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Friday, 3 April 2020

Dear parents/guardians and students,

I often open a letter to families by expressing the hope that it finds you keeping well. In the midst of this global pandemic, I now send that sentiment to you like never before. Whilst much of what I write in this letter is related to education matters, everyone's primary focus at this time has to be on staying well and on all the measures that we have to follow in the short term to come safely through this emergency in the coming weeks. It really is a case of short term pain for long term gain.

I wish to address some thoughts to you as we begin the Easter holiday period.

Parents/Guardians

I fully appreciate the upheaval that the current crisis is causing you. You will be balancing your role of family protectors with the very real worries and issues that are out there at this time. Many of you will have worries that you never saw coming – unemployment, loss of earnings, fear of illness, child care issues, care of elderly and vulnerable relatives. The list is endless. Many of you work as healthcare professionals and, in doing your job, expose yourselves to a level of risk that is a major concern in itself. In doing that, you have the country's support and appreciation like never before. The same can be said of all parents/guardians who are working long hours in many different roles as part of the national effort to keep the country operating. Others are able to carry on as best as possible whilst working from home, albeit with the many challenges that presents. For all, these are demanding and worrying times.

Through all of this, we must keep an eye on the longer term and believe that, in time, a degree of normality will return. I urge you to mind yourselves and never to be afraid to express your fears and worries to loved ones and close friends. We genuinely are all in this together and I believe that this togetherness will stand to us in the weeks and months ahead.

Students

I understand the real upheaval in your daily lives being caused by the current school closure and, in particular, the enforced separation from your friends. You appreciate by now the very difficult situation in which we and the world find ourselves. Your main concern must be to stay safe and to follow all the instructions issued to protect you, your families and society in general - frequent and thorough hand-washing, proper procedure when coughing or sneezing, social distancing, self-isolation if required and staying at home.

I respectfully urge you to play your full part at home during these troubled times. Parents/guardians might need more support from you than you think as they may have big issues on their minds. Be sure to help with the practical jobs around the house e.g. cleaning, tidying, cooking, gardening that are so important especially when our homes are more occupied than they would normally be.

I wish to thank so many of you for engaging so well with your teachers in recent weeks. Teaching, learning and assessment by remote means is not easy and has been a challenge to some. Nothing can replace the dynamic of the classroom where all students are physically present with teacher.

Today marks the start of the Easter holidays. Communication from teachers will, in the main, cease this afternoon for a fortnight and, in line with agreed school policy, homework will not be set for the holiday period. Teachers have been reminded of this earlier in the week. This will allow you the opportunity to rest and refresh over the next two weeks so as to be ready for the final term in whatever form that may take.

Our Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, announced yesterday that the State examinations will proceed this year “by hook or by crook.” The State Examinations Commission is working hard to come up with plans to ensure that this happens. Therefore, our 3rd and 6th year students should take heart and continue to prepare as normally as possible under the present circumstances. Accordingly, the Easter period for these students should be a healthy mix of rest and relaxation with a good programme of revision in all subjects, just as in a normal school year.

We can expect an announcement by the government within the next 10 days or so as to whether or not schools will re-open on Monday, 20 April.

During term time, all students are asked to check their school emails on a daily basis for communications from teachers.

I wish to remind all students who receive learning support and one-to-one counselling that your teachers continue to be available to you by email contact during term time. Please do not hesitate to contact them with any concerns that you may have.

I really feel sorry for our TY students. No work experience. No school tour to Spain. Not sure if the Glendalough trip can proceed in May. However, I assure you that, when school does resume, we will make a serious effort to provide you with some outing to compensate for the loss that you have experienced so far this year. I also want you to know that refunds for the school tour will be posted to your parents on Monday next.

1st years, you too will be missing out on your scheduled tour in May. Let’s see if we can re-organise that for later in the year – something to which to look forward.

Before I conclude, I would like to assure all parents/guardians and students that a great deal of school work continues as normal. All payments to suppliers and staff are fully up to date. The Board of Management continues to function, albeit remotely. We have finalised the school timetable for 2020/2021. The building and grounds continue to be maintained and we are about to sign a contract for the replacement of the playing surface on the hockey pitch so that it will be ready for September.

I have been blessed with the support of a highly efficient and flexible staff in recent weeks, both teaching and non-teaching. Through their superb efforts we have been able to keep going as well as possible and I now express the hope that they too might benefit from a break over the Easter period.

I will continue to check my emails on a daily basis so please feel free to contact me at principal@loretowexford.com if I can be of any assistance.

I wish every blessing on the full Loreto community in the coming weeks and conclude by offering you the following:

This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.
Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.
If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.

JOHN O'DONOHUE

Excerpt from his books, To Bless the Space Between Us (US) / Benedictus (Europe)

Yours faithfully,

Billy O' Shea,
Principal.