



From the Headmaster
Dr D P Nockles

23 March 2020

Dear Parent

My apologies for this lengthy letter. We are truly in uncharted waters at present with the impacts of COVID-19 being so widespread. Macarthur is committed to being a good corporate community citizen by acknowledging both the Federal and NSW Government's expectations around schools and therefore confirm that Macarthur will remain open and operational, albeit in a revised fashion, until advice changes. The School Council and I are also very cognisant of the many families who are concerned with sending their children to school given the current state of affairs. It should be noted that the current health advice is that school is the safest place for school age children to be at this time, however, the Premier is recommending children stay at home. This is extremely difficult for families to navigate and therefore, for the School to navigate.

As a community we have many families where the health of the student or another member of the family is so compromised that the risk of a COVID-19 infection will be life threatening resulting in understandable self-isolation. We also have other families that for a range of reasons wish to self-isolate their children and that is not something the School wishes to impede.

Given the complexity of a 'stay at home' but 'school being operational' hybrid model that has emerged over the last couple of days, there are significant challenges for the School. The School is seeking to provide a learning experience for those who continue their learning at home and those for whom it is necessary for them to remain at school. It is important for parents to understand that it is impossible for teachers to prepare work for both online learning and detailed face-to-face teaching of the curriculum at the one time.

Over the past few days, significant planning has taken place to reimagine teaching and learning at Macarthur to cater for families over what could be an extended period of disruption extending well into next term. The planning required to cater for a variety of situations needs time if it is to be done well and not end up a patch work of ineffective strategies. However, something immediate is also needed.

After looking at the understandably growing number of families choosing to self-isolate their children, Macarthur will be entering a phase of asynchronous online learning on Wednesday 25 March 2020. From this day onwards, the School will move progressively towards an asynchronous online teaching and learning model with some additional services provided at school.

Year 11 and Year 12

Students who wish to attend school will continue to follow their established timetable although all learning will be presented online. The usual classroom teacher may not necessarily be on call but a subject specific teacher will be made available. This will allow students to augment their online learning with some face-to-face tutor-type assistance. **Students who come to school must follow their timetable for the entire day and not come for some lessons only.** More information will be forthcoming from the Dean of Studies in terms of Assessment Tasks. Students should not fret about these as provisions, postponements and alterations will be made as required.

Year 5 to Year 10

Usual classes and timetables will be suspended for the majority of students in the School. However, students will be able to do their online learning at school in a guided and supervised way. Time will also be allocated for students to attend to any assessment tasks that they have.

As time progresses and the model is fully implemented, students who attend school will have their learning opportunities expanded in ways that can only be achieved by face-to-face teaching, that is, through the development of and guidance throughout an Individual Research Project (IRP). Times will be set apart several times a week to facilitate this student driven learning. Teachers will guide students in selecting a research question for their IRP, help them plan how to research it and then support the students in developing their project. Parents who keep their children at home may wish to consider beginning something similar.

For those of you familiar with the Aristotle and Socrates programmes of the School, this is a similar project-based learning model. The final student project will depend somewhat on how long this blended learning model is in operation. The benefits of developing deep, critical and creative thinking skills without being tied to a specific curriculum topic is a very powerful learning tool and I believe this will be a significant benefit to our students.

From next week onwards, time will be set aside for a range of activity-based learning opportunities. For Year 7 to Year 10 students this will be after lunch, however for Year 5 and Year 6 students this will be at various points through the day. With so much of the community-based activities in shut down, encouraging students to engage with such opportunities in a structured way at school is important. As you have heard me say on several occasions, learning through doing and exploring, as takes place in the regular co-curricular life of the school, is very powerful in brain plasticity and creative thinking. In terms of physical well-being, sporting and physical exercise opportunities will be scheduled on Tuesdays and Wednesdays respectively. We believe the physical exercise and engagement with activity-based learning opportunities are important for the mental and physical well-being of students.

Transition to Year 4 For students in Transition to Year 4, classes will mostly operate with combined classes and even stage-based learning if numbers demand it. Online work will be provided to students at home as well as in class, although it is not intended to be exhaustive with other resources provided as appropriate. Year 4 will be using a different online mode of delivery, appropriate to their age group from the rest of Transition to Year 3. The individual iPads that the students use in class will be sent home with the students and for those students who are already self-isolating, parents can arrange to collect them in the next few days through contacting the Head of School.

General information

An Online Teaching and Learning Guide for parents and students can be found here http://www.macarthur.nsw.edu.au/assets/pdf/2020/Admin/OnlineTeaching_TtoYear12.pdf which provides much more detail. The model essentially allows for age appropriate teaching and learning of the NESA curriculum to be done online at home if that is the need of the family but can be augmented at school as well.

If you have any questions, please refer to the Online Teaching and Learning Guide in the first instance, if further clarification is needed, please contact the relevant Head of School or Dean of Studies.

For ICT questions, please contact webhelpdesk@macarthur.nsw.edu.au.

For students attending school, usual school uniform and rules apply with roll marking taking place first thing in the morning. Students are expected to be here for the full day if they attend school. All afternoon co-curricular activities will no longer take place being replaced with a range of activities through the day. Please refer to the detailed guide with regards to Peripatetic music lessons.

Senior Study has been cancelled for the rest of this term and, in all likelihood, for the duration of the online teaching mode.

The Senior Cafeteria and Junior Canteen, are likely to close in the next day or so due to unsustainable sales and so students from Transition to Year 11 will need to provide their own food. The Café is also likely to close based on a lack of sales given the reduced student and parent numbers.

For parents who have not already done so, if you intend to keep your children at home please send an email to the relevant Head of School or to administration@macarthur.nsw.edu.au in the usual way informing the School of your intention.

The model we have settled on requires significant flexibility and will inevitably be refined and improved as time progresses. It is a rich mode of learning that acknowledges not every student can be at school all of the time in the current circumstances. Yes, learning looks different but significant teaching and learning will still take place. Much ongoing planning is needed and as such the staff are planning in a staged and measured way rather than a knee jerk response. I appreciate your forbearance as we stage the implementation.

Thank you for your attention to this letter and your support of the School as we plan appropriately for the needs of our students in uncertain times.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Nockles', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

David Nockles