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3 April 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians & Students,

One could be forgiven for thinking that school holidays are not important or significant in the midst of our strange new reality. Staying at home is the new norm and if we're honest, we may not be adhering strictly to our regular school term routines. There is no doubt that teachers and students have had an uphill battle coming to terms with online teaching and learning. Every aspect of our activities is taking longer and seems more laborious. The National Parents' Council Post-Primary quote sums it up very well: "It is very difficult to type a five-page essay on a Mobile Phone".

Teachers and students are trying to master new skills at a very fast rate. Uploading work and resources takes longer and there is a new level of planning involved. Over many years, teachers have honed their skills, methodologies and approaches to their teaching and now, in the space of three weeks, many of those tried and tested methods have become redundant! Corrections are much slower for teachers and there isn't the same opportunity to demonstrate for the whole group, thus necessitating forensic examination of each individual's work which, in my view, is unsustainable. Students are spending long hours in front of screens while sharing devices with other family members.

A different classroom setting has resulted in a certain isolation for everyone. Teachers know their students and can often pick up on the puzzled facial expression of a girl who is finding material challenging. Students may have 'One Good Adult' at school who makes a difference on the tough days. First years may miss their 'Big Sister'. We all miss our friends! All of these observations just go to prove that there is no substitute for school. School is where we all belong, where we work and learn together, where we gather all of our resources, both human and physical. School is our community of learning in the true sense, because education cannot flourish without the formation of trust and the nurturing of relationships. The familiar and the ordinary seem like luxuries right now, but they will return.

When school closure was announced, everyone engaged with Google Classroom with great gusto and enthusiasm. What had been seen as an enhancement of teaching and learning in our school has suddenly become the mainstay of our interaction. Everyone has been sprinting along to maximise productivity and support. This sprint may well become a marathon and we need to pace ourselves! I urge you to avail of your holiday time, take your break, recharge your batteries and come back refreshed and energised for the final school term of 2019-2020.

Thank you to the huge number of students (300+) who responded so comprehensively to the recent survey 'My digital Learning Experience'. The main findings from this survey are that work is progressing well for the vast majority of students and that teachers are setting assignments and offering resources, feedback and support to groups and individuals. Leaving Certificate students, because of their maturity and ability to self manage have expressed the need for time to revise and this is most appropriate (and normal!) at this time of year.

Teachers will continue to guide that revision and offer supports and sample questions on a topic by topic basis that students can access via Google Classroom.

Our learning environment is likely to continue in this current format for some time to come and in an effort to streamline the process for everyone we have asked teachers:

- (i) To schedule the uploading of resources to Google Classroom at the timetabled period of the day for each class group.
  
- (ii) To give students a deadline for completion of work (within a reasonable timeframe taking into consideration the demands of other subjects)

This will hopefully help teachers to manage their correction workload and also eliminate students and teachers receiving notifications late at night and at weekends.

Thank you to those parents and students who have taken the time to contact their teachers and the school with words of thanks and praise. This encouragement will sustain us all and means a great deal in these uncertain times. All of us in our school community are doing our best!

These weeks have been difficult for all of us both personally and as a school community. Never has it been more clear that our health and that of our loved ones is of paramount importance. As we move into Holy Week, the most powerful time in the church calendar, we are filled with the hope and renewal that Easter brings each year. Rest and be thankful.

God bless you all in this holy season of Easter.

Your sincerely,



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Marése Bell  
Principal