



19 March 2020

Dear Boarding Parents

We are currently living in uncertain times and understand the challenges that the ongoing COVID-19 virus is having on our regional and rural communities.

Unfortunately, as a School, we continue to receive conflicting messages from the Australian Government Health officials which makes navigating the COVID-19 virus even more challenging. I do hope that this letter today helps to make further sense of this situation and encourage you to speak with me or Mr. Brad Allen if we can clarify or support in any way.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that the National Cabinet has accepted the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) that schools should remain open at this time. They also stated specifically that the National Cabinet has agreed that **“pre-emptive closures are not proportionate or effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at this time.”**

However, the Australian Government then proceeded to announce that the National Cabinet had noted the following:

Boarding Schools

Boarding schools are at high risk of transmission of COVID-19 due to close and shared living arrangements and higher frequency of face-to-face contact. An outbreak in a boarding school would present a difficult management issue including potentially the isolation of the entire boarding school, as all students and staff would be defined as close contacts following a confirmed case. Depending on the structure, the boarding school may be unsuitable for isolation procedures.

Should a boarding student from a rural or remote community be diagnosed with COVID-19, they may not be able to return home if there is not sufficient health infrastructure to support them, or support their isolation.

Schools and parents should consider the risks versus the benefits of a student remaining in boarding school, and make their own decision, noting that the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to span more than six months. The decision to remain at boarding school should be a shared and documented decision (AHPPC, 17 March 2020).

Please be assured that Booth House Boarding will remain open to support our Boarders continue their learning at WAS. Mr. Brad Allen, Head of Boarding, and his boarding team, have engaged a number of proactive measures to protect the health and wellbeing of our boarding community.

We also understand, as acknowledged by the Australian Government and the AHPPC, that for some boarding students “they may not be able to return home if there is not sufficient health infrastructure to support them”.



We do have the distinct advantage of being a small boarding school, which allows us to introduce these measures, unlike some of the larger boarding schools that range in size from approximately 100 to 900 students.

These measures further promote social distancing and reduce the frequency of face to face contact “due to close and shared living arrangements”, and will take place from Monday 23 March.

Separate Rooms for Boarders

- Every Boarder will have their own room.

Common areas

- The common room, House area and laundry have been separated into areas specifically for Years 7 - 9 and Years 10 - 12.
- There are no full Boarding House meetings.

Personal Hygiene

- All students have been instructed on personal hygiene measures by our School Nurse, as per the COVID-19 guidelines.
- There are now increased hand washing and sanitising stations and signage.
- Shared cutlery, crockery and cups have been removed from boarding. Students can use their own but they must be appropriately washed and then stored in their room.

Meal Times

- Split dining hall meals for seniors and juniors to further promote social distancing, with separate eating areas in the Dining Hall.
- Individualised cutlery satchels, so students are not touching others’ cutlery.
- Serving of single style meals, moving away from a common server area.

Community Events and Co-curricular Activities

- We are managing exposure to the community and events, as evidenced by the School’s approach to social distancing. All co-curricular activities have stopped in and out of School.
- Non-essential leave has now ceased. Leave will be granted for Health services, appointments, counselling, medical, optical and dental. Leave is only with family members.

Boarding Visitors

- No visitors will be accepted into Boarding apart from WAS staff and immediate family.

Illness in the Boarding House

- Any students that are unwell have been sent home. If your son and daughter becomes unwell, families will be asked to collect them. They will not be able to return to boarding until they have medical clearance.

Cleaning

- The frequency of cleaning in Booth House has now increased.
- Extra precautions and sanitising in the Dining Hall, in addition to the standard level of cleaning.



Boarders' Booth House Bus and Red Colorado Vehicle

- These vehicles are cleaned daily and Year levels are isolated to each vehicle. That is, Years 7-9 (Booth House Bus) and Years 10-12 (Booth House Red Colorado Vehicle).

We also advise Boarding parents to practise social distancing and minimal community contact when Boarders are at home on weekend leave. Further information can be found at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-social-distancing>.

Our Boarding staff and their young families are applying social distancing measures in their own lives out of School.

As always, the health and wellbeing of our Boarding students remains the highest priority for the School and our caring and committed boarding staff. We are also cognisant of Whitsunday Anglican School remaining open and that the advice from Queensland's Health Medical Officer is that:

there is limited information on the contribution of children to transmission of COVID-19, with the WHO-China Joint Mission noting the primary role of household transmission and observed that children tend to be infected from adults... At this stage, the spread of COVID-19 in the community is at quite low levels. It may be many months before the level of community infection is again as low as it is at the moment (Chief Health Officer, Queensland Health, 16 March 2020).

Last night on Sky News, the Australian Prime Minister has defended his decision to keep schools open saying that if they shut down now they will not open again for some time and that "your children will miss effectively a whole year of their education".

We ask that you please respond in writing to Mr. Brad Allen bal@was.qld.edu.au if you wish for your son/daughter to remain in boarding or if you wish to take them home at this time.

Thank you for your continued support as we navigate these very challenging times in our community and at our School. Our Boarders are an integral part of our School community and we shall continue to update families with current and relevant information as it comes to hand.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Brad Allen or myself, as we would be happy to address any of your concerns.

With kind regards

Andrew Wheaton
Principal

Brad Allen
Head of Boarding