

16 February 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

These are not normal times and even as I write this letter, MOH has already raised the nation's DORSCON level from Yellow to Orange. New precautionary measures have been announced and the school is in the midst of implementing these new measures in our specific context.

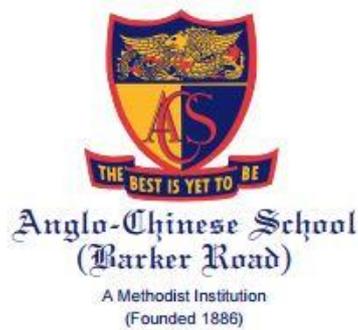
In the past week, announcements have been made to cancel Meet-The-Parents session for Secondary 3 students, parent dialogues with school leaders, the upcoming OBS Programme and other school events. With DORSCON Orange, National School Games are suspended, as are external activities until the end of the March school holidays to minimise exposure of students to the public and avoid mixing of students across schools. CCAs continue with appropriate measures to reduce the group size where possible. You will receive more notifications via Parent Gateway even as the school adjusts its response appropriately.

There are students on LOA who are staying in Oldham Hall. Please be assured that these are healthy individuals, who are performing a social duty to isolate themselves, as a precaution. They have rules to follow, such as keeping to their rooms in the hostels, and actively monitoring their health. MOE continues to support their learning as much as possible. Should any of them feel unwell, they will be receiving prompt medical care and if necessary, segregated from the other students on LOAs.

This letter is not just about the precautionary measures the school is taking. It is also about the need to encourage our students to **be more than their fears**. At this time, being fearful of contracting the virus is real and natural. Fear is a chain reaction in the brain that starts with a stressful stimulus and ends with the release of chemicals that cause a racing heart, fast breathing and energized muscles, among other things, also known as the fight-or-flight response. It is one of the most powerful automatic responses we have to what we perceive threatens us. However, there is a difference in feeling fearful and being our fears.

What do I mean by being our fears? Our fears can drive us to protect ourselves in the moment and it can drive much longer-term behaviours like panic buying, hoarding of essential items, shouting at healthcare workers who share the public transport system with us or in some cases, displaying xenophobic behaviour towards workers from China. In other words, if we are our fears, it drives us inwards in ways that can destroy community and our sense of togetherness.

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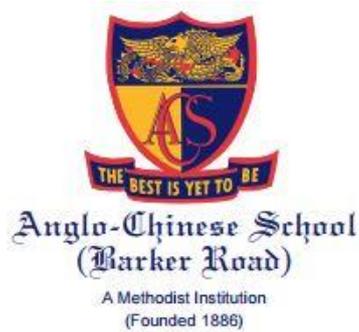


How do we help our students to be more than their fears? It is not about ignoring all precautions because that would be foolishness. It is about directing them to what they can do for themselves and for others. Emphasizing social responsibility and a heightened sense of personal hygiene are two important ways that students can do for themselves for the sake of others. It serves both personal and community needs. The school has been reminding our students of this on a daily basis. Please join the school in reminding them and taking decisions to keep them at home if they are unwell even if it is mild symptoms.

Since last week, the school has instituted an additional wipe-down routine to emphasise this point. Students are asked to clean their classroom desks with disinfectants twice a day – once immediately after morning assembly and the second time following the ‘cleaning chime’ five minutes before school ends. A second part of the routine was instituted after their recess where students are asked to wipe down the canteen tables with disinfectants after their meals. Both parts of the routine emphasize personal hygiene as well as social responsibility to those who share their classroom desks and canteen tables. It is a tangible way to remind our students of looking after themselves and their community.

Additionally, we want our students to express appreciation and gratitude to those who put themselves at risk to ensure that the community is safe and healthy. This turns their response from inward looking to outward looking in appreciation and gratitude. Three weeks ago, our students wrote notes of appreciation to frontline staff at healthcare facilities, transport operators (MRT, SBS Transit, Go Ahead, Comfort Delgro, Changi Airport Group), school custodians and staff at our custom checkpoints in Tuas and Woodlands. This coming week, they will join the other five ACS schools to write personal notes of appreciation to family members, relatives and friends who serve at the frontline in various professions using a card designed by Ms Eng Yuwen, our Humanities teacher (see sample below). I hope you can encourage your child to look outwards, show appreciation and do what is within his capability to make things better not just for himself but also for his community. That, I hope, will be his abiding sense of purpose in ACS (Barker Road) and long after he leaves.

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Finally, I look to you for your support even as the school puts in place not just precautionary measures but efforts to build that deep sense of purpose in our students. My staff has been working very hard to ensure that the school continues to be safe and healthy for all. In the past weeks, some of them have been at the receiving end of strong emotions expressed at some of our actions. In this trying time, I know emotions are frayed but I look forward to your support and encouragement for the work that we do.

I want to quote Ms Eng Yuwen to end because it reminds us of the importance of role modelling in this test of national togetherness, *“How we act today, determines how they act tomorrow. And it is my sincerest hope that we raise a generation of Singaporeans who can ride the storms together.”*

Let us ride this storm out and emerge a stronger ACS community!

Yours sincerely,

Loo Ming Yaw  
Principal

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