

13 March 2020

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families

**Re: Update on Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) is continuing to be a growing concern for health authorities worldwide and we are seeing examples in a number of countries of its health, social and economic impacts. We are aware of the concerns and distress this may be causing to students and our staff will continue to be mindful of this in their pastoral care approach.

This letter relates to the Diocese of Lismore Catholic schools and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) as we actively plan to manage the implications of this virus for our schools and services. While we hope to be spared the worst aspects of this health emergency, we must nevertheless be prepared for the challenges ahead.

In addition to the advice of the State and Commonwealth Health authorities, we would like to advise the measures we are implementing for Diocese of Lismore schools and OSHC as part of our duty of care and commitment to the safety of all members of our communities. We will update this information as circumstances change in line with the professional advice we receive. Updates will be provided through your school or service through their usual communication methods (SMS, App, newsletter, website, etc).

Diocese of Lismore Catholic Schools Office will post updates to our website <http://www.lism.catholic.edu.au/>

**We ask that you please consider the following advice:**

Health and hygiene over the coming weeks will be heavily promoting hygienic practices at all schools and OSHC services. There will be renewed emphasis on washing hands several times a day, the availability of hand sanitisers (when they can be sourced), and the correct protocols for sneezing and coughing. A range of materials has been supplied to your child's school in support of this measure.

We are assessing protocols for school cleaning practices and will continue to work with school cleaners to prioritise human contact areas – benches, handles, handrails, toilets etc.

We are sharing this information with families to encourage matching behaviour at home. Please talk to your children about the importance of the recommended hygiene practices, especially hand washing, covering the face when sneezing and coughing and so on.

On advice from Department of Health NSW, the wearing of masks at school is not advised as they facilitate the spread of the virus. Further, obtaining 'clearance certificates' to confirm a person does not have the virus from your local GP is unnecessary and not required.

### **Children Displaying Influenza-like Symptoms**

As you would be aware the symptoms of COVID-19 are very similar to the symptoms of influenza. NSW Health advises that students displaying influenza-like symptoms are to be excluded until the symptoms have resolved. In the current climate, it is important that students who are unwell and displaying influenza-like symptoms do not attend school or OSHC. Please keep your child at home if they are unwell. Additionally, if you are contacted to collect an unwell child, a timely response would be appreciated.

### **Children or Family Members being Tested for COVID-19**

Testing for COVID-19 is managed and initiated by health authorities. All students who are being tested will be advised on quarantine requirements by NSW Health. Students who may have been in close contact with symptomatic family members who are undergoing testing, based on NSW Health advice, may be asked to self-isolate until testing is undertaken and test results are known.

### **Children with Pre-existing Medical Conditions**

If your child has a pre-existing medical condition and you are concerned that this may put your child at higher risk of infection, please consult with your General Practitioner and/or Specialist for their professional medical advice on your child's individual circumstances.

### **Overseas Excursions**

In line with the decision of the Department of Education, any overseas school travel i.e. immersions and excursions booked for Term 1 (including holiday period) have been cancelled.

### **Overseas Holiday Travel**

For families of students and staff who have made their own arrangements for private overseas travel in the Term 1 school holidays, please be aware – changing circumstances might mean periods of quarantine in overseas or Australian locations, or self-isolation when returning home. This may impact attendance at school.

Students/staff returning to Australia from overseas are not required to self-isolate unless they are returning from the countries listed on the Smart Traveller/DFAT website. As at 12 March 2020 this only applies to mainland China, Iran, Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Italy. However, the government may update this list at any time.

You can keep up to date at <https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>.

### **Impact on School and OSHC Services**

You will have seen media reports of schools being closed in areas where there have been COVID-19 outbreaks. Whether schools close will be determined by direction from NSW Health, other relevant state authorities or if the school is unable to be adequately staffed to meet its duty of care requirements. If schools are required to close at short notice, this will be communicated to parents through the school's normal communication methods (SMS, App, newsletter, website, etc). Please ensure your contact details provided to the school are up to date.

Parents of children who attend OSHC services should also be aware that if staffing numbers are significantly impacted by COVID-19, it is possible that this service may not be offered for a period of time. As much notice as is possible regarding any OSHC service closures will be communicated to families through the OSHC normal communication methods should this situation arise.

### **Ongoing Communication**

We have a variety of means of communicating with families and we will continue to use these channels to communicate with our school families as the coronavirus situation unfolds.

Please look out for further communication from the Catholic Schools Office and accept that this communication is an important part of keeping our school communities healthy and safe. We will update information provided as required.

If you have any concerns, please discuss them with your child's teacher or Principal or OSHC service leader.

Please regularly check the following links to the most current and reputable information about the coronavirus and related topics:

[Diocese of Lismore Catholic School Office](#)

[NSW Department of Health](#)

[Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health alert](#)

[Australian Government Department of Health Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources](#)

[Smart Traveller](#)

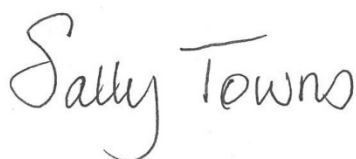
[World Health Organisation](#) (including some useful training videos)

[Hand-wash Hygiene Information](#)

[Infection-control Fact Sheet](#)

Thank you for your understanding and support.

Yours sincerely,



Sally Towns  
*Director of Catholic Schools*