



OUR REF :

TRN : 10025955100003

DATE : Friday, 3rd April 2020

To: The Parents of students from years 1-13 (CIRCULAR REGARDING UPDATES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING FOR WEEK THREE 5TH TO 9TH APRIL 2020)- MINISTRY DECREE (229) ON CONTINUATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING UNTIL THE END OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2019-2020.

Dear Parents,

Greetings from St. Marys. As I write this update, I find myself struggling for the right words as we all come to terms with this 'new normal'. I was reading an article a few days ago and I came across these lines that I would like to share with you dear parents: ***"COVID-19 represents the single greatest inflection point that global society has experienced. How we manage through this pandemic and its aftermath will impact the course of humanity for decades to come."*** – Tom Golway

We truly miss all of our **1939** students. We are concerned for our students' health and well-being, as well as their families. Although none of us have experienced a pandemic before, The UAE government and the community at large have quickly risen to the occasion to ensure the safety of all of us who live here and in a very progressive gesture, they have ensured that the 'learning' continues for our children.

The next few months will not be easy. There will be mistakes, problems, and concerns along the way. However, there will be more successes, happiness, hope, laughter, fun, and purpose! We are very grateful for the immense feedback we have received from parents over the last two weeks. We have tried our best to adapt and modify our plan for Distance Learning based on much of that feedback. We would also like you to understand that not all suggestions are practical and there are a plethora of factors that must be looked into when we plan delivery of lessons synchronously and asynchronously. I must note here that the students must be admired for their collaboration and flexibility and what has been most apparent has been their unwavering resilience even in these times of uncertainty.

We understand and fully empathize that many parents are also working remotely at this time and now have the challenge of managing and/or monitoring your children's work more closely. We also recognize that this is a time fraught with uncertainty in matters of finance and health as well as for all of us expatriates, the added anxiety of aging parents in our home countries. Our teachers share similar worries with us and so we understand that we are not alone in these unprecedented times. We will try our best to support our students and you through these challenging times. All this has been taken into account as we adjust our teaching and delivery of units of learning and we only request you not to stress over the school work via distance learning. We are doing our best to provide our students with school work that keeps their minds engaged and active. But do remember, that at this point in time they are in your physical space and there may be days when you will want to adjust some work as you see fit. Please do so! We also ask for your patience and understanding as we travel this new territory and technology minefield. Our teachers are working much longer hours now while dealing with this 'new normal.'

For our students who have had their London Board Examinations cancelled, we are waiting for the official policy document from Pearson Edexcel as regards the global awarding criteria to enable students to receive a certified qualification. For school processes like subject options for those in year eight going to year nine, forms requiring information about a student's return to school next year, book lists for next year etc. , we ask that you follow our school website closely for updates.

WEEK THREE : Sunday, 5th April to Thursday, 9th April (Please note that 9th April being Maundy Thursday, there will be no live or synchronous lessons with very minimal work in core subjects only set for the day. Please do not worry if plans for Thursday are on the website, these might have been prepared in advance of this decision.)

All work for WEEK THREE across all year groups will be a review and recap of what has been done during the first two weeks. This has been in response to feedback that there has been a rather large volume of work for children as we began the Distance Learning and we would like to give both children and parents an opportunity to catch up on any pending work. We are of course continuing to work to achieve a more workable balance for the weeks ahead.

ZOOM session schedule for English, Math, Science and Arabic for years 1-4.

Parents in years 1-4 will receive the schedule of ZOOM SESSIONS for the week at the start of the week itself. Many parents have asked us the reason for scheduling these in the evening for the youngest members of our school family. Our reasons are to make sure that the children are safe online as parents are available in the evening to monitor them. They are still young and we all know that the virtual world is not a safe place for children. It is also our humble request that once you have set up the system for your child, that you let the lesson be just between the teacher and her students.

ONE EVENING (25 minute) CLASS TEACHER AND CLASS ZOOM SESSION (NON ACADEMIC)

As we move into this extended time frame for Distance Learning the pastoral needs of our children become paramount. We would like to reserve this space for the children to spend time with one another and their teachers. Although this is not going to be a 'scripted' time, we do have an idea of what we would like to see during these 'time together moments'. Teachers will invite children to join together in a simple prayer just like they are used to doing at school. We would like to give Birthday Shout outs and sing 'Happy Birthday' to all those children who will be celebrating their Birthdays at this time. Please have your child tell his/her class teacher when it's their birthday. We haven't been able to host our talent show, but this would be the perfect time for children to share their talents with their friends and help everyone feel much better connected. For years one through four, if any parent has a special talent, even if it is to animatedly read a story to the children please let the teacher know so it can be arranged. (These sessions will be more frequent in the coming weeks).

TEN MINUTE STRETCH WORKOUT VIA ZOOM DURING THE SPORTS LESSONS (YEARS 5-11) AND A SIMPLE DANCE OR EXERCISE VIDEO FOR LOWER PRIMARY CHILDREN.

Knowing how energetic our children are, we can understand how hard it must be for them not to be able to go out and play . We want them to move a little too but don't worry nothing as intense that it might have the neighbours living below you complain. Our sports teachers will engage the children in years 5-11 during their weekly sports lesson in some simple upper and lower body stretch exercises and sometimes in some simple calming mindfulness. For the lower primary, we will send a short video every week to get children dancing or moving.

ATTENDANCE and LIVE LESSON ENGAGEMENT FOR YEARS 5 THROUGH 13 for the rest of the term until the end of the Academic Year:

Attendance across all levels shows a very high level of attendance but not yet 100% . Attendance in the extended Distance Learning now takes two forms: DAILY ATTENDANCE REGISTRATION AT 7:30 AM as well as ATTENDANCE MAINTAINED BY THE TEACHER FOR ALL LIVE ZOOM SESSIONS AND GOOGLE CLASSROOM. We would like to appeal to all parents to explain to your children the importance of their engagement in lessons as whatever assessments take place during those lessons will be key evidence for end of year results and subsequent promotion. It is only fair to understand that students who are consistently absent from lessons and those who do not turn in work as required will jeopardize their position with regard to promotion. We understand that sometimes a child maybe ill and unable to attend lessons . We will look at overall attendance, engagement in live lessons, assessment for learning , mini quizzes and work that teachers have asked to be turned in as evidence for end of year results and subsequent promotion. We will have our teachers do their best to contact parents of those children who are falling behind in their attendance and their school work. Your support in ensuring that children take this seriously will be greatly appreciated.

ETIQUETTE DURING ONLINE LESSONS ESPECIALLY ZOOM SESSIONS :

We have uploaded to the school website some simple guidelines for the children to follow to make these learning sessions pleasant and meaningful for all. It must be said here that the older students, especially those in year eleven, twelve and thirteen have shown incredible maturity and decency with their teachers and with each other in these online sessions. This has not always been the case particularly with boys in years seven and eight. We would like parents to constantly remind their children about expectations for decent behaviour. I am sure we can all agree that during these challenging times, we would not like to add online disciplinary issues to an already long list of hurdles that we all have to overcome.

CYBERSAFETY:

Sadly in these times, there are bad people that want to take advantage of us in our new "digital" distance classrooms and increased "free" digital time. We must be diligent in ensuring they are not allowed to invade the world of our children. Please discuss cyber safety with your children and monitor them as much as you possibly can. We are providing up to date information to teachers to lock sessions etc. Zoom, which now has over 32 million users worldwide with increasing numbers, is also looking to secure control to keep its platform safe. Our best advice for now is to avoid children joining zoom sessions in which no adult is present. This is one of the main reasons we have scheduled Zoom sessions in the evening for years 1-4.

PASTORAL SUPPORT:

While much of the conversations around COVID-19 focus on the impacts on physical health, I want to acknowledge the significant effects this outbreak may be having on the mental health of us all. Particularly, our youngest learners may be struggling to fully understand and process what it means to their lives, families, friends, and communities. This may very well be a time of fear and anxiety for your child, even if it is not readily apparent. Our counselors continue to be available by email. From week four and until the end of the academic year we will be having dedicated staff available to support the younger children's pastoral needs. Their contact details will be made available with further details about this in our next update towards the end of week three. For adults who need help through this Pandemic, a UAE-based group is offering help in this area. <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/coronavirus-pandemic/combating-covid-19-free-mental-health-consultation-for-uae-residents>

The following link is for the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention for latest updates on Covid-19. mohap.gov.ae/en/AwarenessCenter/Pages/COVID-19.aspx

Finally we would like to assure you of our support at this challenging time. Our Vice Principal, Ms. Lise-Ann (lpinto-smchs@smgeducation.org) will continue to be the main point of reference for parents and students with regard to any major concern, issues, worries whether academic or non-academic during this extended phase of Distance Learning. She has requested parents to include a reachable mobile number in their emails in case she needs to speak to you on the phone. For minor concerns, you may write directly to your child's teacher. All teachers emails are available in the contacts section of the school website.

Since Easter Sunday was a scheduled day off for our school, we will not have lessons on that day. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all those families preparing for Holy Week –a peaceful and prayerful Holy Week. I pray that this will be an opportunity for family members to draw closer to one another in prayer and hope. To the entire school family, I would like to offer our prayers for the safety and health of one and all. Please follow the WHO and UAE Government guidelines using social distancing and hygiene protocol. Remember, life will get back to normal, eventually, but hopefully, after this pandemic phase is over, our lives will include more appreciation of our blessings and our relationships.

Yours sincerely,



**Mr. Paul Asir Joseph
(Principal)**

