

Message for the Crescent community from Karin Fleming,

3 April, 2020

Dear all,

As we head into Holy Week, there is still a lot of uncertainty with regard to the reopening of schools and the staging of the State examinations. This is regrettable and it contributes significantly to the anxiety and stress levels experienced by many students, teachers, and families.

I wish to advise you that we in Crescent are planning and making contingency arrangements in the event that schools do not reopen until May, or not at all. These plans will incorporate the continuation of teaching and learning, end of year assessment, recruitment, organisation of classes for 2020/21, to name but a few.

The first of these, the continuation of T & L is of course the most significant, it is the bedrock on which schools exist. As I have said previously, I am hugely impressed by the response by teachers and students to the challenges posed by the abrupt closure of schools three weeks ago today. People have shown remarkable resilience in adapting smoothly to new methods of distance education. In Crescent we are using Microsoft Teams and the information I am receiving is that the experience is positive. Naturally there was some adjustment required for all, and in each family home, whether for the teacher or student, the facilities and opportunities differ. Some teachers have also held 'real time' classes on occasions, however it is of course not possible, or necessarily desirable that the regular timetable is replicated. To put it simply, were a school established to provide remote teaching for an extended period, an alternative timetable would be drawn up, taking into account the entirely different circumstances and demands.

Our ICT and Digital committee met yesterday, remotely of course, to review the provision to date and consider further supports for term 3. A separate notice will issue with regard to any recommendations or proposals from this group.

We know of course that it is not only the classroom experience which helps to form the young person, but also the relationships between classmates, school mates, teachers, support staff, team mates; this is certainly the case in Crescent and we place so much value on relationships, the respect we have for each other, the trust, as well as the fun of course. We are missing out on all of this. Students feel isolated, not just from school, but from other forms of socialising; teachers miss the camaraderie with colleagues and the engagement with their students. As for myself, I even miss speaking each morning to the whole school over the tannoy at 10.30 am when I read the day's notices, and I also miss the very real energy we, the adults, get from our interaction with students.

I recognise that these are tiny sacrifices in the grand scheme of things, a pandemic, however I mention them here to recognise that many are feeling genuinely isolated, and that this is compounded by the general worry regarding the impact on our country, our citizens, and worldwide. I remind you that if you are feeling alone or anxious that our Guidance counsellors and other members of our Wellbeing team are available to support you. Try to control the things you can, your daily and weekly routine, making sure to have a different rhythm at weekends, and similarly to take the next two weeks of Easter holidays as an opportunity to recover from the last few weeks, so that you can 'come back' on 20 April, with renewed energy. You will need this for the final term.

Our board of management held an incorporeal meeting on 1 April and send their good wishes to all during these extraordinary times. The next meeting of the board is scheduled for 13 May. As you are

aware, I gave notice of my intention to retire as Principal at the end of this academic year, and the board will move to advertise this role in the coming weeks.

I wish to end by addressing our exam students, in particular our Leaving Cert students. The conditions under which you are preparing for final examinations are not ideal, and must be taxing your energy and good humour. I am disappointed that there has been no clarity as yet with regard to the exams; the conflicting stories in the media are upsetting and distracting. No doubt officials in the Department of Education and Skills and the State Exams Commission are doing their best and giving this their full attention and so we must be patient. It is my sincere wish that you hear soon the definitive plan. In the meantime, I can only suggest that you continue to follow the advice of your teachers, stick to your plan, ask for help if you are struggling, and to regularly give yourselves permission to take a break from it all.

I pay tribute again to you all, teachers, students and parents; we are in this together, for each other, our extended families, our communities, our country, and always those who are the most vulnerable in our society, and those who are performing essential work so that we can all return to normal sometime in the future.

With every good wish, God bless,

Karin