



Forestville  
**MONTESSORI** School

*Thriving beyond...*



To all our FMS families,

This is quite a long letter and covers areas of great importance, thank you in advance for your time.

These are challenging times. So much has changed in such a short space of time and we've all been impacted. It's hard to believe that only five weeks ago we were celebrating the start of 2020 at FMS with the Community Team's inaugural *Cheese and Wine Evening* where we all felt the strange restraint of social distancing measures. Today, we are in no doubt about what seem crazy one day becomes our new normal as we navigate the pandemic, COVID-19.

All of us have been impacted in ways unfathomable just a few short weeks ago. Like everyone, FMS has been working to adjust to the new realities. Given the fluid nature of the current situation, the FMS Board of Directors has intentionally taken a measured, non reactionary response to ensure we are judicious in our decision making. Put simply, we want to make decisions in the best long term interests of FMS and yet are conscious of the need for short-term responses.

Given the ever changing nature of the landscape we are all navigating, the Board now meets weekly. In consultation with management, immediate decisions have been taken to prudently keep costs to a minimum and delaying some 2020 budget projects whilst continuing to focus of the quality of our enriching educational programs. We take our hats off to all the FMS staff who continue to juggle the daily aspects of running the school with preparation of *Learning from*

*Home* materials to support families who chose to self-isolate. The FMS team moved early and quickly to safeguard lives and focus on wellbeing of students and staff. Thank you to the many families who have sent appreciative feedback and continue to support FMS in so many ways. To this end, I am most appreciative of Denice and her focus on communications with the wider community whilst '*steering the ship*' through uncharted waters.

In times such as these, we know and feel the power of a strong community and there is no doubt that the FMS spirit is shining through. It is worth remembering that this situation we all find ourselves living through, whilst difficult to fathom and navigate on so many different levels, is temporary. Thank you to all those who have warmly shown their support within our community in recent times.

In all our decision making, we believe it is prudent to follow the advice of the Government and Health officials. FMS will be open from Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020 for all families who choose to send their children to our Toddler, Pre-School and Primary Programs. We will ensure you receive any further Government updates during these holidays. We have modelled multiple scenarios and are preparing behind the scenes to continue to provide your children with quality Montessori education. Appropriately we have geared our response around both in person learning and *Learning from Home* that is developmentally appropriate and stays true to our Montessori philosophy.

Another question which we are sure is on everyone's mind relates to the payment of Term 2 school fees. We would like to provide some context for how we structured our thinking and current decision making.

- We recognise that these are tough times and impacts are being felt by everyone. That said we need to ensure we stay committed to the FMS philosophy and ongoing nature of FMS education.
- Given what your children are experiencing, like you, we are committed to providing them with the stability and reassurance of returning to their beloved school as soon as possible. We want to work to safeguard livelihoods and avoid situations where families cannot return to FMS with their children.
- One size does not fit all; some families will have secure incomes; some families may be experiencing temporary financial hardship; Families choosing non compulsory school programs may consider education as something they wish to defer.
- The decisions taken for Term 2 need to be modelled for Term 3, Term 4 and into 2021 as the short term future economic situation is unclear.
- Comparison with other independent schools and decisions they make about Term 2 fees may not be comparing like with like. FMS relies on 80% of parent fee payments to operate as we only receive a very small amount of Government funding.

- FMS needs the regular income from fees to continue to offer outstanding Montessori education, even when compromised by a pandemic.
- If FMS receives any COVID-19 Government support, we will consider the best use of these funds in the interest of staff and FMS families. To date families with children in the Toddler Program and Pre-School are eligible for free child care in Term 2 2020. This regrettably is reimbursed at a rate well below the cost of delivering the child care service at FMS.
- We wouldn't want anyone to leave FMS because of a temporary disruption to your financial stability caused by COVID-19.

## **Term 2 Fees**

The Term 2 fee invoices will be sent to you in the week beginning Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April, payable by Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

FMS asks all families who have secure incomes and financial capacity to pay Term 2 fees when the statements are issued or maintain Ezidebit arrangements.

FMS will pass on, in full, the Government's free Toddler and Pre-School package. Whilst Toddler and Pre-School families will not be billed for Term 2, you will soon receive a form that must be returned by the due date to secure your eligibility for this funding.

An alternative offering is currently being designed for families with children in the NIDO and Parent Toddler Programs. Separate information will be sent to you shortly.

## **Financial note for all parents**

We recognise that these are unsettling times. If you have a serious and immediate financial emergency, please contact [Denice](#) directly. We are committed to keeping all families in our school and mitigating the effects of this pandemic on children. We will work it out, case by case. Denice and [Kirsti, FMS Business Manager](#), are available to talk, in confidence, on the phone at your convenience. We will establish a process to assist families temporarily impacted by COVID-19 and will endeavour to do all we can.

## **Keeping in touch**

Now more than ever we remain at your service through all of our communication channels, email, social and telephone. Denice is on call during the holidays. She can be contacted for any emergency relating to your family's wellbeing by first sending an [email](#) and she will respond as soon as possible by telephone.

We hope it is reassuring for you to know that we are acting with the best interest of everyone in mind and the continuation of our quality Montessori education and school.

The staff miss the contact with your children and the opportunities to interact with families. We look forward to seeing everyone together again soon.

With gratitude and appreciation for your ongoing support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CR', is centered on the page.

Chris Rehn

Chair, Board of Directors