



MINUTES OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL MEETING HELD AT 10:00 ON 16 MAY 2020 VIA ZOOM

Mr Wells welcomed all to the Zoom meeting.

The reasoning behind the meeting is to share our reflections and those of the parents, and to collectively craft a path to take as forward.

Re-opening of schools

Mr Wells stated that the School had followed National broadcast where dates had been published regarding re-opening. At this stage the dates remain slightly unclear. Mr Wells attended an online ISASA meeting, however, there is still no clarity as to where schools should be. Understandably parents felt uncomfortable.

The International School with boarders living outside of the country, has an added dilemma in terms of how we move forward. In consultation with the Board and all stakeholders we took a position to say that we propose that we run online learning for the HS until end of Term 2. If by Mid-term things become a bit clearer this might change. If boarders returned there are certain procedures which would need to be put in place.

For the PS it was proposed that students return at the end of Midterm on 17 June 2020. There were many requirements which needed compliance, including a COVID19 plan for the school.

Challenges regarding co-morbidity issues where people may find themselves vulnerable. All factors need to be considered so that there is a measure of comfort that we have covered all our basis.

Mr Wells continued that legal requirements needed to be in place for the school to function, and currently the national office stated that we could not return to school, and the official dates remained unclear. The current dates have however provided space for mobility and planning.

On the 1st of June South Africa moves to Lockdown Level 3 which has its own implications regarding movement and the infection rate. The school is acting with caution as an organisation.

Mr Wells stated that the School had put out a token to the parents, after a lot of number crunching.

Data to facilitate the online learning is an issue which was raised. The school has tried to show goodwill in passing on credits to parents. The student numbers are not healthy and the school is functioning on a very tight budget, however, the situation remained fluid. Where the credit opportunity arose, the school would consider further credits. As a means of transparency the school is running at a deficit budget and there were many costs going forward, which had not been planned for as it pertained to COVID19.

Mr Wells continued that there were also concerns around examinations, however, internal examinations could be managed. Cambridge has indicated that the students will be sitting the

October/ November examinations. Currently there were many uncertainties, therefore it was necessary to create a platform where we can communicate to function effectively as a school.

Ms Makhan has been managing the online learning with her team.

Mr Wells opened the meeting for parents to ask questions.

Mrs Irene Karuhanga – Form 2 parent

Question

Does this mean that students will be going in to school for one on one classes, and boarding students would continue with online learning?

Answer

Mr Wells replied that this would not be the case. There were challenges facing the school in that some students were outside of the SA borders, and flights were not permitted, and this had been addressed in one of the letters which had gone out to parents. Given where we are schools technically close sometime in August and we return in early September, so Boarders would potentially return in September, however, this remained a guess. There are challenges around examinations where students could not return, and this would then impact on the examination process, however, it was too early to make a call.

Mrs Moabi - Grade 3 parent

Question

Is the school going to revise the Academic Calendar? Students with medical conditions need to be protected and stay at home. Does the school have something in place for them? If a parent says no they are not returning their child back to school, would this be acceptable?

Answer

Mr Wells replied that all schools were following their academic calendars as they unfolded. As a three term school we have more flexibility. Yes we will have to adjust the calendar. A Comorbidity survey will go out for children during this week. Continued online learning would have to be supported. Parents are not obligated to send their children to school. We will continue to engage the community so that your children are not negatively affected.

Mr Olumide-Ojo - HS Parent

Mrs MaCauley thanked Mr Wells and his community for the work that is being done. Mr Olumide-Ojo stated that Zoom was able to accommodate more than 100 participants in a meeting, and that this could be achieved by paying for an upgrade. The refund for boarders is out of order, but a separate meeting could be called for boarder parents and this would prove useful. Mr Olumide-Ojo suggested checking in with other Cambridge schools to see how they are scaling curriculums and dealing with the current challenges.

Answer

Mr Wells agreed that perhaps another webinar should be found to host meetings, and agreed that boarder parents needed a different platform to voice their concerns. Mr Wells had been in contact with Waterford who also runs a three-term school. There is anxiety as to how we move forward and the parents' voice was very important at this time.

Mr Thabo Kalabatane – Grade 3 parent

Question

Children need to catch up. SA has not reached the peak of the Coronavirus and with lockdown being eased, the School needs to ensure that the children are taken care of. School needs a full learning platform. Don't even consider kids coming back even till end of the year. Will send suggestions through as a parent. Zoom is not a good platform, and ISSA needs to gear themselves up for a better platform for learning and communication. The worst case scenario is that children will not be going back to school this year. The Flu will spread within the school.

Answer

Mr Wells really welcomes the opinion. The school is currently treading through these spaces with great trepidation. Zoom is not ideal and we are engaging discussions with different platforms. Prof Lionel Green-Thompson, one of the Board members said that the School needed to prepare for the next 12 months. If online learning is the way to go we need to beef up our resources.

Question

Mrs Lesedi Seeco - PS Parent

There are parents who cannot afford online learning right now, and there are many queries about kids going online. How will parents be discounted on this?

Answer

Mr Wells stated that the return to school on the 17th of June is just a survey, it is not compulsory. Children will not be neglected. The school is negotiating with service providers to see what we can provide for parents, as far as data is concerned. Last year this time the school fee income was about R26 Million, currently it is R20 Million, which shows a deficit of R6Million. The school is telling parents to come forward if they need help. MTN have provided generous packages because we are a business but this will be communicated to parents in due course. The school has passed on a rebate to parents to continue the online learning. The aim is not to leave anyone behind.

Mr Willie Retsang – Grade 4 Parent

Question

Would like to thank the school for trying their best. It is not up to us when the school can open. The situation in the country will dictate to all of us, therefore we need to have a system which can work. There are still issues about governance, and these issues need to be addressed. We have our own Coronavirus as a school, and when COVID19 subsides, we need to deal with the governance issues.

Answer

Mr Wells agreed that we have to invest more in online learning. Outstanding Governance issues we will deal with and we will cross this bridge when we get to it.

Mr Willy Ratlhagane – Grade 2 Parent

There is an issue with fees and our children are not at school. The school has to look at how it is going to restructure the fees at this time. It is really unfair that the fees remain as they are. How did the school get to a thousand rand rebate? We need to meet each other half way.

Answer

Mr Wells stated that the R1000 came from the general purpose fee, which had been reversed. The school is looking hard to see where we can find money. We need to try and maintain the standard regarding maintaining the school and a huge portion of the fees go towards this. The danger is that there might be retrenchments, as some schools have already laid off staff. This is not a straight forward matter. As much as I would like to support parents, we have to tread carefully regarding these engagements.

Mr Jackie Seeco – PS Parent

Question

Parents are entitled to financial statements. The financials that are not signed off, parents should be able to see. Even if the school doesn't have money, how do we believe what the school is saying? Mr Seeco proposed that the school had to look at outsourced contracts first, before considering retrenchments within the school. If parents were able to see the financial statements, perhaps the parents could assist.

Answer

Mr Wells replied that the financial statements were issues for another forum. Will deal with these issues on the platform where it belongs. There is so much potential in this community and it's sad that we are sitting in areas where there are strains regarding governance and resources. Not afraid to engage these difficult debates. Need to get to the core of these issues. Retrenchment is the last resort.

Dr Madyibi – Grade 4 Parent

Question

Agrees that this is not the platform for these discussions. It boils down to when you address us you say we have to pay school fees because the school is not coping. These things rise to take us back to why we not coping. If you want us to move forward, we need to arrange a meeting. When we pay for ISSA we pay for the environment of the school. How can parents pay for things that kids are not enjoying anymore? What are we paying for and what are we getting? Need to revise school fees for Term 2. Will you be able to say to us that you have revised the policy and is this a policy for International Schools? The school has to reduce the fees for parents.

Answer

Mr Wells replied that it is your right as to when you send your child to school. The standing position is that children don't come back to school. Conversation is more powerful than a paper trail. The policy is one which involves stakeholders such as educational psychologists. Not implying that we should be back on the 17th of June. Democratic engagement is needed. The policy for COVID19 is not yet complete, but is a work in progress.

Mr Macaulay – Form 5 Parent

How do we move forward? Let's deal with the children's education. There are still costs, as the facilities need to be maintained. ISSA is the best so we need to support the school where we can.

Difficult situation for everybody. Let's meet each other halfway and support the school where we can. Well done to you and the school for the interventions put forward so far. There are concerns around curriculum, but these things we will take up with Ms Makhan. Personally the school and management team have done a very good job considering the circumstances and we commend you for this.

Mrs Tshekiso – Form 3 Parent

As an ISSA community this is a collective effort to get the best results for the kids. There are issues surrounding the curriculum and fees. We need to have meetings structured according to categories. There are Boarders whom are international students who will not make it back because of travelling restrictions. Arrange a meeting to separate these categories.

Answer

Mr Wells agreed that there needed to be different platforms going forward so that there is constant dialogues and noted the point that assignments should also be sent to parents. The school is trying very hard to refine the communication strategies.

Miss Thato Thaga – Primary School Parent

Suggest that the next meeting we need protocol outlined first. That every parent understands how to do this. Also so that Jenna can manage it from her side.

Answer

Mr Wells agreed to this.

Dr Moleele – High School Parent

Question

Concern that she is unable to manage her son's progress. Needs a timetable or weekly progress reports from the teachers. Difficult to see how much contact he is receiving. The need for a curriculum because the kids are at different levels.

Answer

BW said that parents had to have a handle on their children's learning and that this is duly noted.

Dr Akingba – Form 5 Parent

Thank you for the meeting. We need order in this meeting so that everybody has an opportunity to talk. The school has to be in a position where parents can comment.

Answer

BW said that the Administrator should manage these meetings going forward.

Mr McWilliam – HS Parent

Question

The key thing is the financial recovery plan for the school. Need to look at some kind of loan facility offered by Government. The financial gap will not be breached by charging parents more. We are all in this together. Need a high end financial plan. There are other facilities, other than Government. Does the school have a financial plan?

Answer

Mr Wells replied that the school did not have a plan as yet. COVID19 is here to stay till the vaccine has been found. Have to be pragmatic about some of these issues, depending where we go to with this. Have to think strategically as to how we sustain the organisation going forward.

Mrs Mooketsi – PS Parent

Appreciate the engagement today and bring to the attention of ISSA that a lot of intelligent facts have been raised. The COVID19 policy is still in draft mode and perhaps the parents should have input in the policy. We have to change the way we have been doing things. An Intelligence Register where facts can be put together. This is not an isolated problem for the school, but for everybody together. We are preserving human beings, and we don't want to expose ourselves to threat. In our next meeting then we will have clear streamlined issues we can talk about.

Answer

Mr Wells values the depth of expertise amongst the parent body of the ISSA community and the advice from parents is equally important.

Galaxy 9

Question

Deeply concerned. Both boys in PS and first year at ISSA. This is a new curriculum for them. Nobody is currently monitoring these children and concerned that learning is not taking place. What is the school doing to support the parents who are not at home, such as essential workers? I am forced to adapt to this whole thing. Teachers should engage online with the students. Thank you to Mr Wells and the team for their efforts.

Answer

Mr Wells welcomes the final input from parents. How can we provide support for the essential workers? How can we support each other? Ms Makhan will give further input.

Ms Makhan answered that we are functioning in unprecedented times. ISSA follows the British curriculum framework. We are currently in the process of putting a plan together to support essential workers. The School website outlines the documents for the different key stages. Over and above we sent through an Excel file which outlines the various concepts which are being covered. If parents have changed their email addresses, please send to Jenna. Parents have every right to go into the Google classrooms to see what their children are doing. You can monitor their progress. We will update fortnightly. Welcome the feedback from the parents. In the High School the DOS should be in contact with parents. Please pass queries through to Ms Makhan. When we went live on the 15th of March, Zoom was the only platform which could access a group meeting of a 100 or more. At that point in time, Zoom seemed to be the only adaptable platform. We are looking at running sessions on Google

meet and on Microsoft teams. We are finding ourselves and we will leave Zoom behind in the next few weeks. Thank you to the parents for showing support.

Mr Wells thanked Ms Makhan for the input to parents. Appreciates the platform and so much intelligence to harness this community into helping.

Mr Wells stated that he appreciates the support from the parents and that he has no hidden agendas. Conversations he has had are genuine and sincere and everybody who has spoken out, has the school at heart. The intelligence register is absolutely crucial and this will be at the centre of our community.

Appreciates the platform provided by parents and there certainly is so much intelligence to harness in the parent community.

The meeting ended at 12:15