



*'Lucere et Ardere'*

23 March 2020

Dear Parents and Members of the Aquinas Community

So much is changing so quickly, as authorities attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19. While in some ways it feels as if we are still boxing at shadows here at Aquinas, we all know just how real this will become in the quite near future. I write to update you on our unfolding plans, and to address some specific questions that we have received.

We are pursuing three broad lines of action in our management of the impacts of COVID-19. Even though the following statement (which is posted on our website) repeats a little from my letter of last week, I include it as concise summary of our approach:

**1. *Protocols for prudent management of the College's resident community***

Since it is the students' place of residence, the College remains open. To do this responsibly, we have implemented a raft of measures to maximise hygienic practices, social distancing, and control of visitors. These are aimed at impeding the spread of the virus in the Aquinas community, and responding appropriately if or when residents develop possible symptoms. Students have been fully briefed on these arrangements. It is anticipated that these will continue to be developed as the virus spreads. The College is in regular receipt of advice from statutory and medical authorities.

**2. *Expansion of academic support***

As most courses in the three universities move to online delivery, Aquinas is expanding its own tutorial and general academic support for students. This is seen as the main benefit of being in college at this time. Students will be helped to adjust to online courses, and provided with tutoring, peer assistance, routine, structure, high-speed internet, study spaces, incentives, and professional oversight. In fact, the College has accepted some new applications from university students who are struggling in non-college environments.

**3. *Pastoral care and community***

Aquinas is known for the strength of its community and the quality of its pastoral care. As social and sporting opportunities for young people disappear during this period, the collegiate environment offers students an environment replete with friends, activity and connection. The Student Club, the House Coordinators, and individual students are being inventive in developing ways for students to be physically and socially active. The professional staff and senior students continue to ensure that the needs of each student are known and that they receive all the support they need.

This evening, we will be meeting with students to talk further as to what each of these three lines of action will look like from this week. I will keep you updated on our arrangements as they develop, recognising changing circumstances and governmental decisions will require us to be adaptable and agile.

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Allow me to address two specific questions that we have received:

***With the closing of national and now some interstate borders, and perhaps increased restrictions on intra-state travel, should my son or daughter come home?***

This is a decision for each student to make in liaison with his or her family. It is not a black-and-white matter, as there are pros and cons either way you decide, and some unknowns. It is a question of judging where the likely weight of benefit lies for you. At this stage, only a handful of students has opted to go home, most having discerned that there is more benefit than cost in staying at college. Of course, some do not have that option readily available to them anyway. Aquinas intends to stay open and to adopt the approach outlined above. As to when or if an interstate student would be permitted to return to Adelaide if they did decide to go home for a time, there is no certainty. We would be happy to provide anyone with formal proof of full-time residency, but it is not clear at this stage what weight such a document would carry. There is the additional challenge of a mandatory two-week isolation period on return to South Australia.

***What would be the financial implications of going home?***

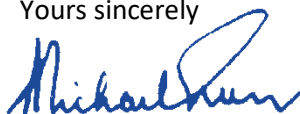
Unfortunately, the College has very limited capacity to offer people any rebate on residency fees. As you would appreciate, most of our operating and salary costs are fixed, and we are locked into a number of pre-determined arrangements with external contractors, notably for catering and cleaning. At the same time, we understand only too keenly that many students have lost the part-time jobs with which they help to pay their residency fees, and the same may apply to parents as the economy weakens. We would consider compassionately the individual hardship of any student, and we would not ask people for what they are unable to pay at this time. We are also studying what compensation that yesterday's announcements from Federal Government may offer students, and also to the College as a not-for-profit entity.

The situation is not straightforward for any of us. We feel particularly for our first-year students who have barely begun their tertiary studies and have not yet adjusted into its new demands on them, let alone settled into a regular pattern of study. We certainly have their wellbeing to the fore in all our planning and attention. We feel that they, and indeed most students here, will be greatly assisted by both the extra academic scaffolding and the means of weekly monitoring we will start this week.

We are advised by the Federal Department of Health that COVID-19 is a viral infection that causes a mild respiratory illness in most people. While symptoms are likely to be slight or not observable for most, especially young people, they can be serious, especially for those with pre-existing conditions. If your son or daughter has heightened risk factors, it may be wise for them not to be in college.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact one of our staff team if you wish to discuss any concern or question you may have.

Yours sincerely



**Brother Michael Green FMS**  
RECTOR