



Jeppe High School for Boys

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18th May 2021

Dear Jeppe parents,

I hope and trust that you are all keeping well and, like myself, have enjoyed seeing the joy on the faces of so many of our boys as they have engaged in various sporting activities over the past two weeks. Despite the disruption and difficult circumstances of the times, we have been very fortunate to enjoy a number of fixtures and are very grateful to all our staff and fellow schools for their flexibility in the organisation of fixtures and to the continued support of our parents despite your understandable frustrations at being unable to watch your sons perform in person due to the current government regulations.

Unfortunately, while I still believe we are in a fortunate position compared to many, I can confirm that we have had an increase in the number of COVID-related incidents within the school over the last few days - either learners (and one staff member) testing positive or students/staff having to isolate as a precaution. We have either informed those boys and parents who are deemed to have been "close contacts", and are therefore required to enter a period of isolation, or are currently in the process of doing so.

We are acutely aware, too, of the increased concern among many in the community and the reality of the increase in cases across society as a whole. It is for this reason that at each and every opportunity we continue to stress to boys the importance of responsible behaviour.

We are relatively comforted, however, by the fact that there remains no indication that the virus is being spread within the school. This is a point which I believe is important to note - there remains no evidence to suggest that either classroom activity OR the extramural programme are currently responsible for the spreading of the virus within our Jeppe community. As evidence of this, despite the high numbers of sports participation at Jeppe, of the five positive cases that have arisen this week, only one of those learners is involved in the sports programme at all; the others having not participated in any organised activity at the school over the past two weeks. Please also note that, when speaking to the parents and learners in these cases, it appears that the virus was most likely acquired via community transmission and not within a classroom or sporting setting.

I would also like to confirm that, at the time of writing, we remain very grateful that none of our positive cases have experienced anything other than being asymptomatic or presenting with mild symptoms - long may this continue!

The increase in cases, for the time being, seems also to be almost exclusively within our senior grades. This is concerning given that these young men have the most to lose from the year ahead - both academically and extra-murally. I once again appeal to parents to assist us in limiting the social interactions of the boys on weekends and outside of school and to remain vigilant at all times in following COVID protocols.

*Turning **black and white** into **gold***

I once again met with the Matrics today and reiterated my stance that school is, in my opinion, the safest place for them to be. This view is supported by recent articles such as the [position statement by the South African Paediatric Association on 1st February 2021](#) and another interesting article in last week's Financial Mail on the [vaccination programme and COVID in schools by Nic Spaull](#), a respected senior economic and education researcher and writer at Stellenbosch University.

Whilst the health risks of the virus to children remain low, there is a growing body of educational and medical opinion that believes that the social, emotional, physical and mental benefits of children attending school and continuing with activities such as sport outweigh the risk of cocooning them at home. However, I am also not unaware of, and sympathetic to, families who have lost loved ones or had their livelihoods impacted by this terrible virus nor am I unaware of the individual circumstances of many families who live with elderly or sick family members. In such cases, I can appreciate, understand and support the heightened concern and fear that these parents and learners have for the virus and would be fully supportive of these parents should they wish to withdraw their children from school sport in the short term in order to minimise their unique family health risks.

For clarity sake, as mentioned in previous communications, our intention remains to follow medical advice as clinically as possible, with respect to each individual situation. Should a student test positive within a class or a sports team it will not result in a blanket cancellation, closure etc. Rather, using the clear guidelines around 'close contacts' we will identify the risk, inform and engage with all those affected - boys and staff - and isolate as required or where people feel more comfortable doing so. The standard measure of a 'close contact' is the following; confirmed contact with an individual who has tested positive and where 1) the duration of time was longer than 15 minutes, 2) inside a closed venue and 3) without wearing masks or social distancing.

Should your son test positive or be required to isolate as a result of a potential exposure to the virus, please could I ask that, as previously requested, I am informed as a matter of priority (hms@jeppeboys.co.za) as I am required to report all positive cases to the Gauteng Department of Education. A member of the School Management Team will then be in touch directly in order to check in on your son and family, record any close contacts, discuss potential exposure points and assist with the ideal way forward and eventual return to school. We are also committed to doing as comprehensive and rigorous a track and trace programme as possible, in order to protect all potentially exposed boys and staff.

The predictions around the severity or otherwise of the third wave, the hope of the success of the vaccination process and for how long we will be permitted to continue playing inter-school sport are matters which are not within our control. However, as I hope is evident from our continued sanitisation and screening process, our communications and our interactions with boys, I can assure all parents and stakeholders that we remain committed to doing our part in creating a schooling environment that is as safe as possible; allowing us to continue the crucial work of educating our young men.

Yours in health and education.



Dale Jackson
HEADMASTER