



COVID-19 UPDATE 24 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

The COVID-19 crisis continues to impact schools, families and the broader community.

I know that many John Forrest families are hurting as a result of job losses and financial instability; as well as being concerned for the safety and health of your loved ones. On behalf of the staff at the College, our heartfelt thoughts are with you.

This communication seeks to answer many of the questions that have been forwarded to the College by parents, carers and students. I apologise in advance for the length of the communication.

The following questions are answered (as best as possible) in this communication:

- Who is advising schools?
- Are schools staying open?
- Should my child attend school?
- If I keep my child at home, do I need to tell anyone?
- Will work be provided for my child?
- What will happen about assessments?
- How will this affect the WACE for Year 11 and 12 students?
- What are you doing to keep my child safe at school?
- What activities, meetings or events are being cancelled?
- What activities are being continued?
- What happened with the College Ball?
- How else can I support my child?
- What if I have more questions?

Who is advising schools?

The Department of Education is working closely with the Department of Health, particularly Dr Andrew Robertson, the WA Chief Health Officer. We will continue to follow their expert advice.

Are schools staying open?

As agreed by National Cabinet, Western Australian schools will remain open until the end of the current school term. The official medical advice is clear - closing schools is not currently recommended for Australia.

Should my child attend school?

The WA Premier, the Hon Mark McGowan MLA made this statement yesterday, *“If parents decide to not send their kids to school, they will not face any of the usual consequences. The McGowan Government understands that parents have the right to make their own choice in this regard.”*

Please keep your child home from school if they are unwell. If they have a fever, runny nose, sore throat and/or cough they must stay home and follow medical advice. If a student comes to school with a cold, we will contact families to collect them and take them home.

If I keep my child at home, do I need to tell anyone?

Parents who wish to keep their child at home **must** notify the College that you are doing so. You can do this by:

- Emailing the College at this address: JohnForrest.SC.Absentees@education.wa.edu.au
- Sending a text message to 0407199 574
- Completing the absentee online form on the College website.

Will work be provided for my child?

Teachers at the College must maintain their focus on classroom learning programs. Due to the considerable workload associated with trying to deliver learning programs online and face-to-face, I regret to advise that staff will not provide additional or specific programs or materials for students not attending school.

As I indicated in my last letter to you, staff are working to increase the curriculum documents available (for all year levels) through SEQTA.

Please do not contact individual teachers to request work for your child. Teaching in a classroom is a full time job (regardless of how many students are present). Asking staff to provide a learning program for a child at home is not as simple as it sounds. Why? Staff don't just provide worksheets and textbooks to students. They teach – implementing a range of strategies and activities to engage students; develop their learning and understanding and assessing the same.

The Department of Education has established a website “Learning at home”. It is a work in progress, although it is live. Currently, the website has resources for K – 10; although additional resources are being added daily. The website indicates that materials will be accessible for staff through the Connect software platform. We are currently investigating how these materials can be made available through SEQTA. The Learning at home website is:

<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/learning-at-home>

The College will also send parents some broad guidance around school routines (in the home environment), screen time and the like.

Staff have also been working on various online delivery models (and continue to do so); however these will not be implemented unless schools are completely closed.

What will happen about assessments?

Whilst school remains open, the following will apply:

Assessments will not be provided for students who do not attend school. Why? The vast majority of assessments are directly supervised by staff (these are called “invigilated tasks”) – which is required to enable schools to validate the accuracy of results. In addition to this, some curriculum courses are so specific that the same assessment task is required in consecutive years. It is essential that these tasks not become “public” to ensure validity of results in future years.

Students will not be disadvantaged for missing assessments, provided that a *legitimate reason* for absence has been provided by parents/carers before the assessment task occurs. A *legitimate reason* for absence includes parents choosing to withdraw their child from school due to COVID-19; as long as parents have notified the College of this before the assessment takes place.

If schools close:

The College is investigating the use of non-invigilated tasks for Senior School General Courses, some VET courses and all lower school courses. Further information will be provided as necessary.

How will this affect the WACE for Year 11 and 12 students?

On 17 March 2020, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) wrote to all school principals and advised the following:

If the assessment of individual students or groups of students is affected by a catastrophic event (e.g. a pandemic causes a number of staff and/or students to be absent from school for an extended period) then procedures described in the school’s senior secondary assessment policy should be applied.

If the school policy does not describe such a circumstance, then “Commonly accepted practice” (outlined below) should apply:

Commonly accepted practice

- *Based on the completed assessment tasks, the teacher or HOLA makes a professional judgement of the performance of the students affected by the event.*
- *Where additional assessment tasks are required to enable the professional judgement to be made, the assessment outline is modified for the students affected by the event.*
- *The school informs the students affected by the event, and their parents/guardians/carers, of the changes to how their achievement will be determined, including any additional assessment tasks.*

Given the likely length of time that COVID-19 will be impacting students, SCSA are developing protocols that may apply in the longer term. **SCSA are currently considering a range of options to address assessment requirements for ATAR students.** Further advice will be provided when it is available.

What are you doing to keep my child safe at school?

In addition to the measures I outlined in my previous correspondence (details below), I want to reiterate some messages:

All toilet blocks contain soap. There are also signs in all toilet blocks directing students to inform the Front Office staff if the soap has run out (as far as I am aware, no dispensers have run out during the school day).

Whilst they will not be immediately available, the College has also contracted workers to install additional hand basins and soap dispensers close to the canteen.

Students should bring their own drink bottles to school and use the water fountains to refill water bottles, rather than drink from them directly.

Social distancing is extremely challenging within a school environment. That said, we will encourage social distancing wherever possible. Some examples of the measures introduced to encourage social distancing include:

- All non-ATAR physical education classes will now be conducted outdoors.
- Students will not be required to change into (or out of) PE clothing in the change rooms. As such, students are able to wear white or navy school shirts throughout the school day.
- Students will be seated as far apart as possible within classes. I acknowledge that the ability to do this greatly depends on the size of the class and the number of students in attendance.

What activities, meetings or events are being cancelled?

In addition to the cancelled activities I previously outlined, I advise that the following are cancelled:

- Engineering Club
- Anime Club
- Writing Club
- Ensemble practices (choir and band) before and after school
- Table tennis
- Breakfast Club
- Chess Club

Parent and/or interagency meetings

- All planned face-to-face meetings between College staff and parents/carers are cancelled.

What activities are being continued?

The following activities will continue:

- Instrumental music lessons
- Year 5 and 6 music lessons

What happened with the College Ball?

As many of you would be aware, the College Ball was cancelled by the venue scheduled to host the event. I have assured Year 12 students that the College will do everything possible to reschedule the Ball for later in the year – however no decision can be made for quite some time.

How else can I support my child?

Some thoughts that may be of assistance:

- Children and teenagers react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. Dealing with the COVID-19 situation calmly and confidently will provide the best support for your children. Keep in mind that not all children respond to stress in the same way.
- Take time to talk with your child about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer their questions by sharing facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child can understand.
- Encourage your child to practise good self-care – get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, and continue to exercise.
- Encourage your child to manage the things they can control – washing hands, coughing into elbow and practicing social distancing.

What if I have more questions?

If you have further questions, please email Angela Trees, Deputy Principal at Angela.Trees@education.wa.edu.au or me at Melissa.Gillett@education.wa.edu.au Please note that, given the volume of emails we are receiving, it may take some time to respond.

Thank you for your ongoing support and cooperation during what we understand is a stressful time for some with many unknowns. All of the staff at the College are committed to continuing to educate your children; and to minimising any disruption to the learning program. We also recognise that, by remaining open, we are enabling parents to continue working in critical areas – such as health, aged-care, policing, teaching, transportation and the like. We thank you for your service to the community.

Yours sincerely

MELISSA GILLETT
PRINCIPAL

24 March 2020