

Dear Parents

Being positive and staying positive does not mean we must not keep in touch with reality. We love our children, that is why we need to communicate and not hide issues while being responsible to combat the challenges and stay positive. I can assure you that in these difficult times Sunridge staff is not only staying positive but giving more than can be expected.

We deal daily with the challenges faced by our learners and parents and we are bombarded with numerous requests, advice, solutions and demands with regards to education. Within this pandemic we as staff must stay positive, evaluate and plan with what is thrown at us. We need to manage what is best for our children and while most critical decisions are not in our hands we keep on working. We know that some work might be “worthless”, if I may dare to say so, and that we will teach it again or we might be required to teach new work. That’s fine, as long as we are keeping the young minds active and stimulated, that is essential. Protecting our children from too much work or other emotional pressure is also a reality. We are not in contact with them as when we are at school, so we are flying blind and relying on you to observe if you can.

When and how schools will resume and how it will be phased in or what the curriculum will require is not within our hands nor consulted with us. We do not know and hope that they will consult with us who are the ones working on the ground. We plan and work with what we know and believe it will be to the benefit of our learners. We are positive about our children’s future and we have shared with you what we know. We shared that we know we will need to support 75% of our learners to proceed and 25% of our learners would need our utmost best support.

This is not **insulting or degrading**, we shared the reality so that you can know that we know and that we are planning because we care. Surely not negative, we are facing it positively and it’s critically important that parents understand that we know your children’s strengths and weaknesses and that we are planning and preparing to serve them productively when we return to school. We need you to see and respect that we are planning within what we know while we face all the uncertainty of what would be expected of us.

We are also dealing with families infected with COVID-19 as well as the death of a parent. This is close to home but still we respect the information and privacy. Please pray for this family and others already facing COVID-19 directly. Within all of this we need to manage what is best while dealing with personal opinions, needs and issues.

Reality issues in service delivery

Nobody was prepared or could prepare for the current position we are in. With different resources available to teachers and parents we have to manage within what is available. Not what is available to individuals but to all in our school. Some staff has access to unlimited data and resources at home while others struggle with basic reception and availability of any resources. At school we have all available resources to face these challenges and to deal with needs. Unfortunately, not even I as principal can go to the school, I am not allowed to be there. I obtained permission to only be at school on the 17th and that was to do essential financial aspects with the support of two staff members.

Remotely we are working online through our “Staffroom” programme while access is limited to the server due to the fact that we have never had to use or plan for it. Working remotely proves not to be that easy as financial resources for this are limited and service providers are not available. We cannot get out and install new facilities. We however did manage to ensure that our servers for “Staffroom”, e-mail and the “portal” are supported with battery backup and inverters to deliver service though any possible electricity issue. This was also done for our alarm and security within the 3 days we had to get ready for lockdown, proud to say that this initiative proves reliable as our servers are still online and working.

Let me get to the point, staff worked through the night to get work and reports to parents in time before the lockdown. They burnt more midnight oil to get work on their computers from the server and took stacks of books home to start and redesign work to mail to parents. Within this they started to learn how to design worksheets by only using their computer, no hard copies, they made WhatsApp videos and when “Zoom” was introduced some could use it while others just do not have the resources.

Within all of this, staff is using their private data and airtime to serve children. 35% of our families are struggling to access these services and work provided. Parents with only cell phones and limited data and other with nothing are in need of support. Our staff is serving them. Parents at work and struggling are also in need of support, while others have lost their job and source of income. Single parents, extended families, essential service workers and much more are all in need. Staff in need is also a reality. Without access to other resources and data we as managers are faced with what our teachers can use from home and to ensure we deliver a service that is fair to all concerned.

At home parents with more than one child at Sunridge struggle with lessons at the same time - that we can try and resolve, while others have high school children, Grade 12 children and then some with children in three different schools. With one laptop, no printer and in some cases only a cell phone available we need to juggle what we can offer. Some children are home alone and cramped into a single room while others are dealing with the reality of the virus. I wish I could share all with you, what I can however put it to you, those hit directly and dealing with the virus are positive and thanking staff for support and understanding.

While one teacher can fit his/her subject in on “Zoom” and serve 90% he/she still needs to serve the other 10%. Other teachers do not even have data, no Wi-Fi and with mums or dads working or mums or dads working from home it is becoming a problem we cannot resolve and please all.

We will stick with what we can, first priority is to put work on the “portal” and to be available for support on e-mail or WhatsApp from 08:00 to 15:30. Anything more is not a given but only available as allowed by resources and ability to serve by individual teachers due to circumstances.

Not one of my staff refused to work or use their own resources to serve. They never once questioned cost implications or the possibility of salaries or their jobs in jeopardy. They trust that parents will pay school fees and that the school will pay them.

As manager I need to battle to predict where this is going, to provide leadership and to ensure we can pay salaries and accounts. This is done while outside social media messages communicate different opinions on it and scenarios change daily.

Facing new experts has become a daily battle. It's shocking to see how many experts in/on education are now available, where were they in the past? It's even more sad to find that nobody talks to Principals about how to tackle the issues on how to get the school year back on track. Labour Unions and Governing Body Federations are suddenly the experts and stakeholders while Principals will be held responsible to make it work and then be accountable. This is what I call sinister!

It's like allowing my secretaries (with all due respect) to choose a first rugby team and then expect the rugby coach to coach them and be accountable.

So when are we back at school and how will it be implemented?

The documents leaked out with the plan and time frames were not consulted with us nor were we part of the decisions. We surely have many questions and uncertainties to face the challenges and ultimately as Principal I will be held accountable while I must comply with something I know nothing about.

This will however not make me negative, I am awaiting instructions and you can be sure that I will and already have been writing letters, e-mails, I have made numerous phone calls, I have consulted and I am committed to deliver service and to open Sunridge when instructed BUT only if our children and staff can be safe within all reasonable requirements. I await clarity on the curriculum and again pray that they will consult with us.

With the support and understanding of the SGB we need to keep all staff employed to ensure that on the day we have to return that we can deliver service to our children. While trying our utmost best to do this we are faced with the reality that some parents really cannot pay school fees, others are just withholding school fees and others are paying and supporting.

While the majority of our staff is employed and paid by the SGB they are the very ones currently serving our children positively and they are working while also facing challenges. I salute them and I respect them. I had not one complaint from a staff member and they are also dealing with what parents are dealing with at home.


Bottom line

We will keep on offering, for the love of our children, what we can. We will keep it as simple as possible and should you not be able to do it, to access it or even if you do not want to do it, It's fine, we will not condemn you or your child, we will not leave him or her behind. All we ask is for you to try, do only what you can. I have written it many times, if it's only reading, then let it be reading. Should you be worried that you cannot give what others are giving or manage what they are managing, do not worry, we will ensure that we will catch up and that we provide the support we promise. Maybe not always what you expect or desire but what we can do and manage.

It's for that reason that I again request that you need to make use of the teachers' availability on e-mail, even if it's just to say that you cannot do anything or that you are struggling or that you are not coping. Nothing wrong with that, nothing sinister, it's fine, we understand BUT we need to plan, we need to know and we need to communicate the reality.

As teachers we are required to be strong in emotional resilience and to deal with life's difficulties and in the end we are also just human, also in the very same boat you are in.

Thanks to the mum who shared this with me. Please stay safe, have patience and most of all, I kindly request for all to be positive and to live "LOVE" in these times.

An illustration at the top of the graphic shows a stack of three books on the left, with yellow, white, and blue covers. To the right of the books are three writing instruments: a yellow pencil, a white marker, and another yellow pencil, all pointing downwards.

NOT EVERY TEACHER

Not every teacher lives in conditions they want broadcasted to their co-workers or students over video conferencing.

Not every teacher can afford to buy out a craft store to convert their living room into a learning wonderland.

Not every teacher has the bandwidth, literally or otherwise, to become an online instructor overnight.

Not every teacher can put their health at risk to pass out work packets or meals to families in need.

Not every teacher works in neighborhoods you can parade through.

Not every teacher has the in-home support to balance being a caregiver, instructor, chef, tutor and tech support all day.

But one thing **every teacher** is doing is trying. Through pandemics, technology breakdowns, revolving expectations and unknown unknowns, we keep trying and we keep teaching.

So if you feel like you are not every teacher, principal, para, librarian or counselor, please know this: while your *daily diligence* may not go viral, the work you do everyday is **vital**. Truly. Thank you.

#Prayer.AndPedagogy