

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

Good afternoon everyone

I hope you've managed to enjoy the weekend so far, and are managing to observe physical distancing and the other health precautions the Government is asking us to take.

I'm writing this afternoon to talk about Pinehurst School's ongoing response to the COVID-19 outbreak in New Zealand. You will all be aware of the announcement from the Prime Minister yesterday; and I am sure you will also be aware that there are now 66 confirmed cases. The number of cases is continuing to climb in line with expectations, and the Government is increasing public health measures to manage the outbreak.

In particular, this now means that:

- We are at 'Alert Level 2', which means that there is a risk of some community transmission, though this is not yet confirmed, and there is no evidence that it is widespread
- People over 70 and those who are vulnerable because of existing health conditions are now asked to stay at home. If you are a carer for someone who fits into either of these categories, you are now also being asked to observe safe health practices – handwashing, cleaning surfaces, physical distancing – to protect them.
- People are being asked to avoid all non-essential travel
- People are being asked to work from home if they can
- People are being asked to practise physical distancing as much as possible
- Schools are to stay open

I want to highlight that there is no evidence yet of widespread community transmission. This is important. There are now more than 1000 tests being processed a day now, which is a huge increase, and I think we can be confident, within reason, that testing this number of people would reveal more widespread infection.

This is a worrying time for everyone, and I think we all need to acknowledge this when we talk to each other. Many of us care for people who are particularly vulnerable to the virus, and we all have a responsibility to look after these people. This means that we all need to listen to what the Prime Minister has said, and to do exactly as she has asked. If you are not already practising physical distancing and taking the other precautions: please do so now. It is about our whole community supporting each other.

### **What does this mean for Pinehurst?**

We have been transparent with our parents and staff about COVID-19 since it first emerged in January, and we are going to continue to be transparent with you. The announcement on Saturday is difficult for us. We are committed to supporting the Government's strategy for the whole country, and we understand completely the need to keep schools open as long as possible.

At the same time, the request for people over 70 and immunocompromised people to stay at home presents ethical and practical problems for us. We have a duty to our whole community to keep them safe: staff, students and parents. I am not prepared to ask a member of staff who is in either group to come to school: the Prime Minister has asked them to stay at home, and we will support them to do so. We think this is simply the right thing to do. We also have a number of students who are immunocompromised, and I think we have a responsibility to support them to work from home.

We also have staff and students who live with people who are over 70 or who are immunocompromised. Some families have already made arrangements to protect vulnerable members of their family by practising physical distancing and increasing health precautions. Others will start to do so now. But there are others who are not able to do so, and we need to support them too.

Finally: I know that many of our parents are in a difficult situation while the school remains open. You want to support your children's education in every way possible – that's why you send your children to our school – but you also want to keep them and your family safe. I am deeply thankful to everyone who was written or spoken to me over the past two weeks about this: in particular, I am grateful for the understanding that has been shown to the School. You express your views, and you show that you understand that each decision is a difficult one.

So this is what we are going to do:

1. Pinehurst School will be open tomorrow to students whose parents wish to send them to school, and we will run a full programme in classes as far as possible. If a teacher is not available, we will provide a relief teacher.
2. **We will review this decision daily and may close down any part of the school with just 24 hours notice if the situation demands it.** Our approach will be to close Primary first, then Years 7-10. We will try to keep Year 11, 12 and 13 students in school as long as possible.
3. If we close part of the school, we will use the extra space we have to employ additional physical distancing measures.
4. If we close any part of the school, we will move immediately to a full-time online learning environment for all students in that part of the school.
5. We will close part or all of the school if:
  - a. we are not able to provide sufficient teaching (staff absences are too high)
  - b. there are more students at home than at school in any area of the school
  - c. there is local community transmission
  - d. there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 connected with the school (a student or any close contact of a student)

There may be other reasons to close the school as well.

6. If you do not wish to send your child to school, we will provide as full a programme as possible for you to follow at home. This may not immediately involve connecting remotely to classes through Teams, but we will try to do this where we can.
7. We will continue to test our online systems, and to use them in classes and at home.
8. **Pinehurst School will close early for the Easter holidays on Friday April 3<sup>rd</sup>.**
9. After-school care is cancelled until the end of Term 1 from Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March. This is to give you time to make alternative arrangements. If you are unable to do so, please contact Jon Horne, who will be able to arrange for your child to be supervised.
10. We will employ social distancing measures wherever we can. We know this will be very difficult in Primary, so we will concentrate on increased hygiene measures especially in these areas.

11. All trips and activities outside school before the end of Term 1 are cancelled. This includes the Year 8 Camp and the Duke of Edinburgh tramp.

I expect many of you will have questions about the decisions we have made, and will be uncertain about the best thing to do for your child. We will respect any decision you make about attendance at school, and will support your child at home if he or she is self-isolating. I will repeat that this will not be a complete online environment while the School is still physically open, but there will still be plenty of work to do.

If you wish your child to stay at home to self-isolate, you should email me directly at [alex.reed@pinehurst.school.nz](mailto:alex.reed@pinehurst.school.nz). I apologise if you do not receive a reply as quickly as usual. These are circumstances we never expected to face, and I want to assure you, above all, that our priority is the health and wellbeing of all of our students, our staff, and all of the families in our Pinehurst community.

Please feel free to write to me if you have questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Alex Reed

**Alex Reed**

*Executive Principal  
Pinehurst School*

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