

*From the desk of the Principal*

16 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

The past few days have again been challenging for everyone in education, as the COVID-19 situation continues to change, often quite rapidly. I appreciate your support as this situation has evolved. With the dedication and hard work of our staff we are helping to deliver a consistent and effective response to our students. As you are well aware, I will endeavor to keep you up to date as I receive news. It may seem like information overload at the moment with decisions and advice changing at a moment's notice – because that is exactly what is happening.

### **School Closures have been reviewed**

Earlier today the Chief Health Officer confirmed that *'pre-emptive school closures are not likely to be proportionate or effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at this time'*. Dr Sutton's statement is attached. This morning's update is long and detailed. To make it more digestible, it has been divided into two sections: New Directions and Q&As. The New Directions section provides information that is a result of decisions taken over the weekend by federal and state governments and authorities. The Q&A's provide responses to questions raised over the past 24 hours. There is a lot of information, but it is all focused on the very important role schools need to play in both protecting the health of our students and staff, and in supporting broader efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19.

### **New Directions**

#### ***Camps and excursions***

- All camps scheduled to commence from and including Tuesday March 17 will be postponed and rescheduled or, if there is no other option, cancelled.
- All excursions outside the school for purposes such as visits to cultural institutions, art galleries, theatres, and sporting events or facilities (**other than those local facilities regularly used by the school**) planned to take place from and including Tuesday March 17 are postponed or cancelled.
- School sport is considered an excursion, which means that all inter-school sporting events and competitions from Tuesday March 17 are postponed immediately until further notice.

An exception to this is Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) students attending a prescribed theatre performance for VCE Theatre Studies, where the audience will be less than 500 people. This does not include student and staff travel between campuses of the same school. It also does not include travel by individual staff or small groups of staff to professional development events.

**ENRIGHT CAMPUS**  
154 TWELFTH STREET  
MILDURA VICTORIA 3500

**MERCY CAMPUS**  
CORNER RIVERSIDE AVENUE  
& ELEVENTH STREET  
MILDURA VICTORIA 3500

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### ***International arrivals***

Everyone arriving in Australia from overseas from midnight on Sunday March 15 will be required to self-isolate for 14 days. This obviously includes students and staff who may be returning from overseas excursions or other travel. Importantly, it also includes parents, carers and any other relatives or friends of your children who are returning from overseas travel. As they are required to self-isolate, they must not visit the college to pick up children or for any other reason. In addition, in response to the New Zealand Government's travel restrictions announced over the weekend, staff and students can no longer travel to New Zealand. This is effective from Sunday March 15, 2020.

### ***Swimming lessons***

Swimming lessons that are held at a local swimming pool can continue.

### ***Residential aged-care visits***

Based on advice from the federal government to protect vulnerable Australians, schools should not visit residential aged-care facilities. At the moment, unless we hear otherwise, Meals on Wheels will continue as meals can be delivered to the front door without contact.

### **Q&As**

#### ***School closures***

The college community will be informed directly if there is any prospect that the State Government requires that our school be closed, either as a standalone school closure or as part of a local or area-based closure. Further information on this is attached.

#### ***Our staff are working well to ensure continuous learning programs for our students***

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, it is important to be prepared to ensure continuity of learning for our students. We have a range of measures that the college would put into place if a school closure occurs. Online and offline delivery options are available, and these can be tailored to individual school contexts and to different student age groups. The College's Wellbeing Team will be asked to maintain its programs and support albeit electronically if necessary. The existing electronic referral system will continue to operate if the college was asked to close temporarily.

#### ***VCE continuity***

The VCAA has created a [frequently asked questions](#) page specifically to support schools in delivering the VCE. These [FAQs](#) provide answers to key questions related to program delivery and assessment. To support VCE students through this important time in their life, we will use the flexibility provided by learning systems to ensure students remain engaged.

#### ***Wellbeing Support for Students***

In any major crisis, some students (and staff) will be more acutely affected by the 'unknown' of events yet to unfold; the saturation media coverage and degree of panic associated with COVID-19 has not helped this in Australia. It is important that the college continues to support students whose wellbeing is challenged in these circumstances. Here is a [useful guide](#) to support children and young people.

The College's Wellbeing Team will be asked to maintain its programs and support albeit electronically if necessary. The existing electronic referral system will continue to operate if the college was asked to close temporarily.

#### ***Organised gatherings***

The Australian Government has announced that mass gatherings of more than 500 people are now prohibited. This explicitly does not include schools running normal teaching and learning programs. It does, however, apply to any school event that involves attendance by community members who are not students or staff (where 'staff' includes support staff) and where total attendance will exceed 500.

This includes school assemblies and sporting events. It does not include parent–teacher events, unless we expect there to be more than 500 people including community members present at any one time.

### ***Good hygiene practices***

The above steps are part of our efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. I would therefore request that you pay extra attention to health and hygiene measures. A [poster](#) communicating good practices is available on the Department of Health and Human Services' website.

### ***Open Evening***

With the current COVID-19 situation, the safety of our students, staff and parents is paramount and it is for this reason we have postponed the scheduled Open Evening set for Tuesday March 17. We are hoping to re-schedule this event later in the year. We thank you for your cooperation and understanding and apologise for any inconvenience. Please contact Admissions and Communications Manager, Mrs Tracy Aston on 5018 8034 if you require any further enrolment information.

### ***Critical Incident Policy and Procedures***

If a COVID-19 infection is confirmed in our college community, we would respond according to the College's Critical Incident Policy that details short and medium-term responses to such incidents. At this point in time we have not had any confirmed cases of COVID-19. If you or your child come into contact with COVID-19, please contact me at the college so that we can be proactive in assessing the risk in relation to our college community. If your student becomes ill with cold or flu-like symptoms, please keep them at home until you are able to seek medical advice.

### ***Students/Staff currently having Flu-like Symptoms***

Typically, for this time of year, there are a number of students and staff who may be feeling unwell with mild flu-like symptoms. The college does not have any grounds for insisting that students or staff stay home in case such symptoms may result from a COVID-19 infection; the Health Department has issued [guidelines](#) that we encourage people to read along with the [Australian Government Department of Health news](#). Hospitals and medical practices have tight guidelines with respect to testing for COVID-19 and most people are not being offered these tests. Of course, these guidelines may change as the outbreak grows. The [Self-assessment for risk of coronavirus flowchart](#) provided by DHHS may assist in determining whether individuals need to self-isolate or be tested for coronavirus.

### ***Finally...***

Parents and families are encouraged to pay close attention to the College Website and Skoolbag for further notifications and updates. Please accept my sincere thanks to each and every one of you for the support you offer to our college. These are really challenging times but, in the end, we are all working to ensure the safety and wellbeing of not only your child, but our wider community.

I am enormously grateful for the dedication and caring of everyone in our community and never more so than in this intense and difficult time. Thank you for all the ways in which you look after our community — and each other.

God bless us all, keep us safe, **and well,**

Yours sincerely



**Mrs Marg Blythman**  
Principal