



Kia Ora Katoa St. Francis Xavier Whanau,

It was inevitable that New Zealand would find itself in lockdown again as the Covid Delta variant took hold around the world so here we go again (I'm sure that's the title of a bad song).

I'm reaching out to the community today not only as a representative of the Board of Trustees but also as a parent of school age children, albeit that my children are no longer at St Francis Xavier.

There are many concerns and challenges that parents have about their children in relation to lockdown and I class myself as one of those parents. Will my children fall behind in their learning? Will their friend group at school be the same or will there be a shift in dynamics in the time they've been away? Will there ever come a day that I don't have to harass my son about getting his work done instead of playing on the play station? Will my hair grow back after I've pulled it out in frustration about trying to balance work, parenting, home schooling and feeding my whanau?

I can't answer all of these questions but I would like to share a personal story which may help to navigate some of these issues. Eighteen months ago my daughter became very ill and was unable to attend school for nearly a year. My initial concerns didn't involve her schooling as our focus was on her health. Eventually I began to worry about the long term impact of this situation on her learning, her friendships and her social belonging – friend groups in school environments are constantly changing. There is a long version to this story, but I'll give you the short one. She eventually was able to transition back to school and within six months she has completely caught up. As for the friends and social belonging, she was welcomed back with open arms by people she hadn't even anticipated would miss her and although there was a change in dynamics, she re-established herself within her friend group.

What's the relevance of this story? It's hopefully to provide some confidence that your children will be OK. They won't fall behind in their learning and whilst I understand that some students find the academic work more challenging than others, I have every confidence in the St Francis Xavier teaching team to support them. Although there may be some changes in friend dynamics, as parents we can help our children navigate their way through the world of relationships and again, I know that the team at St Francis are only too willing to work with you.

I am particularly mindful that we have parents who are essential workers. On behalf of our school community, I would like to extend our thanks to you for all that you are doing, and also to extend an offer of assistance. We know the extra pressures you are facing currently, and I would urge you please to reach out to us if there's anything that we can support you with.

In due course, following further advice from the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Education, we will be making announcements about how we transition children back to school. This won't be immediate for any school in the country and we are no exception. As a parent, I share everyone's frustrations about home schooling. As a Board representative, I'm resolute in ensuring we follow the guidelines laid out when the time comes.

Thank you for your continued co-operation with the school team and a big thank you to all of the staff at St. Francis Xavier for the fantastic work that you are doing.

God bless you all

Joanne Ashby
Chairperson