

19 March 2020

Good afternoon everyone

I know you will be aware of the increase in cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand and overseas over the last couple of days. There are now 28 confirmed cases, and there were six new ones announced in Auckland yesterday and today. All of these cases are connected directly to people arriving from overseas, and **there is currently still no evidence of community transmission in New Zealand**. There are now tests being done on a wide range of people who have no connection with overseas travel and are showing flu-like symptoms. There have been no positive results from these people.

You will also have heard that a small number of schools have staff members who are close contacts of people who have been confirmed as having COVID-19, or who have been confirmed to have the illness. You may also be aware that Pinehurst has a small number of staff who are self-isolating and a number of children who are self-isolating. All of the staff and all of the children are self-isolating as a precaution because they have been in contact with people who have been overseas in the last two weeks.

Nobody connected with our school is a close contact with someone who has been confirmed as having COVID-19.

But I do need to add: if a student is a close contact with anyone who has been overseas in the last two weeks, he or she must stay away from school for 14 days since the person who was overseas arrived in New Zealand. Please inform me immediately if this is the case, as we are keeping a record to ensure that we can support students who are not able to be at school.

Today's news for you:

1. I have changed what we are doing for students who are self-isolating. Teachers will check in daily with the student - usually by email - to make sure that they have work to do. Students are encouraged to write directly to teachers with questions: teachers will respond to all emails and to messages through Seesaw or Schoolbox. **This is still not a full online programme**, and it is far better that students are at school, but it will offer a little more support than we currently have in place. Parents are encouraged to ask questions and to talk to teachers, who will set work and assess it.

2. We are in the final stages of arranging for an e-book platform to be available for all students. There will be a Primary section and a College section, and students will be able to read a selection of 1200 books on phones, tablets and computers. We hope to have this in place by next week, and this will be a permanent part of the school's services.

3. Should we close down, the school will also continue to enable access to physical books from our Library. This will be an “email and collect” service, and we will be disinfecting books when they are returned. If and when we close, Mrs Coombridge, our Librarian, will write home with detailed instructions for you to use this service.

4. We will also make arrangements, if we close, for students or parents to collect textbooks and physical resources. This will also be an “email and collect” service.

5. We are continuing to increase our health precautions in school. Today, we have made our water fountains “bottle only”, and are cleaning them regularly during the day. We cancelled our House Barbecue, and we changed a Year 9 meeting by splitting it in two so that there were fewer than 50 people in one place.

6. We have been asked by a couple of parents about refunds for sports that are not running at the moment. We would ask you to be patient about this: we simply don’t know right now when sports will resume, so it is difficult for us to issue refunds immediately. We will, though, refund a portion or all of sports registrations later in the years where appropriate. If this causes financial hardship, please contact Jon Horne, our Business Manager.

Finally, I have been asked a few times over the last two days when the school might decide to close. My understanding is that the Ministry of Health will move very quickly as soon as there is any sign of community transmission, and certainly before the community transmission is widespread. If we are instructed to close by the Ministry, we will of course close. We may also decide to close if there is a case of COVID-19 connected with the school community. We will also decide to close if we feel there is an increased risk to our children and their families, whether or not the Ministry tells schools to close.

At the moment, because there is no community transmission, we feel school is safe, and that it is better for students’ wellbeing to be at school than at home.

As ever, please feel free to contact me with questions - I will always respond within 24 hours.

Kind regards
Alex

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Our place