

**25 January 2021**

Dear Parents

Welcome to 2021 and welcome back to School! We will communicate ASAP about the opening school and how we will be able to manage it safely.

We understand that we are all tired of this “new normal”. Social distancing, sanitizing and wearing masks are just the basics we are confronted with every day, changing our lifestyle and that which we saw as normal and that which we want it to be is a reality we face.

Welcome back to school and welcome to a school which suddenly changed dramatically and way beyond what we ever imagined. Opinions and the way we want it to be are not only different but required way more of us than we might want to admit.

At Sunridge, governors (SGB) and managers (SMT) are asked to deal with matters unknown but in compliance. Our main focus is the safety of all and even that proves to be a challenge due to different opinions. We are not entitled to the luxury of our own opinions but are responsible toward the school. Clarifying a few matters might upset some and cause a few raised eyebrows but it is essential. A totally different start to a new school year and even more so for our new Grade 1's. We did not push the limits of safety by even trying to host an open day or know your school day as it would have been irresponsible and put lives at risk. We will rather lose out on education than lose a life! Over the next few years we can provide remedial education, catch up on work lost and support our children, but we need children and parents to be alive and healthy.

The bottom line is that our governors had dealt with the fact that from the start for 2021 we are 5 staff members short. We are owed a large amount of money by the DOE for services we delivered while they failed. We are financially challenged due to the DOE not complying, but that did not once prevent us from delivering our service. Our managers were compliant and served way beyond what can be expected.

As Governors we employed enough staff for the 2021 school year to not only address the non-compliance of the DOE but also to ensure that we can deliver a remedial and support service. We budgeted and set our school fees for the year which are payable for the year in advance BUT, as in the past, we allow parents to pay monthly.

The DOE failed to provide PPE's for our school in 2020 and none have been received for 2021. The DOE failed to commit to approve maternity leave for their employees and again, as Governors, we had to ask management to assist.

The opening of schools is out of our hands and we must comply with regulations. We can only accommodate 50% of our children per day and the only way to comply with safety for all dictates our time table. This not only proved to be safe but successful, as we could minimize the impact on education and the curriculum for all. That there were areas we could not cover is a reality, this was however the bare minimum and we are way more privileged than the majority. Our Covid-19 school day is planned to allow the maximum teachers and children we can accommodate safely. We are not pushing the limits of our staff's ability, learner's ability nor that of safety.

This proved to be successful in 2020 and while we can still improve on certain levels, essentially it was sustainable. Grade 7's were served every day and with a maximum of only 9 to 16 learners in a class for Grade 1 - 6 we could deliver 2 days' work in one day to compensate for the one day at home.

This definitely puts pressure on families and staff as planning and service delivery is very different. A simple aspect like break time as seen from some parents' views proved to be a challenge way beyond the normal. We just cannot cope or manage it safely to allow children to be outside, masks down to eat and social distancing, not even mentioning the urge to run, play, share and interact. Safety, disinfecting, sanitizing and managing with one or two children is still fine, but with 9 to 16 the risk multiplies and outweighs the advantages.

We rather allow more controlled breaks in class under manageable supervision, controlled reading time outside, shortening the school day with 30 minutes and returning your child after a school day with the smallest possible chance of getting infected due to an urge to play outside. We acknowledge the value but this advantage can be achieved at home much more safely while we still face the threat. The same is applicable to sport or any extracurricular activities. It proved to be the super spreaders in 2020 and we experienced how families tested positive as this social desire exploded. The new strain of the virus is now unfortunately putting our children at risk and those still ignorant should pay attention to the fact that even at Sunridge we have had to deal with it and will still be required to so. Should you wonder, the Principal, staff and SGB members had to deal with being infected with Covid-19 as well. Easy to point fingers and to be angry but eventually the reality is we must be responsible and act accordingly. This is the only way forward. We thank the Lord that we have pulled through, we pray for those still struggling and our sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones.

We do not have the luxury to not attend or deliver our services, we are front line and essential workers irrespective of what others believe. We will deliver our services when allowed and we will apply the safest possible way forward, irrespective of other opinions. It is what we can deal with, we feel safe to apply and ultimately what we know we can sustain safely.

It is a given that it is not going to be to everyone's liking, nor would it be what we want but what we can reasonably do and what we can accept accountability for. All of us will face challenges and all of us will make sacrifices. We can all choose to point fingers, to complain or we can choose to support and deal with it.

As the Principal previously communicated, his hero of 2020 was a Grade 7 child dealing with cancer, fighting to stay and be alive, attending school every day, smiling with her eyes, facing all challenges and everything thrown at her. She chooses to live life irrespectively. She never once complained, not even when she could not manage to get through a single day. She always asked where she could support, her family supported her and us and she made a difference!

So I challenge myself to adopt her attitude to make a difference and I respectfully challenge all Sunridgers to do so as well.

Please stay safe, stay positive and live life to the full, even within this pandemic. Honour the rules and regulations and together we can beat this.

Sunshine greetings



J. AUKETT  
Governing Body Chairman





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