

4<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear Damascus students and families,

In line with the Victorian Government's announcement on Sunday, we will commence remote learning from tomorrow, Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August.

Yesterday and today the College has been working consistently to prepare for this next stage. This communication is intended to provide some resources and information to families on things that we are doing differently as we move into this second phase of remote learning.

### **Guiding Principles**

The four principles that have continued to underpin our College's planning and decision making in response to COVID-19 are:

- Maintaining the safety of the entire Damascus community
- Ensuring we remain connected and support one another
- Ensuring continuity of quality learning and teaching
- Being willing to adapt, change and try new things, recognising that we will make mistakes at times.

These have continued to guide our decision making. The changes we are making as we move into this next phase have been grounded in the feedback we have collected, and we are very grateful to all those who contributed to surveys and to retrospectives.

### **Additional Planning Time - Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> August**

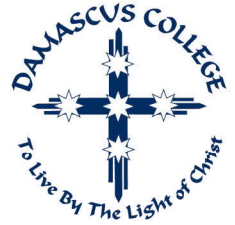
The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) are supportive of schools taking additional planning time to support the transition back to remote learning.

Damascus College is going to take an additional planning day next **Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> August** to consolidate our remote learning protocols, and get our planning in place for the subsequent cycles of learning. We acknowledge these first few days come off a very short lead up, but we want to keep the momentum of student learning here at school going and then take the chance to refine our practices after our first few days.

For Year 7-11 students, there will be no classes on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August and no expectation of engagement with their learning, however, it does provide an opportunity for students to catch up on work and consolidate learning. It will also provide a psychological break for everyone next week, following a period of prolonged uncertainty. We will get up and going this week, and then, pause, reflect and refine next Tuesday.

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## **Year 12 & Students undertaking a Unit 4 & VET Arrangements for Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August**

The Victorian Government has committed that Year 12 VCE and VCAL students will complete their VCE and VCAL certificates and receive results within the 2020 calendar year. It is expected that Year 12 VCE, and VCAL students **& students undertaking a Unit 4** will continue with their learning program next Tuesday and teachers will guide students as to what is expected during this time. In a small number of cases, assessments were scheduled for next Tuesday, and these will continue as planned. The General Achievement Test scheduled for Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September has been rescheduled to Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October for all students studying a VCE Unit 4.

Students who undertake a cluster VET program are expected to attend remotely next Tuesday.

### **Remote Learning Manual**

The Damascus College Remote Learning Manual can be found at <https://www.damascus.vic.edu.au/news/covid19-the-latest>. This document has been amended to reflect the refinements for this next phase of remote learning. The Remote Learning Manual should be families' first point of reference with regard to school protocols and expectations for this period of learning from home.

### **Student Checklist**

The Remote Learning Student Checklist can be found [here](#) and is designed to support your student/s as they move into remote learning next week. If you have the opportunity to print the checklist, you are encouraged to put it in key places for your learner/s. Alternatively, encourage your student to have it open on their device and minimised, able to be referred to as needed.

### **Roll Marking**

We believe that to best support students through this next phase of remote learning; regular roll marking provides a valuable snapshot of student engagement. Just as it does when we are onsite. Students are expected to touch base with their teacher at the start of each lesson / double lesson. Roll marking enables us to track student connection and flags for us the individuals who will need follow up. As a College, we will be able to follow up those students who are disengaging and support them more strongly. Checking in with teachers does not preclude students working differently to the timetable through this period, but it does ensure that they are staying in regular communication with each of their teachers.

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Families are asked to communicate illness or absence through the regular channels of calling the office or through the Damascus App. If families communicate absences, it saves valuable time following up students who are not in class.

### **TA Time**

Morning TA will continue as normal; however, these will be predominately video conferences via Microsoft Teams. Regular roll marking and consistent contact with teachers changes the need for afternoon TA. Pastoral care and community connection is still a key principle of Damascus remote learning. Students are still encouraged to reach out to their TA regularly outside the morning TA time, but afternoon TA will not be a requirement of this remote learning period.

### **Cameras on when Talking**

This time we want everyone to have their camera on when talking to support the strongest engagement with learning and teaching and build connection to those who we are engaging with. This will be a substantive change for students this time, but we feel it will be important for our connectedness. We appreciate that bandwidth presents issues at times, but as a general principle, the expectation is that cameras are to be turned on when talking.

### **Keep Microsoft Teams Open**

Students are expected to keep Microsoft Teams open through the learning day. If TA's, teachers or other staff within the College want to contact students, we need the application to remain open so students can take calls.

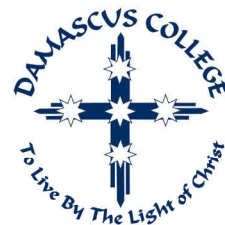
### **Learning and Teaching Refinements**

There have been some refinements to processes for distribution of work for the learning cycle which will now generally be distributed by the subject teacher within the scheduled class time. It will still be the block of work for the designated period, but it will predominately be distributed to students through Microsoft Teams, rather than email in most cases. Teachers are collaborating on the type and volume of work and assessment to be handed up, and students will experience some changes in this space through their learning programs.

Parents/guardians will not be cc'd into communications with the work programs to students; these can be accessed by logging in to PAM and clicking on Learning Areas. This change was made as a result of the number of emails parents were receiving. Parents can still access the work provided to students. More detail exists within the Remote Learning Manual.

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## Well-being Support

After reflecting on the feedback from Term 2 remote learning, we are looking to create a regular opportunity within the timetable to address;

- Screen fatigue
- Time for consolidation of learning
- Increased opportunities for physical activity.

We are going to move to a condensed timetable one afternoon per week rolling across Tues, Wed, Thurs – on these days there will be 35-minute lessons to gain 90 minutes in the afternoon – for physical activity or consolidation of learning. The rolling nature across days is to spread the impact on classes affected. This is a substantive change for this period, but one that we believe is in everyone's best interest.

The timetable and schedule for these days follow

Week 7(A) – No activity due to Tuesday student free day

Week 8(B) – Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> August

Week 9(A) – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> August

Week 10(B) – Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September

Week 11(A) – Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September

Week 12(B) – Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September

Bell times below;

### Remote Learning – Afternoon activity (35-minute Periods)

- Rolling afternoon activity/catch up – 6 shortened periods, shorter lunch break (30minutes)

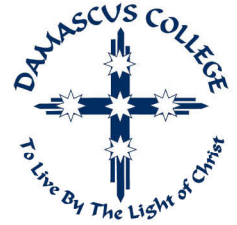
TA	8.55am	9.09am
Period 1	9.11am	9.46am
Period 2	9.48am	10.23am
Recess	10.23am	10.43am
Period 3	10.45am	11.20am
Period 4	11.22am	11.57am
Lunch	11.57am	12.27pm
Period 5	12.30pm	1.05pm
Period 6	1.07pm	1.42pm
Afternoon Activity	1.50pm	3.20pm

## Onsite Supervision

As Andrew Robertson communicated yesterday from Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August, all students who can learn from home **must** learn from home.

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Damascus College is able to provide support to students and families that require supervision for their student during this period of remote learning. This can be provided to;

- Children whose parents cannot work from home and are essential workers
- Vulnerable children

If your student fits into one of the above categories and you require student supervision onsite could you, please fill in the following form ASAP but not later than 1.00pm Friday 7<sup>th</sup> August. <https://forms.gle/CY8EdRAMcgywEGcz5>

Consideration will be given to requests for onsite support in line with these criteria throughout the period of remote learning.

Families are reminded that students will be supervised to complete their remote learning at school. In line with COVID-19 guidelines; staff on campus will be limited.

### **College Calendar**

The College calendar will need to be revisited and substantially adjusted in relation to our move back to remote learning. This will be communicated through the weekly newsletter.

### **Communication to families throughout Remote Learning**

The weekly newsletter, Damascus News will be the primary source of information for families over this time, consistent with regular school communication. Significant changes issued by the Government may necessitate extraordinary Principal's Communications. Families will receive these by email and will be notified by text message. These communications will also be available through the College website.

There will be no newsletter on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August in light of this communication.

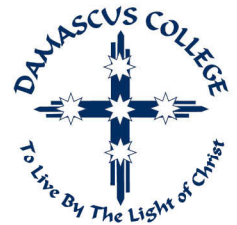
### **School Operation**

While the College is providing onsite supervision, a minimal number of personnel will be present at school to support students. A member of the Leadership Team plus other required staff will be present. If anyone is required to come onto the campus at any stage, they will be required to attend **student reception** on arrival. Family members are asked to ring the office to determine if support can be provided without the need to come onsite. If you do need to come onsite, the student reception will be open from 8.30am to 4.00pm.

In the interest of everyone's safety, all individuals will have their temperature checked. If anyone's temperature is above 37.5 degrees entry will be refused. Visitors will be asked to sign in on arrival and out on departure.

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## Subject Selections

Some students were not able to make their subject selections for 2021 on Monday afternoon. TA's will support students to do this each TA morning this week. A gentle reminder that all VCE/VET Accelerated, VCAL and VCE English Forms (Literature and English Language) need to be submitted to TAs before the end of the week.

## Finance

I am aware that many parents will have lost significant employment or business income due to COVID-19. At this time, our position as a Catholic school, in the Mercy and Diocesan tradition, is very clear that families will be supported in times of need. The school's immediate priority is to provide as much stability as possible for your young person/people, and with this in mind, we are committed to providing flexible and confidential financial assistance to support you with managing your school fee commitments for 2020. If this is an issue for you, please get in touch with us to discuss the options. We do care, and if you need help, please reach out by contacting [fees@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:fees@damascus.vic.edu.au)

## Learning in a Christian Community

Recently, I have been reading about the Sisters of Mercy's collaboration with Florence Nightingale in the foundations of modern health care through the Crimean war <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5375655/>.

Aspects of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy's work in establishing Catholic health care - transfer appropriately to our time in Mercy education. This reflection on the key elements of Mercy health care I have adapted to Mercy education. It speaks to me. I've changed patient-centred to student-centred and health care to education. I think it provides a good context for the role of our school community in a time of change and uncertainty.

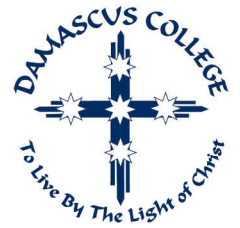
*"In contemporary terms, the Sisters of Mercy (and now their institutions, such as Damascus College) practiced what we now call "student centred education". They attended to the individual needs of the student with a view to the physical, emotional, and spiritual good of the person. This is a critical point in today's educational environment. The "quality education" that the Sisters of Mercy sought to practice was holistic in nature and included the gift of time given to individual needs.*

*The Sisters could see the forest while giving their attention to the individual trees. They did not give in to discouragement or disillusionment in the face of a complex times. As a Catholic educational community, we turn to God in trust, to creatively and prudently navigate the current educational landscape."*

So, as we enter this next phase of remote learning we turn to God in trust and quote Catherine McAuley – *"While we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertion."* We pray that our efforts to reduce the spread of this

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virus, through our period of remote learning, will keep people safe and connected.  
We make this prayer of our loving God. Amen.

Take care

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Byrne".

Matthew Byrne  
Principal