

7 April 2020

Dear Colleagues,

COVID-19
Quality Learning and Teaching

Your continued support of the students, staff and parents in your school community and the calm approach you are taking in leading others during the COVID-19 crisis is greatly appreciated. Your faith-filled, intelligent, generous, and courageous leadership continues to define our collective Marist response. In this critical time, as *leaders of learning*, we are called to consistently promote and inspire high aspirations for learning and teaching with our students, staff and parents. It is not an easy task. Vital is the need to bring a growth mindset to the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching in the midst of the greatest health and economic crisis in our shared life experience. As *leaders of learning*, we are compelled to grow the engagement, progress and achievement of every student in our care.

A new learning paradigm

Schools across the world are grappling with the challenge of delivering learning to students in their homes. In most of the developed countries, online learning has become “mainstream”. As with many other industries, businesses, and services, responses to the impacts of the virus are likely to influence education in some ways for many years to come. Learning and teaching from home is a paradigm shift for our students and educators. Without a physical classroom, leaders and teachers are seeking new ways to gather feedback on how students are engaged and progressing. Maintaining a culture of collaboration and mutual support between teachers and, teachers with middle and senior leaders is paramount. Ensuring as much as possible equity of access to offsite learning, particularly for our boarding school students from remote areas presents further challenges. For some of our students for whom home is frequently a volatile and unsettled environment, learning from home is proving difficult. The Australian media is currently reporting the increased pressures on parents to work from home while, at the same time, ensuring their children are learning.

Our Marist way of educating during COVID-19

As always, and particularly at this time of crisis, the capacity of our Marist schools to continue to deliver high quality learning and teaching for each of the students in our care is a fundamental priority. The goal of every school in this matter is clear: to maintain and grow the engagement, progress and achievement of every student. This is sacred work. It is the work we are called to do in the spirit of Saint Marcellin and our Marist mission:

We exist to support the Catholic Church’s evangelising mission to make Jesus known and loved and to ensure quality education in the Marist tradition.

(Marist Schools Australia Mission Statement)

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Following an intense period of close consultation by the MSA Regional Directors with all MSA Principals, necessitated by the COVID-19 crisis, the following *learning principles* are presented in an effort to capture our shared commitment at this time and provide support and guidance as we continue to further develop, deliver and refine the practices and processes of offsite learning arrangements.

1. We are Mission focussed

We exist to support the Catholic Church's evangelising mission to fulfil the educational, pastoral, and spiritual needs of our current and future students and their families. This is our work. This priority guides all decisions related to the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching.

2. We are Learner Focused

Every learner is like all others, like some others and like no other and we are called to respond creatively, flexibly and effectively to ensure the best possible learning outcomes for every student.

3. We are committed to feedback rich reflective practice in relation to the new paradigm

At this time, as new ways of learning and teaching unfold, the voices of the key stakeholders must be heard, with preference for those we serve, our parents and their children.

4. Our values as Marist educators are evident

The characteristics of Marist education remain important touchstones in the design and delivery of this new paradigm.

- **Presence.** By, for example, seeking alternative ways of maintaining positive relationships between students and between teachers and students through regular check in, online or phone discussions and pastoral care.
- **Simplicity.** By, for example, ensuring simplicity of access and delivery in our teaching and clarity in our expectations of students and colleagues.
- **Family Spirit.** By, for example, ensuring preferential attention and support is provided to those students whose needs are greatest or for those whose situational context is more complex.
- **Love of Work.** By, for example, seeking ways of making offsite learning arrangements engaging, varied, flexible and meaningful through active participation and where possible, learning by doing.
- **In the Way of Mary.** By, for example, bringing the Marial dimensions of tenderness, strength and consistency to our teaching, and ensuring prayer and reflection are important components of the way we deliver offsite learning arrangements to our families.

5. We respect and respond to diversity among our students

We seek to provide personalised learning where possible for each student. We acknowledge that for some students, offsite learning arrangements will offer some



distinct advantages while for others there is likely to be some degree of learning loss. Adapting for the diversity present in any classroom becomes more demanding in offsite learning arrangements and therefore requires strategies to ensure student voice and agency and the building of a safe, supportive and productive learning environment.

6. We are committed to excellence in teachers and teaching

The role of the teacher remains the critical element in ensuring successful learning by students. Clarity of communication and regular, specific feedback to students in offsite learning arrangements where the use of online technologies and other remote arrangements are understood and practised as supplementary to teaching and not a replacement of the teacher.

7. Our Principals are leaders of learning

The Principal, clearly positioned as *leader of learning*, is critical in ensuring consistency and quality in the delivery of learning experiences for all students. Visible leadership by the Principal of the learning journey during COVID-19, will be the key influencer in building the morale and professional capacity of teachers, the confidence of parents, and importantly the successful learning outcomes for students.

Living and Leading with Paradox during COVID-19

There are some obvious and not so obvious tensions and paradoxes for schools in navigating our way through this time. Our education has often trained us to have a desire for explicit answers and explanations and perhaps, be less tolerant of ambiguity and paradox. And yet we find ourselves in new territory and in these times, we are all learning. Seeking out the advice and support of others during this period is vitally important and to that end, it will be our intention to continue seeking ways of supporting schools and curating the sharing resources between schools for the benefit of our students. This is, after all, Marist family spirit in action.

Further Advice and Support

Over the coming weeks a portal page dedicated to Learning and Teaching at Home will be established on the MSA website. You will be encouraged to contribute to it and consult it frequently as together we seek to find new ways of delivering a distinctively Marist way of educating for the young people in our care.

Yours sincerely

Dr Frank Malloy
National Director