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ST GEORGE'S
PREPARATORY

13 May 2020

Coronavirus COVID-19 Letter 8: School Re-opening

Dear Parents



We have no doubt that many of you are wanting to know when St George's will re-open and what it will look like when we do open. It was very important to us during this decision making process to best gauge the 'climate' of our parent body in order to assist us with this decision. With regards to this, we would like to thank all our families for completing the recent survey. Whilst with all surveys you will always have a wide differentiation in opinion, on the whole the numbers really did speak for themselves. On average across all three phases of our school, 82% of the responses requested that the school continues with distant and online learning at home for the remainder of Term 2, and consider returning in July of Term 3. When asked what month parents would be happy to send their children back to school, there were noticeable differences per phase with the Senior Prep generally wanting an earlier return than the Pre and Junior Prep. On average across all three phases, this is what was reflected - June 22%, July 27%, August 20% and September 31%.

We are also very mindful of the decisions being made at Government level and need to comply with certain school regulations that are beyond our control. To date, all information is presently suggesting the opening of Government schools is to take place for Grade 7 and 12 pupils on 1 June 2020. Already this date is questionable as the dates provided by the Department of Basic Education have already been changed by local Education Departments in 7 of the 9 provinces and to date no staff may enter school property and have been instructed to remain at home until further notice. As an Independent School, we have been advised to follow the same protocols as to when staff may return to school. The proposed date for the June 1 opening will only go to council on 18 May and we will then be in a better position to understand exactly what schools' status under Level 4 (or possibly Level 3), will look like.

It really would make little sense for us to attempt open St George's on 1 June for Grade 7 pupils when the actual likelihood for our province could realistically be two weeks later which would take us to our mid-year break. We are also of the opinion that the pupils have adapted to School at Home and to then return to school and then go on holiday would be counter-productive. So on this basis, the Senior Management Team of the School recommended to our COVID-19 Response Team (which is made up of both school management and Board of Trustee members) that we **continue with School at Home for the remainder of Term 2 and re-open St George's Prep to certain Grades on Monday the 6th of July 2020**. This recommendation has since been ratified by the Board. We are still in the process of deciding which Grades will return and when and we will notify you as soon as possible.

Thankfully, we are a small enough school that we will be able to structure this return to school in such a manner in a model that best suits all our needs. We are confident that **initially a dual model of distant/online learning as well as the pupils physically being at school** would probably best suit the requirements of our families. We would obviously adjust our approach until such a point that we have all our boys and girls safely back in class, whenever that may be. We understand the challenges of parents returning to work, families with siblings at other schools, siblings within different Grades at St George's, families with pupils or family members at high risk etc and we will attempt to develop a safe re-introduction to school life that will cause the least disruption for all our families during this period.

To date we have lost 9 school days as we closed 6 days premature of the end of Term 1 and we lost an additional 3 days at the start of Term 2. Of these 9 days, 2 would have been non-academic days (St George's Day and Triathlon Day). We have already worked back 2 days on both Worker's Day and Freedom Day and we will be opening 2 days early for Term 3. This leaves us with 3 days lost and as we will not be continuing with traditional team sports for the foreseeable future, we will be in a position where there will be far fewer interruptions to our academic day for tours, derby days etc. With this in mind, we have decided to stick with our St George's Calendar for now, other than starting 2 days earlier next term, subject to any further changes to our situation!

As a school, we are acutely aware of the economic impact COVID-19 has had on the economy. Whilst the full impact is impossible to predict at present, we are concerned that the payment of school fees could become more problematic for some families. St George's Prep has many fixed costs that cannot be adjusted during our closure and with the loss of revenue from other income streams during this time and the fact that we are a non-profit organisation, it would not be financially prudent at this stage to offer a general discount on fees. We are aware of the fact that the financial impact is already having an immediate effect on some of our families and we encourage you to make contact with our Finance Department at accounts@stgeorges.co.za to inform us, so that we may positively engage. As everyone's situation is different we will continue to assist families on an individual needs basis to ensure all our pupils' education may continue as seamlessly as possible.

Again, we thank you all for your incredible support and for all the sacrifices you have had to make. It has been a real treat to bump into some of our families running, walking and cycling recently in the streets of Walmer and to experience a sense of neighbourliness that has almost become forgotten. I even saw my wonderful PA, Gill, in person yesterday on the corner of 4th and Fordyce on our morning walk!

This message from an anonymous Headmaster, was shared with me today from an ex-parent of St George's whose CEO shared it with him, and I thought it wise to share with you to end this letter:

COVID-19 Kids – what if?

“When people say kids are going to be ‘behind’ I say, behind what?? Not each other- they're all in the same boat. Only ‘behind’ the age expectations of a curriculum that currently has limited context due to these extraordinary circumstances. In front on so many other more important fronts I say.

What if instead of “behind” this group of kids is advanced because of this. What if they have more empathy, they enjoy family connection, they can be more creative and entertain themselves, they love to read, they love to express themselves in writing.

What if they enjoy the simple things, like their own backyard and sitting near a window in the quiet? What if they notice the birds and the dates the different flowers emerge, and the calming renewal of a gentle rain shower?

What if this generation is the one to learn to cook, organize their space, do their laundry, and keep a well-run home? What if they learn to stretch a dollar and to live with less? What if they learn to plan shopping trips and meals at home? What if they learn the value of eating together as a family and finding the good to share in the small delights of the everyday?

What if they are the ones to place great value on our teachers and educational professionals, librarians, public servants and the previously invisible essential support workers like truck drivers, grocers, cashiers, custodians, logistics, and health care workers and their supporting staff, just to name a few of the millions taking care of us right now while we are sheltered in place?

What if among these children, a great leader emerges who had the benefit of a slower pace and a simpler life, who has a fine sense of empathy and care and concern for fellow humans.

What if he or she truly learns what really matters in all this...”

Stay safe and God bless!



Alex Hall
Headmaster



Peter Pitsiladi
Chairman of the Governing Council