

## **COVID-19 Advice (Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March)**

Dear Parents,

I hope that all our families all received a Skoolbag alert on Sunday evening which provided an update on the latest information related to COVID-19. If you did not, please ensure that you have downloaded the most up-to-date version of the app as it will be our primary means of communication with families at this current time. This letter provides additional information regarding our school's with proactive planning and safety management. As you would imagine, this situation will continue to change and develop and it is my desire to keep our community as informed as possible. Please check the date and time on any communication so that you receive so that you can be assured you have the latest information.

Our actions are guided by the advice from NSW Health and the NSW Department of Education (as well as Federal Health authorities). As a school community it is important that we respond calmly with both our social and professional responsibility in mind. I ask that you continue to be supportive of our staff, our school families and wider community as we work to positively navigate current circumstances.

Currently, there are no reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 within our school community. At this point, on the advice of NSW Health and NSW DoE, our school will continue to be open and operational. However, as a phased social distancing strategy will be introduced within our school spaces, there will be an impact on current operations. In addition to the information provided via Skoolbag on Sunday 15 March, our school is putting a range of systematic, proactive measures in place to mitigate risk to students, staff and our wider school community. I am sharing the draft form of our risk assessment with you via our school website (and via Skoolbag) in an effort to be transparent in our efforts to take a community-focused approach in response to COVID-19 concerns. Please be assured that these are proactive measures, designed to increase student, staff and family confidence that our school is working to minimize all possible risks to students, within the guidelines provided by NSW Health and NSW DoE. This document will remain on our school website and will be revised as needed, as additional potential risks are identified and addressed. Parents will receive a Skoolbag alert informing our community when an amendment to the RA is added and parents can review these changes by visiting our school webpage.

Our overarching aim within the current changing climate is to provide a safe space for our students where they can continue to engage in high quality learning experiences. Our school is, and continues to be, a safe and supportive environment where our staff are aware of and responsive to

student needs. This includes teachers proactively addressing concerns relating to psychological safety in regards to the current social climate. Our teachers will be talking with and discussing facts relating to COVID-19 in a supportive, caring environment with an age-appropriate level of discussion. Our students will most likely have some knowledge of COVID-19 and many will have seen and heard conversations and news footage. It is perfectly normal for children to have questions about events that are covered in the media and, along with parents, children look to their teachers as significant adults in their lives for guidance on how to manage their reactions. Our teachers will support our students by remaining calm, maintaining currency with the facts and through providing reassurance that the situation is being handled appropriately across our school.

There is sometimes a common misunderstanding that talking with children about a topic such as coronavirus may increase their anxiety. However, experts tell us that this is not the case. Over the coming weeks, our teachers will play an important role in listening to students and answering their questions as honestly as possible. Please be assured that our staff will also act sensitively to correct any possible misunderstandings. This will help students feel informed and understand what is happening. We are also aware that older students may be accessing information on social media. It can be helpful to get them to find facts and talk about how misinformation can lead to confusion.

We encourage parents to also ensure that they are up to date with the facts from reliable sources as this will help keep conversations calm, considered, and constructive. Provide facts in words that are appropriate to the age of the students.

While coronavirus is of concern, our staff will continue to remind students that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not COVID-19. We will remain vigilant for any signs of students being ostracised or bullied. Individuals may be particularly vulnerable when returning to school after an absence and our teachers will be mindful and proactive to ensure students re-engage positively following an absence.

## **Implications for our school as of Monday 16 March, 2020:**

### **School assemblies:**

From Monday 16 March 2020, there will be no shared school assemblies. This means no Friday afternoon assemblies and no Monday morning assemblies. Our school will need to explore alternative ways to communicate with students and parents other than through school assemblies. At this stage, awards will be acknowledged in classrooms. This means that our planned Harmony Day assembly for this week (Thursday 19 March) will NOT go ahead.

### **School excursions:**

All school excursions **outside of our local community** will be cancelled until further notice. Local community excursions (eg Turo Park) will go ahead as planned. All overnight excursions and school camps will be cancelled until further notice. Currently, the following events have been postponed:

- Taronga Park excursion (postponed)
- Maitland Bay excursion (postponed)
- Harmony Day (postponed)
- Year 6 Sports Day at KHS (postponed)
- Swimming Scheme (postponed)
- Easter Hat Parade (postponed)
- Anzac Day whole-school event (postponed)

### **Activities and events:**

All major Arts, Sports and Initiative activities and events will temporarily be ceased until further notice. This includes whole school sporting events and inter-school events involving three or more schools. Local inter-school sport and other activities may go ahead, based on a case-by-case process, where organisers are able to ensure that, as best as possible, reasonable precautions are taken. This would be for inter-school activities where no more than two schools meet, with only small students involved from each school (eg a debating competition).

Scripture lessons have been informally postponed at this time. External providers who work only with small groups of students are still able to provide support for students, as long as they meet requirements provided by NSW Health (in good health and having had no contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19).

### **Conferences, seminars and gatherings:**

Schools and corporate staff will not be arranging or attending large conferences or educational seminars. Non-essential activities will be reduced. Schools will need to negotiate what this will look like in our current reality, balancing the need to deliver professional learning with the recommendations around phased social distancing. As a small school community, our in-school professional learning will go ahead as planned.

### **Stay home if sick:**

The health and safety of our students and staff is paramount. If children are unwell with respiratory illness, they should remain at home until symptoms resolve and, where appropriate, seek advice from a medical practitioner (and call ahead first). We urge all members of our school community to clean hands thoroughly for at least 20-seconds with soap and water as well as appropriately cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.

## **Support good hygiene in schools:**

I urge all families to support good hygiene across our school community. Our commitment is to also ensure that our staff are well. Any staff member who indicates signs of being unwell will be sent home.

Within our school community, we will make time to practice good hand hygiene. We will endeavour to:

- Supervise hand sanitation, particularly for our younger students,
- Introduce regular hand washing schedules throughout the school day,
- Teach and reinforce effective cough and sneeze etiquette and encourage students not to touch their face/nose/mouth/eyes.
- Regularly check soap dispensers are full in all bathroom facilities and classrooms.

We are aware that children with chronic medical conditions or immunosuppression may be at increased risk of disease. As this current health situation evolves, we will put plans in place to consider special arrangements for these children.

## **Communicating with you:**

If the school needs to become non-operational our main communication source will be our school app. We will also send home current information via email and paper note. We will post our current COVID-19 risk assessment on the school website and will provide alerts via Skoolbag as this is modified/updated.

## **How You Can Help:**

- Download the Skoolbag app and turn on notifications. This will allow you to receive urgent information from the school, if necessary. The school app is available in Apple and Android versions and can be downloaded for free by searching “Pretty Beach Public School”
- If your child has a cough, sore throat, respiratory illness, fever or heavy cold or flu-like symptoms please keep them home. If your child presents with these symptoms at school we will contact you to pick your child up.
- Reinforce good hygiene habits with your child. Wash your hands (knuckles, between fingers) for 20 seconds, don't share food, avoid touching your face, avoid contact with other students. Reinforce effective cough/sneeze etiquette.
- Send a refillable water bottle with your child.
- If your child has travelled from overseas please keep them home for 14 days after your arrival back in Australia.
- If your child has been in close contact with a person with a confirmed case of COVID 19 please keep them home for 14 days. Close contact means 15mins face to face contact from

within 24 hours of symptoms appearing or more than 2 hours in a confined space with a confirmed case.

- If your child or someone at home is at a higher risk from COVID 19 you can contact the school and explain your situation.
- Talk with your child and reassure them that our school community is taking every possible step to provide a safe learning environment for all.
- Read our current risk assessment planning and provide positive supportive recommendations, should you consider this necessary. Please ring the school office or send feedback via email.
- Remain in close contact with the school and pass on any information as soon as possible that may relate to the safety of your child and others.

I thank each and every member of our school community in advance for your support as we work diligently to navigate the ramifications of this first phase of the Department's social distancing strategy. As a community centre we will make this our single essential priority to put in place practical and reasonable measures to support wider NSW Health containment strategies.

With kind regards and deep gratitude for your ongoing support,

*Karen*

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