



St Mark's School

Transforming lives through the St Mark's Story

Tuesday, 25 January 2022

Kia ora e te whānau,

Board of Trustees COVID-19 Communication 1

As we move forward into 2022, we do so with some uncertainty in what continues to be an everchanging landscape in response to COVID-19. As a Board of Trustees, we are committed to kōrero (communication) with our school whānau (family), and wherever practicable seeking your thoughts and feedback. We are also committed to adapting and responding to any updated guidance that may come through from the Government via the Ministry of Education as the year progresses.

In December 2021 we asked for whānau feedback on key areas in relation to our legal obligations as both an employer to St Mark's school kaimahi (employees) and to ensure that our precious school is a safe environment for ākonga (students). As COVID-19 is an identified risk, we have obligations to ensure that we take all practicable steps to mitigate this risk.

We received over 40 responses from our school whānau. Although the responses were diverse, there were some clear themes in the feedback: manaaki (caring) for one another amongst uncertain times, ensuring access to opportunities, improving kōrero and risk management were key areas in which there was significant feedback, and areas that the Board of Trustees and St Mark's school kaimahi are able to have some influence over within the parameters of the COVID-19 protection framework.

In addition, there was feedback on a number of areas which fell outside the remit of both the Board of Trustees and kaimahi: these included COVID-19 testing onsite for kaimahi, mātua (parents) and ākonga, vaccination of ākonga, enrolment criteria involving vaccination status, and use of the school for vaccination. These are not areas in which the Board of Trustees has any mandate or influence and therefore have not formed part of our kōrero.

There are several areas which are not at the discretion of the Board of Trustees or kamahi but are laid out as requirements within the COVID-19 protection framework by the Ministry of Education. For this reason, we have included links for our school whānau to familiarise themselves with the framework and its application to education at red, orange and green. We hope you will take the time to familiarise yourself with this, to enhance understanding.

Below is a summary following our consultation of how the school will operate under the COVID-19 protection framework (however, this may be subject to change and if so, will be communicated):

1. St Mark's school is committed to adhering to the Ministry of Health COVID-19: Minimisation and protection strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand and the Ministry of Education COVID-19 protection framework and adapting our policies and operations as a school in alignment with any updated Government guidance.
2. Under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 any kaimahi (paid and unpaid) that have contact with our tamariki (children) and rangatahi (young people) (which includes support people in schools such as the Board of Proprietors, Board of Trustees, Teacher-aides, Administration kaimahi, Parent-teacher Association related activities, maintenance kaimahi and contractors) must be vaccinated.



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3. St Mark's school will ensure all curriculum related activities will not discriminate against any ākonga or members of our school community regardless of their vaccination status. This will mean a variety of opportunities for participation.
4. In accordance with the guidance within the COVID protection framework and a key public health measure to keep kaimahi and ākonga as safe as practicable from the risk of COVID-19 no member of our school community who is unwell should attend school grounds or activities. Kaimahi are to observe ākonga on arrival, checking for symptoms. Mātua and caregivers for those presenting as unwell will be contacted to come and collect.
5. Whānau may access school grounds and deliver / collect their tamariki to / from outside their classroom, but all whānau must contact trace, wear a mask, practice safe distancing, cover coughs and sneezes, uphold hygiene practices of washing hands and keeping unwashed hands away from the face and stay home if unwell. We request that whānau do not remain on school grounds after delivering or collecting their tamariki in order to reduce gatherings of people particularly in the red setting.
6. Whānau will not have access to the classroom during school hours when ākonga are onsite. All hui (meetings) with teachers needs to be pre-arranged, conducted outside of school hours, or at an agreed time/location without the presence of other ākonga. Teachers may request that appropriate public health measures are implemented which may include the hui is at a physical distance, conducted outside and masks worn, or alternative options such as a virtual hui considered.
7. St Mark's school is committed to taking all practicable steps to minimise risk of exposure to COVID-19 and will ensure risk assessments are undertaken for both curriculum and non-curriculum related activities.
8. All curriculum related activities outside the classroom (EOTC) will adhere to Ministry of Education guidelines, we will identify and mitigate risk, and take all practical actions to adhere to the requirements of the venue at which they are held.
9. All non-curriculum related events with more than 50 attendees will only go ahead if a vaccination certificate is required. At some levels within the framework these events will be unable to proceed at all. Should the framework allow and the event proceeds, alternative options such as live streaming or recordings must be in place for any non-curriculum event (such as prize giving) will be live streamed. This will enable equity of access for a variety of scenarios (non-vaccinated whānau, health compromised individuals, working whānau, whānau who are intentional about not attending large gatherings).

Some examples of school-based curriculum-related events and activities include:

- Assemblies (subject to Ministry of Education guidance).
- Physical education classes.
- Parent-teacher hui.
- School plays or cultural activities during class time.
- Pōwhiri (welcome) ceremonies.
- Science fairs.

Some examples of events and activities that are not curriculum-related include:

- Church.
- Prizegiving events involving the wider community.
- School leavers' dinners.
- Weekend sports.
- Community use of swimming pools or other facilities.



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- Out-of-hours music and art, and sporting and cultural activities held out of school hours.
- School fairs and fundraising events.

It can be hard to navigate all of the information so to assist with some clarity at this stage we are proceeding on the assumption that the school year is likely to commence at red within the COVID protection framework as this is the current setting for Waitaha (Canterbury). However between us providing you this information, and school commencing it is also possible that we may move to orange, so we have included what settings will look like at both levels so that all whanau are prepared for both orange and red: <https://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-for-schoolskura/covid-19-protection-framework-advice-for-schools-and-kura/orange/>

At both red and orange, curriculum related activities can continue with public health measures in place:

- Proof of vaccination cannot be requested from ākongā and their whānau attending curriculum related activities.
- Large activities with ākongā, if they are to go ahead, should take place in well-ventilated areas or outdoors.
- Any other activities where ākongā might closely congregate indoors in large numbers will need serious consideration. If they do go ahead, they will need careful planning.

At both red and orange non-curriculum related events should be limited and may only go ahead if a vaccination certificate is required:

- Events may only go ahead if a vaccination certificate is required.
- If bringing others on site, including mātua and caregivers, any general rules for events applicable at the time, will apply.

At red the below additions apply:

- **Face coverings are required all Year 4 students and upwards** when indoors or in close contact with others. Teachers and staff should also wear face coverings for classes Years 4 and up.
- Face coverings are required on school transport for ākongā aged 12 and up.
- Schools must complete regular cleaning and disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces. This includes items like door handles and phones.
- Distance learning supported for those who need to remain at home.
- Specified outdoor school or sporting events — allowed with capacity limits.
- Large groups of ākongā hui indoors should be avoided including assemblies, prize giving's and performances.
- Beyond classroom groupings physical distancing of 1 metre when indoors should be observed wherever practicable.
- Mātua and caregivers dropping off or picking up ākongā before and after school are encouraged to wear a face covering and keep 2 metres distance from others.
- Exercising and singing must be held outdoors.
- Large activities with ākongā should not go ahead unless held outdoors.
- Non-curriculum related events should be limited and may only go ahead if a vaccination certificate is required.
- At red, there are no non-essential visitors on site.

We know that some of the things people may have hoped for in 2022, will be different to your expectations, or will not be able to simply return to the way they once were. We acknowledge that this brings great sadness, and a number of challenges. As a Board of Trustees, we would like to reiterate that the COVID protection framework and its application to education are requirements for all schools



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to adhere to, and as such we have no ability to influence any of the requirements outlined above at orange or red. As many of us are also mātua at the school, we too understand and experience the impact of these difficult circumstances and continue to pray that this pandemic may come to an end.

Whilst many things have changed, there are some things that remain constant. Our kaimahi steadfast commitment to ensuring wonderful teaching and learning opportunities underpinned by best practice, that the special character of our school is woven through every facet of school life, and that it is a safe place for all. Since March 2020, life has been an ongoing testament to our ability to pivot, adapt and be resilient in the face of adversity. We are assured as a Board of Trustees that the incredible team we have at St Mark's will continue to meet the needs of ākonga in creative and exciting ways, as we all continue to live in somewhat uncertain times.

As mentioned above, there was feedback on a number of areas which fell outside the remit of the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees, however, hear and take on board the feedback of our school community and as a result the Board of Trustees has preliminarily approved the allocation of specific pūtea (funds) towards the adoption of live streaming and or recording technology, enhanced communication with whānau and the introduction of appropriate equipment/systems as required to enable this to occur. If it is identified by senior leadership that some additional administrative support is needed for a period to assist in any additional implications of the COVID protection framework, it has been recommended a proposal be brought to the Board of Trustees for the approval of additional funding.

As a special character school, we rest assured in the knowledge that **Isiah 41:10** offers us assurance that amongst times that may feel overwhelming, different, uncomfortable or even scary that the Creator of the Universe gives us these words: *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* We pray that in this next chapter of our St Mark's story, we will continue to walk together with aroha (love) and atawhai (kindness), with huatau (grace), māhaki (humility) and piriponotanga (faithfulness).

And finally, the Ministry of Education has advised they will provide further guidance on the impacts of Omicron following Cabinet's consideration on Tuesday, 25 January 2022. In the interim, they have advised schools not to hold assemblies in both red and orange settings. The Board of Trustees and our senior leadership team led by Dr Averil Worner will continue to communicate with our school community when guidance and instruction is provided. We ask for your patience as we navigate this every changing COVID landscape.

As always, should you wish to communicate with the Board of Trustees please email Lauren Ball (Chairperson) and Claire Bourne (Deputy Chairperson) on saintmarksbot@outlook.com

Nāku noa, nā

Lauren Ball and Claire Bourne

Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson
On behalf of the People sub-committee and
Board of Trustees

M: +64 21 833 980

E: claire.bourne@outlook.com