



Aquinas College: managing the COVID-19 pandemic

Context

Aquinas College accommodates 180 university students attending the University of Adelaide, the University of South Australia and Flinders University. Most students come from regional and remote areas across South Australia and other States, and there is a handful of international students. During the current health crisis, some students have returned to their home regions, but most remain in residence. Reasons for their staying include: the benefits for their mental health and academic progress from staying in a collegial environment with active pastoral and academic programmes; no ready alternative accommodation; inability to travel home; people at home with vulnerable health conditions; reluctance of some home regions to allow people from the city to enter; reduced facility at home for online learning (e.g. poor internet).

The Aquinas Response

The College has implemented a three-pronged action plan called: 'Operation Aquinas, Staying Mean with COVID-19':

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, which it implements.

2. *Expansion of academic support*

As courses in the three universities have moved to an online platform, Aquinas has expanded its onsite tutorial and general academic support for students. This is seen as the main benefit of being in college at this time. Students are being helped to adjust to online and distance learning, and provided with tutoring, peer assistance, routine, structure, high-speed internet, study spaces, incentives, and professional oversight.

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.

We are being inventive in developing ways for students to be physically active and socially connected. 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.

Control and emergency measures introduced so far:

1. Phase 1, 2 and 3 protocols for ensuring: a hygienic environment, social distancing, and campus entry/exit controls
2. Planning in place for various scenarios: precautionary isolation; managing infected students onsite; partial or full lockdown; resident and non-resident staff isolation and/or illness
3. Consistent and frequent messaging to students and staff
4. Regular briefings of students and staff, both in person and electronically
5. Highly visible signage (digital and actual)
6. Provision for isolation of students or resident staff, if required
7. Provision for full or partial lockdown, if required
8. Changes in arrangements for meal service and catering staff protocols
9. Ensuring adequate supplies of soap, paper towels, hand-sanitiser, hospital-grade disinfectant, and other cleaning products
10. Provision for specialist, high-intensity cleaning if it were required

