision of Remote Learning @ GGS at our Bostock House, Toorak or Corio campuses no later than 8.00am on Tuesday 14 April.

We value and respect our civic duty to assist Australia’s response to COVID-19 and we appreciate the support of our community to help us balance competing needs.

Boarding @ GGS
We continue to take a proactive and highly precautionary approach to Boarding @ GGS, particularly given our unique, predominantly residential context as Australia’s largest coeducational boarding school, with a student composition representing every state and territory, as well as 16 overseas countries.

- Boarding schools have been identified “a high-risk setting” by the Victorian Government (Health alert updated on Sunday 5 April) and as a residential facility “with an elevated risk of community transmission” of COVID-19 by the National Cabinet (published Thursday 26 March).

- The School will not knowingly place students or staff in a position of risk unless such risk may be reasonably mitigated.

- In parallel to preparation for Remote Learning @ GGS, the School continues to model and scenario plan ways of mitigating risk in residential environments once the DHHS can advise it would be appropriate to do so, and as soon as we can access sufficient resources (such as testing kits) to enable safe practice. Such modelling includes, yet is not limited to, a process whereby students voluntarily enter Timbertop and Corio campuses, following 14 days of isolation and testing, for a period that is subject to no leave provisions. Assuming we can practice under such conditions, we are considering a change to Term dates and adjusted holiday periods in 2020. We anticipate having proposals available following our next full Council meeting in early May.

Overseas Students
We are actively working with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and other entities to safeguard the education of our Overseas Students. We remind all our families of the resources and support available for Overseas Students and confirm that our Overseas Student Officer, Emily Scarlett, may be contacted by telephone on (03) 5273 9138 or by email to escarlett@ggs.vic.edu.au to discuss any queries or concerns.
Year 11s and 12s
We remain especially mindful of the impact on the academic pursuits of our Year 11s and 12s at this time. Teams of senior staff continue to plan specifically to meet their needs and to advocate on their behalf with relevant authorities. Whilst their pathway thus far this year was not anticipated, we are striving to make the most of the new opportunities that have arisen and remain fully committed to supporting our learners to access preferred pathways beyond their GGS education.

The Victorian Government announced yesterday changes to the 2020 timetable for VCE and VCAL students: VCE students will still receive an ATAR but the GAT test will move to October or November; examinations will be postponed ‘until at least’ December; and universities will be asked to delay the start of the 2021 university year. We are continuing to research the details underlying each announcement and will provide further information as we are able to do so accurately. This also includes any communications and decisions from the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO).

Fees
Given our sensitivity to the many complexities and uncertainties caused by COVID-19, we have reviewed the best way to support our families with regard to the payment of fees. As a result of this, the billing for Term 3 will be 11 weeks later than our usual practice and will occur in Week 8 of Term 2. Additionally, the payment period will be extended (from 30 to 42 days) with payment due no later than Day 1 of Term 3.

- For as long as residential learning remains not practical in the weeks ahead, we will credit the full value of the associated Term 2 boarding fees to the Term 3 boarding students’ account.

- Additionally, in acknowledgement that we are currently unable to provide the full GGS experience, we will also credit to the Term 3 accounts:
  - a 15% deduction to the tuition element of the fees for Years 5 to 12 for boarding and day students for Term 2; and
  - a 25% deduction to the total fee for Prep to Year 4 students for Term 2.
  - Existing scholarship concessions will be applied pro rata (not cumulatively) to the adjusted fees.
  - We will be writing separately to families of ELC students.

- Furthermore, our sibling discount, effective immediately, has been increased:
  - From 15% to 20% for the third and subsequent children when all are boarders and three or more are enrolled at the same time (discount applies to youngest sibling); and
  - from 10% to 15% for the third and subsequent children when three or more are enrolled together but not all are boarders (discount applies to youngest sibling).

- It is anticipated the deferral of billing will allow time for families to assess their own financial position in light of any employment or economic impact from COVID-19. Once the billing is activated in Week 8 of Term 2, we will offer a specific, means-tested Bursary initiative, inclusive of an independent assessment.

Given that the cost structure for tuition is largely unchanged for GGS, and our income affected adversely due to the inability to provide boarding, it would be appreciated greatly if families who are able to pay 100% of tuition fees continue to do so. We are currently investigating ways to offer a tax-deductible Bursary scheme for those able to pay full fees during the COVID-19 adjustment period. It will be initiatives such as these that sustain the provision of exceptional education at our iconic School.
As we are able to provide more of the GGS experience the fee structures and billing cycles will be reviewed and revised until we return to our normal fee structure and billing cycle.

Next week, further detail will be provided on the dedicated COVID-19 page of the School website for the COVID-19 Fee Schedule.

Communication and Planning
We continue to actively monitor State and Federal Government guidelines and advice. In this rapidly changing context, our planning cycle is intentionally shaped around a two-week timeframe. As such, further information on the COVID-19 page of the website, supported by our associated Updates, will be provided at least every 10 days.

Please be mindful that the webpage is refreshed regularly; we encourage you to check this site frequently. Given the volume and required pace of information processing in the pandemic context, email alerts will not always be sent to notify families of Updates. Year 5 to 12 students are also encouraged to check the website for the latest GGS information in relation to our response to COVID-19.

Similarly, a reminder to please direct all related queries to:
  - RemoteLearning@ggs.vic.edu.au; and
  - C19questions@ggs.vic.edu.au

Holy Week
With Holy Week approaching I’ve been pondering what this period and its ancient symbol of new life means for us in 2020. We are certainly birthing new ways of being and belonging; we are also blessed to know the love and strength of the Geelong Grammar community. In this spirit, we warmly invite you to join our Chaplains as they share their thoughts in a series of short talks and articles over this period.

Holy Week begins with Reverend Gordon sharing his reflections in a brief Palm Sunday Service, followed by previously recorded devotionals on Maundy Thursday (Father Howard) and Good Friday (Rev Gordon), culminating in a short Easter Sunday service. Our Timbertop Chaplain, Sandy Mackinnon, also shares his thoughts in his article on the present crisis. We hope that you find the prayers, articles and videos helpful in these challenging times.

As ever, I wish your family fine health and deep connection.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Cody
Principal