

Friday 21 August, 2020

# ST. MARY MACKILLOP PRIMARY SCHOOL

152 Odessa Avenue Keilor Downs, Vic 3038 [www.mmkeilordowns.catholic.edu.au](http://www.mmkeilordowns.catholic.edu.au) T: 03 9367 6199



## *Staying Connected... No. 19*

Dear Community,

This lockdown seems to be dragging on. It's as if we are travelling through a long tunnel and we are at the mid- point when we can't see the 'light' of the exit, even though we know it is there. Lots of people, parents and children and teachers are experiencing moments of heightened emotions when **"It's all getting too much!"**

We all look forward to restrictions easing. I fully appreciate how stressful it must be for many of you stuck at home, working, or in some cases worrying about your future employment. Add to that enormous pressure, you have your kids and their schooling to worry about. I know it is not easy, but we have to keep managing the best we can as we move forward and hope things get back to some sense of normal, sometime soon.

We are all over it. You want your kids to return to school onsite and we teachers certainly want to see the kids back at school soon. The reality is, despite what we offer with our online learning programs, it is you, the parents and carers, who have to manage your children and do a lot of the explaining of tasks. This is particularly so for those of you with younger children. I have had people tell me they are over it and it is not working for them. We can only do so much. This is the reality of our time and place at the moment.

I once again reiterate how proud I am of my teachers and the work they are doing to deliver online learning. They are stressed too and over it, but our teachers keep working with determination and commitment to do their best. They were never trained to teach online and never thought they would be teaching this way, however, my admiration for all of our teachers is immense. They are working harder than ever and continue to do so, because they want to give the best they can, so your children continue learning.

I greatly appreciate the support and positivity the vast majority of parents are showing towards our teachers. The respect and encouragement you show towards our teachers affirms their work and eases their load a bit. Thank you very much.

SeeSaw (our online platform) released some stats last week. I think these stats point to the good work and positive attitude of our community.

SMMPS is in the top 20% for Activity on SeeSaw Schools Nationally for the Month of July.

- 497 connected family members
- Averaging 1266 posts per day
- Averaging 731 comments per day
- Averaging 635 likes per day
- Averaging 422 family visits per day

**AND HERE'S MY ADVICE** if it's getting too much:

- Go easy on yourself
- Go easy on your kids
- It's okay to take time. The children don't have to do everything we ask.
- Simply read with or to your kids.
- Cook with your kids.
- Go for a walk.
- Play a game
- Have some fun
- It's okay to take a few days out of the process, to reduce the tension between school work and your own work.
- Do a few things that bring you and your family joy – such as one family's idea to 'go camping in their backyard' and toast marshmallows in their bbq pit.
- If the weather is good, perhaps start a small veggie garden project with the kids. Helping things to grow has shown to have great relaxation benefits.
- Sometimes focusing on doing something for someone else, is a great way to help ground one's feelings. Perhaps go through some of the 'unwanted toys' that could be donated.
- Keep it simple.

**ABOVE ALL LOOK AFTER YOURSELF and LOOK AFTER YOUR CHILDREN!**

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**The 'Elephant in the Room'.** I hear the question being asked,

***Will my child need to repeat?***

- **No.** All school children in Victoria are in the same boat during this pandemic (and all Victorian school children cannot repeat the school year!)
- These are exceptional circumstances. We will be taking advice from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCCA) and Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM), as we plan our way forward into next term and into 2021
- We will do our best to address your child's individual needs when they return to school, working forward in hope.
- And don't forget... Children are resilient.

***Where does my child sit compared to the rest of the class?***

- Due to the limited evidence we can gather, we can make no comment on this matter.
- The authenticity of any evidence submitted cannot be verified. (Maybe a parent or someone else completed a task. Maybe a child has excelled at home and is now doing exceptionally well. We can't be sure.)

**There will be a lot more to come on Assessment and Reporting into next term.** I am meeting regularly with fellow Principals and senior leaders in CEM and again, we are taking advice from the VCCA and CEM.

## **FEES and LEVIES**

The Catholic Education Melbourne Policy on Fee Relief states:

As some families are more affected than others, there is no requirement for blanket fee relief and schools are asked to offer adjustments on a case-by-case basis to ensure that our support and assistance goes to where it is most needed.

Once again, I invite any family struggling with finances to email me and let me know. I am not interested in details. I appreciate that many of you have lost your jobs or have had your hours significantly cut. I know how hard it is for many families. I share your concerns and worry, as I see that happening in my own extended family. I know, I am one of the lucky ones, but I still worry for my adult children and their families.

I have been humbled by the stories shared and I am only too prepared to provide fee relief to families struggling. You simply have to trust me and let me know.

The school's ongoing costs are still relevant. The school may not be fully functional, but we have the 'plant' to upkeep:

- We have buildings and grounds that need to be maintained.
- We are spending a considerable amount on recommended cleaning procedures and schedules to keep the school COVID safe.
- We are still paying for services, e.g. gas, electricity, water
- All staff are still working either onsite or at home and are being paid

## LEVIES

I appreciate there has been some discussion around levies. In short, we are redirecting levies to cover unexpected educational costs.

- We have had increased costs in providing devices for families to access online learning. We also needed to buy suitable chargers for the home, for each of these devices.
- There was significant cost incurred 'testing and tagging' all devices prior to being sent home
- Many of these devices will have to be replaced next year, simply because of 'wear and tear'. In fact, we estimate to bring SMMPs back up to an adequate ratio, we will need to purchase 200 devices next year.

There have been no excursions, however, the school heavily subsidises camps and excursions each year from sources beyond levies, up to the tune of \$80,000. We do this, so your children get opportunities at reduced cost to you. The levy allocated to excursions is only \$50.00 per child. Buses, to travel to excursions, cost the school \$10 per child per bus!

## CAMP

We were holding out hope that the Year 4 & Y 6 Camps would still go ahead, for the benefit of the children, especially for our Year 6 students.

Given the circumstances, particularly the fact that the borders are closed, these camps will probably not go ahead.

We will refund all Camp Fees paid. We will be able to make refunds at the end of the school year when we reconcile the school's accounts.

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I trust everyone is well and keeping safe. We will get through this together.

We continue to entrust our families, school and community to the care of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Mary MacKillop.

Take care everyone,



**Anthony McCluskey**

**Principal**

## **FROM the WELLBEING LEADER- Jennie Monaghan**

In this issue of Staying Connected, our focus is to continue providing support for our families and their children.

As I watched the news last night, up came a slide that said as Melbournians, we have been in some form of lockdown for 81 days - 88 days if you have been in one of the 'hotspot' postcodes! I was initially surprised that it had been that long, but then after further thought, yes it has been a very long time.

As we enter Week 3 of this Stage 4 Lockdown, some people are talking about things appearing to be harder now. This 'Time of COVID 19' continues to present challenges and our reserves need some topping up. With this in mind, we have included

- An article written by Michael Grose of Parenting Ideas with some strategies to assist parents and kids to '[Staying The course in COVID times](#)', and
- Some ideas from the OSHC Organisation for some fun activities that can be done at home. <https://www.oshclub.com.au/oshc-at-home>. (Kellie will email some activities home.)

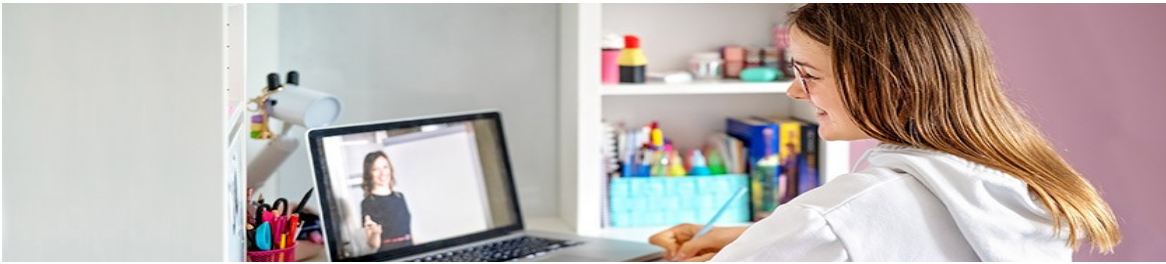
Should you require any assistance please feel free to contact us at the school either by phone or email.

Wishing you and your family well,

Jennie Monaghan

Wellbeing Leader

## Staying the course in COVID times



**POSITIVE PARENTING** by Michael Grose

COVID-19 continues to test us in ways that were unimaginable at the start of 2020. It's becoming the defining event of this generation and a reference point for decades to come. We've had depression kids, war kids and now we have COVID-19 kids.

The impact of COVID-19 is felt differently across the country. Currently, Victoria is in Stage 4 lockdown while other states are on high alert. Not every student is working from home, but most students are COVID conscious, knowing that they're only a corona cough or virus-filled hug away from remote learning.

Encouraging kids to stay the course when they've been denied access to the classroom, peers and community activities is now a common parenting challenge. Denial is generally tolerable in the short term, but the novelty of changed circumstances soon wears off. The following strategies will assist both parents and kids to stay the COVID long course:

### Accept difficult emotions

'There's nothing so bad that we can't talk about, but there are behaviours that we won't accept' is a mantra that serves families well. It's okay for children to feel frustrated, annoyed, angry or upset about their change of circumstances due to the pandemic but that doesn't give them permission to behave disrespectfully, miss school requirements or fail to assist at home. It helps if parents validate how their children feel, then encourage them to focus on fulfilling school and family expectations.

### Encourage acceptance

Some children and young people will protest the COVID induced changes that have been imposed upon them. In some respects, it may be admirable for children to push for a better deal, but the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic means that the individual needs to bend toward the greater community good. This is simply a case of accepting and making the best of the situation at hand.



## Take it one day and week at a time

On family bush walks my young children would rarely complain when the tracks were windy. The complaint levels rose when paths were long and straight as the finish line seemed such a long way off. In a similar vein during our current times it's smart to keep kids focused on getting through each day and week rather than look too far ahead. Six weeks of Stage 4 may seem intolerable, so it's better to focus on getting through each day and week.

## Be the hope person

Help children and young people understand that they will get through difficult times. "This too shall pass" is perhaps the most apt meme for our times. If your hope bucket is emptying out, seek out positive friends and relatives who can top it up. Our own resilience needs nurturing if we are to last the distance.

The internal parenting manual that guides us probably doesn't include chapters dealing with remote learning, lack of peer interaction and kids' disappointment. Most of us are treading new parenting ground so it's best to be open to change, accepting of difficulties and forgiving of inevitable parenting stumbles.

## Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 year's experience, and has 30 year's experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.