



15<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Damascus Students and Families,

The State Government's decision to move to a stage 4 lockdown from midnight Friday, to help reduce community movement and prevent the spread of COVID-19, came as a surprise to many, particularly those of us in regional Victoria. As a Christian community, we remember the many people within society who are struggling with the enormity of change that the Global pandemic has thrust upon us all, we also empathise with those who experience loneliness and distress, as we again make these adjustments to our lives and livelihoods. We are fortunate that we have the skills, commitment and resources of our community to adapt and respond to these changes.

As we move into this next stage, and we hope it will only be until Thursday, the College Leadership Team have used four principles to guide our decision making.

These are:

- Maintaining the safety of the entire Damascus community
- Ensuring we remain connected and support one another
- Ensuring continuity of quality learning and teaching
- Being willing to adapt, change and try new things, recognising that we will make mistakes at times.

In line with our principles, tomorrow, we will commence remote learning for all students from Years 7 to Year 12. We have rearranged our timetable tomorrow and have swapped lesson 1 and lesson 4. We have done this because lesson 4 is our Teacher Advisor (TA) Pastoral Lesson. Students will spend their TA time and the first lesson of the day with their Teacher Advisor online. This time will provide an opportunity for teachers to support students in refreshing their understanding of remote learning and hopefully address any technical issues surrounding the use of Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) to make sure they are well placed to continue classes. It will be valuable time to support those new to our College to be equipped for their learning and refamiliarise existing students with expectations and supports.

For Year 7 students and students new to the College at other levels, to access TA tomorrow, the following video clip has been developed by Nikki Hexter.

<https://youtu.be/i9FA7rJyM6c>

I would encourage families and students to watch this clip to outline the steps involved in connecting to an MS Teams classroom/TA. I have also attached a document entitled 'Accessing MS Teams for the first time' to also assist with the connection.

We appreciate that it may be a challenge for Year 7 students and other students new to the College to adapt to this new mode of learning, but we are treating these next two days as an important opportunity to grow student's skills with their devices and software. By working to try and engage remotely, we are hoping students feel connected to their school and that we can bridge onsite learning with remote learning over the coming days.

**DAMASCUS COLLEGE LTD** ACN 609066775

1412 Geelong Road, Mt. Clear 3350 P 03 5337 2222 F 03 5330 2366 E [info@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:info@damascus.vic.edu.au) [www.damascus.vic.edu.au](http://www.damascus.vic.edu.au)



During TA time, we will support students to follow a similar process to attend other classes consistent with how they have attended TA to follow their timetable throughout the day.

Rolls will be marked at the start of each lesson or double lesson to ensure students and teachers are connected; to provide direction for the lesson, and to provide the opportunity for students to ask questions.

Learning Support Officers will be available online to support students with additional needs.

I have also attached an updated Remote Learning Manual for families as we move into this phase. It provides valuable information on contacts, how to deal with problems with your device and the College's approach to learning and teaching. Families are encouraged to print off the remote learning checklist at the end of the document as a visual reminder of how to approach effective remote learning. This document contains important protocols to make sure that online learning is safe and effective. These will be addressed in TA tomorrow.

For our applied learners, our VCAL students, as with all students, the expectation is they will engage with TA and classes as scheduled tomorrow. Wednesday's structured work-place learning (SWL) cannot continue under the current lockdown and students have been asked to contact their employers and arrange to postpone this week of working.

Some students have asked if they can go to their SWL - this can only occur if:

- it complies with Government regulations,
- the employer is able to take the student on, and
- if the student and their family are comfortable with the situation.

Please note students will NOT be penalised for not going to their placement this week, nor will this jeopardise the successful completion of the VCAL certificate.

The Hands on Learning Program students will have TA and regular class tomorrow, and Alan Strange will be online with students on Wednesday, however, due to the lack of practical component the class will only run until lunchtime.

Applied Learning Coordinator, Belinda Dwyer has been notifying students about the details relating to VET classes and whether they will proceed remotely tomorrow. VET students need to monitor their email for direction.

There have been some requests for students to access lockers for equipment that was not taken home on Friday. Please contact the office, and we will arrange an opportunity for equipment to be collected.

Many of our families will again be impacted by job uncertainty and income diminishment. Please be assured that Damascus College will work with you to provide stability for your family and continuity of your children's education. Fee concerns can be directed to [fees@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:fees@damascus.vic.edu.au)

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Damascus College is aware of the precautionary measures being taken by the St Aloysius community in Redan following their Grade 5/6 camp to Melbourne last week. If you are a St Aloysius family who is required to isolate, Damascus College will support your learners for the required period – please contact the College and your students House Leader to discuss the nature of the support needed.

There are several activities planned for later in the week. The Year 7 camp had been scheduled for this week, and the Log Cabin Camp management have been working with Damascus staff members, Brendan and Ann Bawden, to develop a program that will see two Houses go out for a day of activities each day on Thursday and Friday. From our experience last year, when we cancelled things, we were not able to bring them back into the calendar, so our preference is to try and proceed, if possible, with some camp experience this week. There would not be the overnight stay for students. We will communicate directly with Year 7 families regarding this possibility, as it becomes clearer whether schools can return onsite Thursday.

The Head of the Lake Rowing Regatta is scheduled for Friday. The Ballarat Associated Schools (BAS) principals are meeting on Wednesday, by which time we should be able to determine whether the regatta will proceed or be delayed. Information will be sent to rowing families.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. We will make it the focus of our prayer on Wednesday. Tomorrow is Shrove Tuesday, and this may provide families with the opportunity to make pancakes together in the spirit of our tradition.

Our leaders of Faith and Catholic Identity, Tony Haintz introduced our Leadership Team yesterday to St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 13:11) that spoke to these times and the importance of us being there for one another:

*"Brothers and sisters, we wish you happiness! Try to grow perfect, help and encourage one another, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."*

We invite the God of love and peace into our hearts in these challenging times. Please reach out to the College through [info@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:info@damascus.vic.edu.au) if you have questions or concerns.

My next communication will be the College newsletter on Wednesday.

Regards

Matthew Byrne  
Principal

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