Thursday 23 June 2022

Dear Parents and Families

As 2022 progresses, we continue to witness the great resilience of our families learning communities across the Diocese as you respond to the demands created by the pandemic. This year has brought a raft of new challenges for school communities as both COVID 19 and influenza move through schools. We recognise the demands that this places on both families and school staff.

The first six months of this year have, in many ways, been more difficult than the first two years of COVID. The not knowing who will be available to work and who will turn up to be taught on any given day has been, and will continue to be, very demanding on all. This is compounded by the shortage of teachers that many schools are facing.

As you will be aware, we continue to are experience high levels of COVID in Victoria, with cases currently around 8000 per day. Influenza cases are also rising rapidly and are greater than pre-pandemic levels. Modelling indicates that schools will continue to face high levels of illness as winter progresses. School communities face the possibility of peak influenza and COVID infections occurring in late winter or early spring - with the August and September period being the historical time of greatest illness within the community (Doherty Institute and FluTracking).

As we move into the second half of the year, we are seeking to be proactive in the interests of students, families and staff by creating a planned opportunity to pause next term. We appreciate that there may be some concern about lost learning time with the inclusion of a brief pause in Term 3, but we know that healthy educational communities optimise learning by being deliberate about wellbeing and planning proactively.

Therefore, as there are no scheduled long weekends in Term 3, to enable school communities to have a short respite during next term, DOBCEL schools have been given the opportunity to have a ‘circuit breaker’ weekend in either Week 5 or Week 6 of Term 3. This means that your school will close on (Choose date/s; Friday 12 August and Monday 15 August or Friday 19 August and Monday 22 August.

The circuit breaker weekend is in addition to any other school based measures that schools may take to manage staff and student absences throughout Term 3.

We are making this announcement early to allow families to make arrangements.

We are very hopeful that this circuit breaker will reduce staff and student absences in the long run and to ensure any further pandemic and influenza disruptions are reduced.

Yours sincerely

**Tom Sexton**

Executive Director

Catholic Education Ballarat