



1 February 2018

Dear Parents

WATER CRISES

As the water crisis in our province becomes more critical, it is obviously important that we all do what we can to reduce water consumption. I hope that this letter will make clear both what we are doing at Somerset House and the reasons for our actions.

I attended the meeting held in Kuilsrivier yesterday where the Premier, Mrs Helen Zille, addressed principals of over 1000 schools regarding the plans that are being formulated to deal with the water shortage. From a provincial point of view, it is seen as imperative that schools remain operational in order to avoid the loss of an academic year and the consequence of literally thousands of unoccupied students on the streets. In order for schools to remain open, teachers will not be able to queue for water and so the province is attempting to organise that they receive their allotment of water at their schools. The logistic challenge that this presents is enormous, and we support the province in their attempts to achieve this, should it be necessary. It is obviously our intention at Somerset House to remain operational. It is unclear at present whether Independent Schools will be included in this plan. Should we be excluded, we will obviously need to do whatever is possible to allow an uninterrupted service.

In addition, all schools have been asked to develop a plan to reduce water consumption. Mr Amm has been working on our plan for Somerset House which has led to a number of decisions being made.

Decisions regarding water use at Somerset House

Basically, we have been working on a way to use our borehole water for everything except drinking and food preparation. This decision has necessitated a number of significant changes to how we normally do things at school. I highlight the most important of these below:

Toilet Management

More water is used for flushing of toilets than drinking by every person on the campus. We are therefore installing water tanks which will supply our toilets with borehole water for flushing. We are making these installations permanent as we see this as a long-term solution. Tank availability is an issue, however we hope to complete this project in the next 3 weeks or as and when delivery will take place.

Swimming Pool

We have been using borehole water to top up our pool, however, we feel that as borehole water supply comes under increasing pressure, it is no longer right to use this water for swimming. We will close our pool after our gala on Monday which has been brought forward for this purpose. The water will be used for flushing of toilets and cleaning purposes. The pool will not be filled or used for swimming until the situation normalises.

Food

Food preparation obviously uses large amounts of water. Our kitchen is revising the menu and meals will be changed accordingly. Washing of the cutlery and crockery is also an area where we can make significant savings and so outside lunches will become far more frequent which also saves on cleaning of the dining hall.

Gardens

Borehole watering of gardens has been reduced to once a week to simply keep our grounds alive. This will be reviewed if necessary. Fields are receiving no water.

Drinking

We will be closing off all taps and water fountains on the campus. Children are required to bring a water bottle to school. We will have smaller tanks with taps to allow them to replenish as they need to. We will not be limiting water for drinking unless the situation changes dramatically. Closing of taps will happen as soon as we can take delivery of smaller tanks. Please can children bring plastic bottles to school if they have not done so already.

Cleaning

All cleaning using water has become borehole based. This will remain the case going forward.

Uniform

We will allow children to come to school in their Physical Education or Sport kit on days they have these activities to alleviate washing. Children will need to wear takkies and socks if they are in Physical Education kit. They will remain in that clothing for the day.

The Future

This crisis will have a long-term impact on how we do things in the Western Cape for the foreseeable future. There is no evidence to suggest that we will be in a better position in terms of water storage in a year from now. As a school, we have therefore adopted the current situation as the "new normal" approach with regard to water use. We understand that these decisions will impact on how we do things at Somerset House, but we trust that we will enjoy your support of the measures taken to save water.

Chris Storey - Headmaster