



Thursday 16 January 2020

Dear 2020 Timbertop Parents and Guardians,

I am hopeful that this correspondence finds you safe and well having enjoyed a wonderful festive season with your family. With much of the nation still ablaze or reeling from the effects of devastating bushfires, it feels wrong to express excitement as we welcome a New Year together. As I spent time rejuvenating from my first 7 Terms at GGS in a place free from smoke and immediate risk, I felt guilty for savouring the luxury. As the shock of the circumstances subsided, this unhelpful thinking was reset towards gratitude:

I am grateful to be writing to reassure you that Timbertop has not been impacted by the devastation, there is no immediate threat of fire at the campus and as of today's date, we intend to commence the academic year as planned.

The significant bushfire activity in Victoria has been focussed some distance to the north and east of Timbertop. Whilst there have been smaller fires in the Alpine region, milder weather conditions and rainfall in recent days has assisted with fire suppression across the State and southern New South Wales. As per our usual practices, we continue to monitor weather conditions and work closely with all the relevant authorities, including the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria, to reduce the possibility of fires on site and mitigate exposure to potential fire activity. All our fire procedures are regularly reviewed in consultation with these authorities.

The safety and wellbeing of students and staff is our priority. Our safety record at Timbertop is excellent and we take great care to minimise risk. Robust policies and procedures support our risk management strategies, including where evacuation of the campus is considered the most appropriate response. We have a purpose-built, state-of-the-art safe haven in the centre of our campus, which is designed to house 320 people in the event of an emergency. This award-winning facility has its own oxygen supply, auxiliary power generators, underground water tanks and fire shutters.

We also continually monitor air quality and will manage student activity according to our Air Quality Risk Assessment matrix and Environment Protection Authority (EPA) monitoring and forecasts. We have a supply of P2/N95-rated face masks, which can help filter fine particles in smoke, if required. Thankfully, local conditions at Timbertop are generally better than in valleys and/or at lower altitude.

Our hiking programme begins in Term 1 and builds throughout the year. When our students are in the outdoors, they are surrounded by a comprehensive safety system and guided by skilled and experienced staff. Regular contact is maintained through satellite tracking devices and an extensive network of radio, satellite and mobile communications, whilst staff walk the same route as the students, supported by four-wheel drive vehicles and a Nurse on call. The first four weeks are spent on or close to campus, with all areas covered in Term 1 surveyed by staffed fire towers operated by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). In order to support your child's safety and wellbeing further, please do alert your child's Head of Unit to any relevant history that may heighten anxiety at this time. We are conscious that current events may be a trigger for some individuals in relation to their past experiences.

There is no doubt that the success of Timbertop's transformational learning programme depends upon our high performing team of staff led superbly by our Head of Timbertop, Tom Hall. Please find the accompanying Fact Sheet in relation to fire and the associated risks and contingency planning. We encourage you to view this website and the Fact Sheet regularly; updates will be weekly or more often as required.

Australia's 2019-2020 bushfires have been unprecedented in scale. All of us at Geelong Grammar School extend our sympathies to those families and communities who have been impacted by these catastrophic fires. We also respect and applaud the selfless service and generosity of those on the frontline, particularly the courageous volunteers, as well as members of our community who have contributed to support those in need: thank you one and all.

Unless we advise otherwise, we look forward to welcoming you to Timbertop on January 29 and 30.

Yours sincerely,

**Rebecca Cody**  
Principal

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**Principal's Study**

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