



20th May 2020

It has been fantastic to see such excellent support by families for TA interviews this week, and I apologise to those families who were unable to access TA's during the available hours. Please touch base with your TA if you were not able to make an interview, and I am sure they will work with you in the best interest of your young person.

It has been a big week as we work through the process of a staged return for staff and students to Damascus College. The COVID-19 virus is changing the way we live and learn, and our return to school will be very different from last term. Within this communication, I want to outline some of the things that we know at this stage, but there are still many things that we are planning to address, and we will continue to make that information available to the College community progressively.

This week I am using sub-headings within my communication to ease the navigation of information, given the volume of content.

Guiding Principles

Throughout this crisis four principles have guided our decision making;

- 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.

As we plan for this next stage of bringing people back together to learn, these principles remain as important as they have right throughout our management of this situation.

Staged Student return

Stage 1: 26th May – 4th June

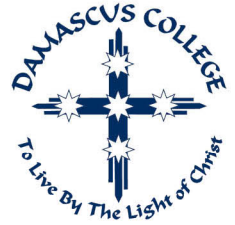
In the first stage, students in Years 11 and 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) will return to school from Tuesday 26th May.

Year 10 students undertaking VCE studies, including VCE Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies, should also attend school for those classes where practicable. We are currently awaiting advice on cluster VET classes and will notify families as this information becomes available. Where needed, Year 10 students who attend for VCE/VET classes can be supervised at school for the remainder of the day if travel is problematic.

Remote and flexible learning will continue for all students in Years 7-10 until Stage 2.

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During Stage 1, the existing model of onsite schooling for students who cannot be supervised at home and vulnerable children will remain in place.

Stage 2: from 9th June

All other year levels will return to school from Tuesday 9th June. All students will be expected to attend school as normal, and the College will return to full onsite curriculum delivery.

Once a year level has returned, all students will be expected to attend school as normal. This means if you choose to keep your child/children home after their year level has returned to onsite schooling, there will be very limited support for learning from home unless there is a medical requirement.

Staged Staff Return

One of the key risks of the transition back to school is the adult to adult transmission of the virus. To protect our school community, we are also transitioning staff back gradually to the College in line with the graduated student return. Only the staff required to ensure a safe and operationally functional school for senior students will be onsite between 26th May and 4th June.

Student Free Days

As I communicated last week, the 25th May and 5th June will be student-free days. There will be no expectation that students will undertake school-based work on these days beyond ensuring they have fulfilled the planned learning requirements provided by their teachers for the particular fortnight.

Onsite supervision for Year 7-10 children of essential workers from 26th May to 4th June

Damascus College supports the Governments position to provide educational supervision for students in Years 7-10 to the dependents of essential workers who cannot work from home and/or vulnerable students (students in out-of-home care, students deemed by Child Protection/Family Services to be at risk of harm and students identified by the school as vulnerable for reasons of violence, homelessness, mental health or disability). In addition to this, the opening of schools for students, Prep-2 and Years 11-12 allows us to offer supervision of students whose parents/carers are employees of educational institutions who are now required to return to work. On the 9th June, it will be expected that all students Years 7-12 will be on campus to continue face to face learning.

If you believe your family is unable to facilitate learning from home due to the criteria above and where no other arrangements can be made, could you please complete the following survey, by accessing the link below by 5.00pm Thursday 21st May to enable us to plan appropriate supervision and support on campus. Later requests will be considered, but we are trying to ascertain the level of current need for next week.

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Please note that if you have already made arrangements with the College for on-campus remote learning supervision, you are not required to complete the survey.

A member of the Leadership team or Wellbeing team will contact families (other than Year 10 VCE students) seeking supervised on-campus education services to discuss your specific needs.

Survey Link: <https://forms.gle/o7pQHRHahNoCXFk86>

I must reiterate that Damascus can provide on-campus supervision only to support students to access the Remote Learning program. The supervisors will not be actively engaged in teaching; the student's regular teachers will do this remotely as per the manual that has been circulated to parents. Damascus will continue to provide faith, wellbeing and academic support as outlined in the Remote Learning Manual, which can be accessed through the Parent Access Module (PAM).

Year 10 students undertaking a VCE or VET subject

It is expected that Year 10 students who are completing a VCE Unit attend these face to face classes at Damascus. To ensure student safety and enable them to engage with their remote online learning, supervision will be provided at the College for Year 10 students. Onsite supervision will be provided all day as needed, or if students intend to work at home in the morning or afternoon adjacent to their onsite class, we ask that families facilitate travel over lunchtime and only if safe to do so. We would ask that all Year 10 students that are completing a VCE subject please enter their on-campus times via the survey link.

Survey Link: <https://forms.gle/o7pQHRHahNoCXFk86>

Food and Drink

The College Canteen will not be available between 26th May and 4th June. Senior students and those attending onsite supervision will need to bring their lunch and snacks for this period. The Canteen will reopen with the full return of students from the 9th June.

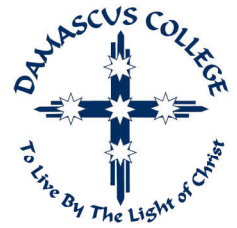
We have also been required to remove bubble taps; students are encouraged to bring a full water bottle from home. There will be refill stations available, but it would be good if students arrived with the bottle full in the morning so that valuable learning time is not lost filling them up and so taps do not become points of congestion.

Uniform

As students return to on-campus learning, they will also return to school uniform. Students will be required to wear their winter uniform as they come back on campus for classes. Please get out your winter uniform now and check for size and hem length (to the knee). Pants are an item available for all students this winter, but the ladies pants can only be secured through Crockers at this stage. Crockers are located at 4 Armstrong Street North, Ballarat.

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For families wishing to access Dobson's Uniform shop on site, we ask that you please move directly to and from your car to the shop to observe social distancing. Only two families can be in the shop at any time.

TA

The College will continue to run morning and afternoon TA through until the 4th June. Senior students will move directly to their Period 1 class as they come onsite. In line with return to school guidelines, staff and students will no longer be temperature checked as they come on to campus every day. There will be room changes, and I encourage your student to check their timetables. They will engage remotely in TA at that time. Earbuds/headphones are essential learning equipment as students return to school, please ensure students have them so that they can engage discretely with their TA.

Mobile Phones and the COVID Safe App

Students are encouraged to download the COVID Safe app and will be able to carry their phones for this period of time. This provides insurance, that if there are identified cases – contact tracing can happen most efficiently. The students will carry phones only, and they will be advised that we will not be seeing them in class, or they will be confiscated!

Supporting One Another

The best support families can continue to provide our community is to keep students home who show any symptoms of illness. This is counter-intuitive when many of us have encouraged our young people to go to school knowing that adolescent "lethargy" in the mornings may be an underlying factor, only to receive a call from Simon or the office team later in the day to collect a genuinely sick young person. If there is a chance your young person is unwell – please keep them home.

Limiting Onsite Visitors

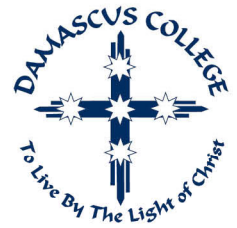
One of the significant risk minimising factors that we will adhere to for the safety of our community will be prioritising students and staff on campus. Our advice specifies the importance of limiting adult to adult contact over this next stage, so I ask that parents not exit their car when onsite. If you believe there is a legitimate need to come into the College office, please contact the office via phone, and we will work through the specifics of your need individually.

Cleaning, Cleaning, Cleaning

The College is investing heavily in an increased daily deep clean of all high contact surfaces and areas. Tables, desks, chairs, contact points will all be cleaned daily to the advised standards, reflective of this time. High touch areas are to be disinfected throughout the day (all entry/exit points, drink stations, toilets, counter areas, kitchen areas).

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Additional end of the day cleaning, including detailed clean and disinfecting of:

- doors (door handles and handrails, guardrails)
- kitchenettes including sinks
- Bottle filler units
- student tables, chairs and locker doors
- electrical fixtures and appliances (switches, printers, photocopiers, fridges etc.)
- bathroom areas
- classroom waste bins
- teaching and non-teaching area floors (hard floors and soft floors)

Hygiene

Families can help by reinforcing hand and cough/sneeze protocols prior to students returning. Washing hands regularly, particularly before eating, will be important. Strategies to improve infection control in addition to the existing cleaning arrangements include:

- Hand sanitiser stations in classrooms and offices around the College
- Disabling of drinking fountain taps around the school, while allowing bottle fillers to be used
- Sneeze guards to be located in reception areas, helpdesk and St Martin Resource Centre counter

Early Start

We have decided to push the end of Semester One for all year levels out to the end of the term. In other years students change their elective subjects and VCE subjects for the last two weeks of this term, but due to the disruption and to enable students the opportunity to undertake some practical activities, the change-over of electives will take place for the start of next term.

VCE, VET and VCAL teachers have the flexibility to transition content from Unit 3 to Unit 4 at their own discretion. This is also the case for Unit 1 to Unit 2 change over; however, most subjects will not change until the break.

Financial Support

The safety of the Damascus community is the key priority of this period of time. It sits alongside our commitment to continuing our provision of quality education and maintaining a connected and supported community. In ensuring we are able to provide the support families need, please contact fees@damascus.vic.edu.au if your family is experiencing financial duress. Young people's education must not be a victim of this global pandemic, and we are here to help.

Centacare Ballarat has also asked that I bring to families' awareness the availability of Emergency Relief Funds. No doubt there are families within the school community finding it financially difficult at this time. Centacare is certainly finding many people who have never had to seek financial aid before are now needing to do so due to sudden changes in their circumstances. The funds can be used to help with

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expenses across a broad range of goods and services (such as utility bills, groceries, fuel, phone bills, vet bills, household items, winter clothes, etc. They don't cover speeding fines, but most other expenses will be considered).

Families just need to **contact Centacare reception on 5337 8999 for a phone booking with the Emergency Relief Team.**

Office Phone disruption this Friday 22/5

As we move towards more onsite delivery next week, we will need to transition our phone system back at some stage throughout the day on Friday. This may result in the phones being "offline" for a period throughout the day. We will try and minimise this disruption for College families.

Co- & Extra -Curricular Activities

As we transition back over the next few weeks, our focus is on returning to onsite learning. Many of the activities that complement and enhance a Damascus education will not return this term. There will be no BAS Sport for the rest of Term 2. The SRT program will also not recommence at this stage. Instrumental music will continue to be conducted remotely at this stage.

Buses

CDC and the Country bus service have advised that they will return to their normal scheduling from Tuesday 26th and will conduct a scheduled cleaning regime in all of their buses to support good hygiene practices.

International Educational Support Day

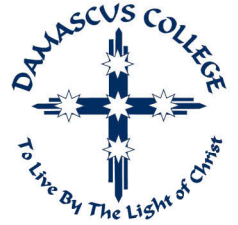
Saturday 16th May was International Educational Support Personnel Day. The Damascus College staff team is a team of committed educators, and I use that term inclusively of the entire staff team, as all who work in schools play an invaluable role in educating. We send out an enormous shout of gratitude to all our educational support personnel who are helping students, teachers and families in a myriad of ways such as learning support, in the office, in technical roles, careers, in sickbay, the library and IT, in special programs for sport and Maths and the arts, finance, and development, Human Resources, sustainable racing, enrolments, and maintenance; these are but a few.... To all who work in educational support – thank you – we are always grateful but never more than through this period of disruption when you have been so helpful and caring!!

Being community

The Sisters of Mercy directed me towards an article from which I have taken the closing paragraphs. It is a beautiful reflection on this time and our need for mutual support. While we are fortunate in Australia – our good fortune has come from effort and decision making to be safe. This will continue to be critical in the days and weeks ahead. I share the importance of our continued commitment to mutual wellbeing that is at the foundation of our Christian community.

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“Every hand that we don’t shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise.

It is obvious that “distancing,” if misplaced or misunderstood, will take its toll not only upon our community’s strength and resiliency but upon the very integrity and meaning of our spiritual commitment. And who knows if it was for this time that we have committed ourselves to walk in God’s ways.

The way that we will protect and save ourselves is through protecting and saving others, as is always true.

When we next find ourselves in prayer, let’s pause, and silently stand before our God who knows our needs even before we articulate them and who has called upon us to be the fingers of His outstretched hand.

Let’s stay safe. And let’s draw one another closer in a way that we’ve never done before.” (Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky, “Coronavirus is a test for the government. But it’s a test for us, too.”) - Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky is the rabbi of B’nai David-Judea, a Modern Orthodox congregation in Los Angeles

We pray this week for Narisa Bunworth (Year 9) and her family on the passing of her grandfather and also Calhoun Jenkins (Year 12) and his family on the passing of his grandfather. We keep these families in our thoughts in this time of grief.

Until next week ...

Matt