

I thank you for your continued support and understanding in these uncertain times. It continues to be a delight to move among our young people, as they go about their learning. I attended an amazing meeting today of the students who are not able to go to Timor Leste, but they remain firmly committed to supporting that community, despite their own disappointment. It is a reflection of their innate goodness, when in uncertain times they continue to look to help their neighbour with the unlikely prospect of reward for themselves.

As we approach the end of term, our staff team have been amazing in their efforts to support the current learning and teaching priorities, while preparing for a possible period of shutdown. The staff have prepared a remote learning plan and I will share the details of this more fully in a communication tomorrow. To support that preparation for our remote learning plan, **the final Friday of Term 1, March 27 will now be a student free day**, enabling the staff to trial the on-line learning and to prepare for a potential extended closure. Therefore, for our students, Thursday 26 March will effectively become the final day for Term 1.

This student free day is a joint decision of the Catholic secondary schools in Ballarat, so it applies to all students and staff of Loreto, St Patricks and Damascus College.

The rapid evolution of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak continues to be a challenge for everyone in education.

I am aware that it has caused concerns for parents, staff and students, particularly as we remain open as a school community. The health and safety of our school community is our highest priority, and the school's decision to stay open is based on advice from the Australian and Victorian Chief Medical Officers.

Currently, the advice of Dr Brett Sutton, Victorian Chief Health Officer, is 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'. Attached is today's latest correspondence from Dr Sutton further outlining the government's reasons for schools remaining open.

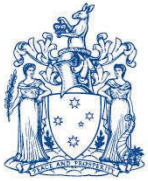
When advice from the Chief Medical Officers changes, we will communicate those changes to our school community, via the usual Damascus platforms including email, SMS and social media. I shall communicate tomorrow with further updates on the Damascus response to the Pandemic and details of our remote learning plan.

Regards

Matthew Byrne  
Principal

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One of the reasons why schools have been kept open by governments across Australia, on the basis of the advice from the health and medical experts, is that people remaining in their routine daily activities, whilst decreasing non-essential social and mass gathering activities, will decrease the opportunities for spread in our community, including those to teachers.

There is evidence that children in households may be infected by adults within the households, which is why all household contacts of confirmed cases are placed into home isolation when a case is confirmed. This will continue throughout the COVID-19 response.

Thus far, approximately 2% of total cases in China have been in children, and there have been no deaths in children under 10 years with very few hospitalisations. There is emerging evidence indicates that the people who are most unwell, and most symptomatic are more infectious than those with very mild or minimal symptoms.

There is not widespread community transmission at this point, and levels of COVID-19 illness are likely to be very low. Children who are at all unwell are advised to be at home, and schools and teachers should exclude any unwell children who present to school. Any children with undetected symptoms are likely to be minimally infectious.

At this point there is no evidence of any school clusters where infections were driven by the student population or student introductions. The evidence is reviewed daily and advice will continue to be tailored to the evidence. Any change in policy advice will consider the risk to teachers as well as the broader community.

**Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton**  
Victorian Chief Health Officer  
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