

17th January 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Today is day eight of most students' return to campus and RBC has been able to revert to in-person classes. It seems that our re-integration approach together with the prudent behaviour of students and staff, and a strong measure of good fortune, have been effective in keeping Covid from spreading on campus (the three students who inadvertently arrived with covid appear to have kept it with them).

I want to thank you for your understanding and support in facilitating your child, our student's return to campus for 7pm on the evening of Sunday 9th January. It always is important to be able to have a streamlined start to a semester especially in a boarding school context. That makes more manageable the stresses and strains on the House Tutors and allows for an effective start to the teaching and learning. This January it was even more important, bringing students and staff together from a multitude of circumstances, given the challenges of Omicron and very high Covid infection levels in many parts of the world from which our students and staff were returning.

I wish to thank especially Helen White (Deputy Rektor and Director of Student Life) and the House Tutors, as well as the School Nurse, for their magnificent facilitation of our re-integration.

RBC accepts that it is not possible to ensure that there are no Covid-19 infections at school unless everybody living on campus remains on campus and all others remain off-campus. It was appropriate, in the first phase of the covid pandemic, to isolate completely the people on campus from those off-campus, but I continue to think no longer so. With our vaccination status (almost 100% fully vaccinated in the RBC community), and on current knowledge of Omicron, individually we are at very low risk of becoming seriously ill if we become infected with Omicron, lower than for previous dominant variants of Covid at the time when they were dominant. Vaccinations, together with our mitigation measures, appear to have held against the spread of covid on campus last week. Accordingly, we will continue to steer our measures and I hope our behaviour towards what we describe as lower (covid) risk situations and activities, not "no-risk", "confined-to-campus" situations and activities.

At a special assembly on Saturday, we outlined the measures we would be taking to keep the RBC community in Covid-safer circumstances.

At one level, this may become known as the Omicron Semester. At another level, that would be a wasted opportunity. At today's assembly I paid tribute to Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu who died during our Winter Break. Archbishop Tutu's three children attended our sister UWC Waterford Kamhlaba (WK), and Archbishop Tutu remained a Patron of WK until his death. Archbishop Tutu was an indefatigable defender of human rights (not only in South Africa), and in his later years, of the environment. I also spoke of WK's Founder, Michael Stern, a visionary educator and human rights activist, who would have celebrated his 100th birthday last week. Both Archbishop Tutu and Stern's life directions were profoundly influenced by the Anglican priest and anti-Apartheid activist Trevor Huddleston. In Stern's case, it started with reading a Huddleston article about Apartheid in The Times (London) with the headline: For God's Sake, Wake Up! Given challenges that are faced around the world and the opportunities that we UWC people have, without any intention of blasphemy I think this is a good rallying cry for this Semester.

With best wishes,



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