



24 April 2020

Dear Saints Family

Covid-19 Update

Our 2020 chosen focus on the theme # Be Stronger One and All has certainly taken on a life of its own during the extraordinary conditions of the Covid-19 epidemic and we are most grateful to all who continue to contribute to our College of welcome and wonder.

The social media campaigns on Facebook and Instagram, which have involved participation across our school community, have helped to lift our spirits and build togetherness – thank you, One and All. Our daily prayer during Eastertide was underpinned by our chair of the Council Church Committee, Rev Peter Witbooi, praying for the nation and reciting [The Saints Prayer](#).

The end of Term One has given staff the opportunity to reflect on the three weeks of online learning and teaching since the nationwide closing of schools on 18 March 2020. These reflections have been further enhanced by feedback from parents, staff and students. This feedback was both formal and informal and has been most valuable in enhancing planning for the the next stage of our academic delivery.

Scenarios

We mentioned in our previous communication dated 9 April 2020 that the College Executive (working with the Council leadership and the Council Finance Committee) had identified three scenarios to shape our framework of planning and response. These are characterised as follows:

Red (full lockdown continuing for up to six months);

Orange (a partial lockdown continuing for up to three months, with a limited return to carefully managed Onsite Learning and the continuation of Online and Distance Learning); and

Green (a phased return to Onsite Learning on our beautiful campus, with precautions around health, safety and social distancing in place and certain features of school life – for example the sports programme and outdoor education camps – being re-invented or re-scheduled).

Partial lockdown and phased return to school from 5 May

Our decision to focus our planning and strategic thinking on the Orange scenario was reinforced through the extension of the national lockdown for a further 14 days after 16 April, the end date of the first lockdown of 21 days. As President Ramaphosa announced last evening, there will be a 'phased re-opening' of the economy after 30 April, influenced by five risk-assessed levels. With regards to schools, we await further details from the Minister of Education, who is scheduled to make an announcement on Monday 27 April – and a further communication from us next week will be informed by this announcement.

The staff, both academic and administrative, are preparing for a continuation of partial lockdown and a phased returning to school over the next few months. Our planning is guided by the following factors.

1. Term 2, as per the St Stithians calendar, begins on 5 May for a combination of both Onsite Learning and Online and Distance Learning.

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2. Onsite learning and teaching will be for specific grades. The details will be communicated by the Heads of School.
3. Onsite presence of teaching staff will depend on the configurations of Onsite Learning; and presence of administrative and operations staff will most likely be rotational, with remote working continuing in the mix.
4. The health and safety of our students, staff and parents is a priority. We will communicate with you regarding the measures we will be putting in place for our onsite programme, this includes:
 - Drop off and pickup of students
 - Screening and testing
 - Sanitisation and cleaning measures
 - Implementation of physical distancing

Task teams: orange and green scenarios

A number of task teams are hard at work planning and implementing

- academic delivery and the wider curriculum
- financial projections, modelling, monitoring and expenditure management
- human resource implications and initiatives
- operational and services requirements for re-opening the campus for onsite presence
- communications, social media and public relations in advancing our community of belonging

We understand that our students and parents have many questions regarding in particular exit years, namely Grade 7 and Grade 12. We are also cognisant that our Junior prep students require the social interaction and play in order to learn and grow. It has been striking how surveys of older students have indicated appreciation of social connecting that is experienced through being at school. Rites of passage, school tours, camps, awards, community service, school productions, Kamoka, subject choices, boarding and assessment all play a critical role in the development of our students. Each of the schools is investigating the best possible ways of continuing to offer these within the constraints we find ourselves in.

While being shaped by national legislation and the Department of Basic Education's regulations, we also operate within the sector of the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA).

The academic planning and requirements of the schools are supported by our Human Resources, Operations, Finance and Advancement Departments.

Finances

We are deeply appreciative of parents who continue to pay their school fees in circumstances of severe economic disruption; and we are keenly aware that many of our parents have been confronted by sudden and unplanned changes in businesses and livelihoods. As previously stated, the College's annual budget relies on fee income to fund 98% of the operating costs in our non-profit entity. We are implementing our approach to the payment of fees articulated in our letter of 9 April, with a focus on the option of deferred payment in a planned manner.

Our overall finance approach is to implement an annual timeframe to savings and income trends, with outcomes to be calculated in a comprehensive and systemic manner as the year proceeds, realising that we are operating in a dynamic and uncertain environment. Certain savings have been quantified during the lockdown period; and identified refunds of discrete activities will be processed on the monthly accounts. Our planning framework extends into critical decisions that will shape the Budget for 2021, with an acute awareness of the impact of economic recession.

Conclusion

We are most grateful to those parents and Council members who are assisting us in our planning as we move from an emergency response to Covid-19 to a more strategic and systemic approach to the impact of the virus on the life of our College. We remain committed to offering a high-quality and innovative learning experience for our students in the challenging circumstances of our time: Inspiring Excellence and Making a World of Difference.

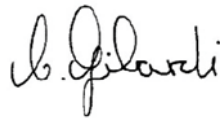
We encourage you to please contact us should you have any queries or comments of if you are able to assist us. Please direct email correspondence to rector@stithian.com.

During the course of next week, we will be able – through our schools – to distribute more specific details relating to the start of Term 2 and the weeks that lie ahead.

Yours sincerely



Dr T A Nuttall
Rector



Mrs C Gilardi
Incoming Rector (with effect from 1 May 2020)