

8 Park Drive,  
Port Elizabeth, 6001

E-mail: [prep@stgeorges.co.za](mailto:prep@stgeorges.co.za)  
Tel: +27(0) 41 585 4825  
Fax: +27(0) 41 585 1638

Campus Head Mr Alex Hall  
(B Prim Ed, UPE)  
[www.stgeorges.co.za](http://www.stgeorges.co.za)



ST GEORGE'S  
PREPARATORY

3 June 2020

### Coronavirus COVID-19 Letter 9: School Re-opening

Dear Parents



It truly has been an interesting past ten days as the country has been grappling with the re-opening of schools at a national level. I have been working on this correspondence for the past week and have had to draft and redraft this letter several times as the situation changed. Last week I spent a lot of time in Zoom meetings with various stakeholders and reading a vast amount of information on the regulations with regards to the re-opening of schools.

There has been an enormous amount of contradiction and ambiguity, particularly for Independent Schools, on what exactly our rights and responsibilities are at this time, hence the delay in this email. To give you some perspective, on Thursday we were informed by the Department of Basic Education that we would be able to open our ECD centres (Early Childhood Development Centres - Grade 00 and Grade 000), on Friday we were informed that they are not part of the Department of Basic Education but fall under the Department of Social Development and as such no dates have been given. On Saturday we received a Government Gazette Vol. 659 stipulating they may open on 6 July. Earlier in the week, we were informed that smaller Independent Schools may open any grades as they see fit as long as the required Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) are adhered to. And then over the weekend we were informed that only Grade 7 and 12's may return on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. As many of you now know, the government schools were informed by a media release on Sunday evening that no pupils may come to school on Monday, only teachers, and that pupils could then return on 8 June.

As I type this letter, I have just received an email via ISASA, from Minister Angie Motshekga, informing Independent Schools that they may open any grades providing they do not exceed 50% capacity and that they have informed the Department of Basic Education and are fully compliant with regards to the SOP's given to Independent Schools that we only received late Thursday afternoon last week. This has been gazetted but Grade 1 and Grade 2 as well as ECD were omitted so an amended Gazette was circulated on Monday evening. Now that we have received confirmation from the Minister, I am in a better position to inform all our parents as to what we will be implementing as of 6 July and the start of our Third Term. Of course all of this will be subject to change as South Africa fights in the battle against COVID-19 as well as the legislation of the state at the time.

We intend to open School on Monday the 6<sup>th</sup> of July to Grade 7, Grade 1 and Grade R pupils initially under the very strictest Health and Safety protocols that will be required. We will be sending out a survey



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to all the parents of Grade R, 1 and 7 pupils to assist us and to investigate the possibility of opening a stream for their siblings in other grades to be accommodated on campus at the same time. On the completion of the survey, we will have a far clearer idea of what our capacity will be and perhaps an adjusted approach could then be considered. We also will be in a far more informed position to determine what our second phase of returning pupils will look like. As mentioned before, as we live in very fluid times, it is not always practical to commit to decisions a month in advance as much can and does change. There are many concerns about returning to school, so we have decided that St George's Preparatory will offer both online and physical teaching for all grades as we reintroduce pupils back to school as we will have some pupils with comorbidities or other valid reasons for not returning. Families who choose not to send their children physically back to school will be able to receive the continued online support.

We have chosen to allow the Grade R, Grade 1 and Grade 7 pupils to return first for a number of reasons:

- Grade R and Grade 1 pupils are of an age where it is very difficult to self-direct their own learning without the very close and constant supervision of an adult.
- Grade R is an important year, particularly the second semester, in the preparation for school readiness.
- Grade 1 is very much a foundational year where children are learning the basics of reading and writing.
- Grade 7 pupils are in their final year of Prep and as early teens have already missed out on much that is special about their final year. They are also needing to prepare for high school and the social needs of a 12/13 year old is very much based on the affirmation and acceptance they receive from their peers and a lot of their self-confidence is built through these relationships.
- Medical and scientific evidence points towards higher levels of safety for younger children and international trends have shown us that schools are receiving younger children back into schools before the older children. A very good article written by Dr Nic Spaul ([click here](#)) provides some insight.
- Practically as we open, it also makes sense to open one grade per phase initially to ensure the very best health and safety precautions and SOP's may be put in place.

Once we have received feedback from the survey sent to the three returning grades, we will be able to share more details about our reopening process. We will be circulating our Standard Operating Procedure and further information regarding our reopening in due course.

Thank you to all of you, our parents, who have shown tremendous support of St George's Preparatory and who have gone the extra mile in helping their children with online learning. We are also very appreciative of our committed teaching staff who have grappled with change and who and have continued to adapt to the daily challenges faced. We also wish to thank all our boys and girls who have been amazing during this time and remained focussed and engaged.

Yours sincerely



**Alex Hall:** Headmaster



**Peter Pitsiladi:** Chairman of the Governing Council