

Ref.: ALPE | 12 | 2020-21

Date : 10/08/20

Dear Parents,

1. At the outset we hope and pray that this communication finds you and your family in the best of health. It is safe to say that the world has not been witness to any epidemic, similar to the present one- it is unprecedented in its nature and has left everyone scrambling to come up with solutions to meet this situation.
2. We thank the large number of parents who have shown their continued support and appreciation for the school by sending us encouraging messages and making fee payments on time.
3. Whether appreciating how we have implemented online teaching-learning or how your children have remained engaged and motivated throughout, we have truly enjoyed reading your views and this has been a source of great support and encouragement to our teaching and non teaching staff. We truly value the response. It is heartening to note that you have taken the time to understand and appreciate the efforts put in by the School Team.
4. You have raised certain issues i.e. cost savings or reduction of our various operating costs and requested the Management for substantial reduction of fees.
5. For understanding why the school needs to charge fees to its students, please understand that the school is a permanently unaided school – this means all the expenses towards administration and management of the school – including those relating to paying the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff of the school – have to be met from the fees required to be paid to the school by the parents. The fees are approved under the Maharashtra Educational Institutions (Regulation of Fee) Act, 2011 as amended upto date, alongwith the Rules framed under the Act.
6. There are fixed operational expenses which every school has to meet – salaries, property taxes, security agency charges, housekeeping agency charges, annual maintenance charges for computers, water purification systems, airconditioners, fans, licence fees for software used in the computers, maintenance of the building and equipment, repairs and replacement of broken, obsolete equipment. The school does not receive any grant from the Government or any other authority for meeting either its salary or non-salary expenditure.
7. In fact, salary expenditure constitutes approximately 70% of the school expenditure.
8. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the administration and management of the school in diverse ways as set out in this communication.
9. We are aware that getting used to the new normal with established routines thrown into complete disarray hasn't been easy at all.
10. Our biggest strength has always been our ability to maintain open and honest two way communication with our parent body and, taking this forward, with the information we are disclosing here, we hope will help you understand the rationale behind maintaining certain processes and policies.

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11. **The school continues to support and employ its entire teaching and non-teaching staff and has been paying them their salary every month, without any reduction in their salaries. We have continued to pay the salaries of our school staff, despite some parents not paying fees not only of this Academic Year, but also of previous Academic Years.**
12. Due to the restrictions imposed by the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra on the physical re-opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, the teachers have been trained to switch to a completely online mode of teaching and have also been trained to get ready for a hybrid mode of teaching – we need to keep our school and teachers prepared for the fast changing scenario, so that we meet the challenges faced by the school and the teachers. Our non-teaching staff have been reporting for duties, once the lockdown restrictions were eased, to attend to administrative matters , including result preparation, accounts updation, Government portal updation. The teachers have also been reporting to school, when required, for preparation of lessons for online teaching, preparation and release of report cards (which have been mailed to all parents), and, in the secondary schools for SSC results related work and work relating to training parents and answering their queries via video conferencing platforms, for online admissions for Class XI.
13. While we will be happy to meet all our students in a normal school schedule, we are constrained to switch to an online mode of teaching, combined with the offline mode of teaching and assignments. While the school and the teachers have trained themselves to conduct the online classes like a virtual school, with a longer duration, the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra have prescribed the number of hours of online classes each day and we are therefore required to restrict the duration of the online classes.
14. We continue to meet our financial obligations towards our security and housekeeping agencies and have ensured that they keep their commitment towards their staff too. We believe it is important that in this time, when a single touch or cough or sneeze can transmit infection, we deal with service providers who have been associated and known to the school for a long time, since they will be more forthcoming about any hygiene risks. Hence, we will not discontinue with their services or take up newer unfamiliar service providers, merely to cut costs as it would mean compromising with the hygiene standards as also the safety of the Students which has always been paramount.
15. The school has incurred additional costs of cleaning and sanitization in the previous months, continues to do so, since the school does function on campus administratively, and will do so in the future as well. You will appreciate that, though the students may not be in school, but our infrastructure and equipment still need to be serviced on a regular basis and maintained in a fully operational condition even during the lockdown period, particularly to avoid any moisture-related damage to computers furniture, lab equipment, washrooms, water-purification systems, and even pre-monsoon cleaning of the underground as well as overhead water storage tanks. The scale of work in maintaining the hygiene standards of the school -including classrooms, lobby, courtyard, washrooms, corridors, water purification system will result in continued cleaning and sanitization costs, and these costs will increase exponentially once school reopens. This involves increased sanitization of the entire school campus, to sanitizers in every bathroom, foyer, and public area . This also involves employment of people for orientation sessions with the support staff to ensure that they are aware of the strictness of hygiene standards and the risks involved. Even infrastructure such as ground etc has to be maintained, cleaned and sanitized so that when school resumes, they are safe, cleaned and sanitized for use by our children, and we will have to continue to ensure that they are so. The staff of the school will be trained as per Health and Security norms , when the schools reopen in the forthcoming months. Hence, cleaning and sanitization efforts cost not

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- just in numbers of products/services procured but also breadth of application. The school has not yet charged these costs, separately, in the fees, despite having incurred these increased costs. We have to be prepared for the exponential costs that will arise once school reopens as you will be witnessing completely different standards of hygiene, cleaning and sanitization, which needless to mention, cannot be compromised under the garb of cost-cutting measures.
16. Various obligations to pay overheads like electricity charges, property taxes, rents etc, unfortunately have not changed with the lockdown. Obligations to vendors /Contracts outsourced to third party too continue to be a part of our permanent expenditure , with no relief on the same .
 17. We had to assist our Teachers in upgrading their technology skills to teach students on an Online Platform, implemented all over the world to ensure safety to the lives of students , not compromising on concept delivery , assessment techniques and even equipping them to appear for Online Examinations in case of extended emergency crisis. Migrating to a virtual classroom / online learning has not been easy, yet online learning, both synchronous and asynchronous, has been made available to each student at no additional costs. While our teachers spent and indeed do spend a substantial portion of their non-teaching working hours and even work at home to prepare lessons in advance, the working hours have now extended because they need to first prepare the lessons and then make them online teaching user friendly.
 18. With access to textbooks, worksheet files, video resources, and online lectures, we have optimised a synchronous and asynchronous blended learning environment for students. Through all of this transitioning, the school has incurred additional costs which will continue to rise. We are constantly evaluating new platforms, and software, and none of these costs have been passed on to you. Our teams have sacrificed their weekends and worked late into the night to make this happen. In spite of recurring challenges we remain committed to excellence.
 19. The Management has ensured that irrespective of whether the fees have been paid or not, online learning is accessible to all. Each student has been given a login ID and access to online modules so that learning is continuous and there is no disruption in learning at home.
 20. As a school however, we do not have the luxury of being prepared for just the online scenario. We are prepared for virtual school, physical school and a hybrid of the two, considering that an entire academic year must be planned since the timeline of this pandemic situation is unpredictable. Correspondingly, investments had to be made, and expenses incurred as any of the three possibilities may become operational at any time during the year. It is also essential to maintain staff strength for when we do revert to a hybrid model or regular school. We may be looking at staggered batches coming into school and any reduction in staff will significantly impact the learning experiences of our students. The multifold nature of this preparedness incurs an extremely heavy expense.
 21. Our costs are increasing with cleaning and sanitization, maintenance, purchase, salaries, availing of cleaning and sanitization experts, as also the cleaning and sanitization process of the school, etc. The cost of operations has not decreased in any way but will increase exponentially to ensure complete compliance of safety and hygiene standards once the school reopens.
 22. We hope that as a parent, your foremost concern should be on access to education for your child, alongwith safety/cleaning and sanitization, etc. so that the immunity level of our children is not endangered. The School has already invested in Thermal temperature recorders, Sanitizers at all strategic places and classrooms, and would also, if directed by the authorities, prepare and keep signboards in common areas and in washrooms regarding safety measures, healthy practices and social distancing.

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- We will be discussing this issue of safety/ cleaning and sanitization etc as also increased costs with the PTA EC so that a mutually acceptable solution is worked out after reopening of the School and probably each parent may have to pay towards this increased cost at least partially as safety/cleaning and sanitization etc is of utmost importance and compromise in this behalf has no place in this organization.
24. We have taken up the aforesaid safety and security measures as a self-imposed responsibility as we remain committed not only to the cause of education, but also to the safety and security of our students. Our greatest efforts lie in making the school a place where our students love to come and learn. We equally miss our students' presence, energy and infectious laughter which used to light up our corridors.
 25. Certain questions are being raised about certain additional costs for the effective delivery of education imparted through digital medium. You will appreciate that even our costs are, in fact, increasing, exponentially, due to the increased cleaning and sanitization efforts, unbudgeted expenses on training and development, technical infrastructure and on integrating new platforms and software, investment in machines /equipment for dealing with COVID – 19 situations, being prepared for virtual school, physical school and a hybrid of the two since the timeline of this pandemic situation is unpredictable, corresponding investments and expenses incurred as any of the three possibilities may become operational at any time during the year, human resource, and many other areas. **It is a matter of common knowledge that during this pandemic situation parents have incurred additional expenses even at their homes towards sanitization etc which is unavoidable. You will appreciate that the acquisition of certain technological tools such as laptops including expenses towards the internet etc is for the advantage of your child and we do not stand to gain or derive any benefit out of the same. You will appreciate that this pandemic being an extraordinary situation calls for extraordinary measures in terms of time/money/energy/out of box planning etc. We all our incurring additional costs ,spending more time/effort/energy than before for which no one can be blamed or held responsible/accountable as it emanates from an unknown and unavoidable situation which has engulfed the entire world.**
 26. We do appreciate that this pandemic situation has cast some additional responsibilities towards your child but we may add that as parents even pre COVID -19 situation your involvement was discernible. Educators, parents and learners across the globe are dealing with the unique situation that we find ourselves in. This pandemic has affected us all in unexpected and surprising ways.
 27. We are aware that getting used to the new normal with established routines thrown into complete disarray hasn't been easy at all.
 28. **It will neither be fair nor proper to compare a regular classroom to a virtual classroom and migrating to online / virtual classroom / online learning has not been easy yet online learning, both synchronous and asynchronous, has been made available to each student at no additional cost.**
 29. **Our teams have sacrificed their weekends and worked late into the night to make this happen.**
 30. In spite of recurring challenges we remained committed to excellence. Given the current pandemic situation and considering our vast experience and expertise, we feel we are very well equipped to determine the perfect balance of various platforms and mediums at every stage for our learners.

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31. We have taken all decisions keeping in mind the best interests of each age group. As parents, you may differ with our view on what is best for your child and we respect your individual opinion, however considering the entire scenario we can only advise you to treat every format of learning with the respect and seriousness it deserves and to support our learners through these unprecedented times with an open mind. The school maintains its right to decide what is in the best interest of the child as per their age. As we always believe that the school, family and child are in a three-tier continuous developmental process and hence they should work in unison for the development of the child. We request you render your support in this journey of education.
32. It has also come to our notice that few Parents/ Associations having vested interest are sending WhatsApp message that Hon'ble Supreme Court and Bombay High Court have given directions regarding non collection of Fee or fee reduction. It may be noted that no such directions have been given either by Hon'ble Supreme Court or Bombay High Court about non collection of Fee/fee reduction. Parents are requested not to be carried away by such false messages. The Hon'ble Supreme Court vide its order dated 10-7-20 in Writ Petition(s)(Civil) No(s).622/2020 in the case of Sushil Sharma has refused to entertain plea of parents seeking waiver of school fees during lockdown and consequently the Petitioner has withdrawn the Petition. We may further add that the GR dated 8th May, 2020 issued by the State Govt stipulating that last year's fees etc should be charged by Schools was challenged by the Associations of Schools and others and the Honourable High Court vide its order dated 26th June, 2020 passed in WP-ASDB-LD-VC-100/20 to 103/2020 has stayed the GR dated 8th May, 2020. Thus Schools can charge increased fees, as approved by the PTA EC under the provisions of the Maharashtra Educational Institutions (Regulation of Fee) Act, 2011, along with the Rules framed thereunder and parents are bound to pay it.
33. We take this opportunity to thank the large number of parents who have shown their continued support and appreciation for the school by sending us encouraging messages/emails and making fee payments on time which has gone a long way in meeting our commitments. It is heartening to note that you have taken the time to understand, recognise and appreciate the efforts put in by each member of the school team in ensuring that the interest of our children is held paramount, even amid a pandemic. The team has indeed come together fabulously, worked through severely inhibiting circumstances and ensured uninterrupted online learning. Each email and message praising the online education, expressing unconditional support etc has not only upheld but boosted the morale of our entire team and we urge you to continue to maintain this morale as we look forward to another year of delivering nothing but the best of learning experiences for our children.
34. We request parents to stick to the payment schedule so as to help us in our financial commitments , of which we have given you an idea in the previous paragraphs.
35. Now is the time to honour/reciprocate your commitment towards the school, which educates children, a noble activity devoid of commercial motives. The school needs the conscious efforts/support of parents, including payment of fees on time .

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36. You will appreciate that as an unaided school our primary and only source of revenue is fees. Thus despite increased costs as above we have not increased the fees which is a challenging time for the school - but we are MANAGING, not because we have to - but because we WANT to - in view of the current situation and the fact that our expenses are continuing. Having reiterated our costs, and detailed our expenses, we hope you understand that there is absolutely no scope for provision of fee reduction.

We request you to pay the Fees as per the Fee schedule notified in the notices for payment of fees, which has been uploaded on the website of the school.

Let us all work together so that the long journey ahead of us is spent in a meaningful and constructive manner and allow the School team to focus on further enhancing the programme through innovative and effective learning methods.

In case you haven't paid the fees yet for the academic year 2020-21, we request you to make the payment immediately as stated above.

We look forward to your understanding in this matter and co-operate with the school and the management in ensuring that the children continue to enjoy their learning and grow with us.

AS Keskar

(Name and signature)

Head Mistress/ Asst. Head Mistress / In charge