

Wien, 27. April 2020

Dear parents and guardians,

The last few weeks have been a difficult time for us all, but especially for you. Many of you were obliged to organise your work commitments from home. At the same time, the everyday business of school was reduced to a minimum and switched over to distance learning. This was a difficult decision to make, both for the government, and me as the minister directly responsible. However, it was a necessary step to protect the general population, as well as all those who learn and teach in our schools.

Within a short space of time we have developed models for distance learning, endeavoured to make technological equipment available to our pupils, and provided digital teaching and learning resources. We have put in place a hardship fund to support parents and guardians in cases where cancelled school trips and events could not be refunded. Lastly, we have developed a model that enables pupils to complete the Matura and other school-leaving qualifications in times of Coronavirus.

However, school is much more than just a place of learning. The social contact and the friendships that exist in the classroom, the daily contact with other children and young people, and with teachers and other adults in positions of trust are equally important. All this makes the re-opening of our schools a high priority for our society.

Since the beginning of April, we have observed a steadying in the number of new infections. In many areas of public life and commerce, efforts are being made to establish a “new normal”, so that work can begin once more. After careful consideration and with the agreement of the Chancellor and the Minister for Health, it is now time to take the next steps in the field of education.

We have developed a clear strategy, based on the following key points:

- Schools will not be opened for all pupils at the same time.
 - Schools will first be opened for pupils who need to sit their final assessments: On 4th May, all those taking the Matura, as well as those in the final year of vocational schools, will return to the classroom.
 - The second stage is planned for **18th May**. This affects all 6-14-year-olds: primary schools, the junior classes of the Gymnasium (Unterstufe), new middle schools and special needs schools.
 - If everything goes well and the rate of infection does not increase, the third stage in the re-opening of our schools will follow on **3rd June**. All polytechnical schools, the senior classes of Gymnasium (Oberstufe), and vocational schools will reopen.
 - The second and third stages begin respectively on a Friday, with a conference for the teaching body. In this way, the school start for the pupils in the following week can be thoroughly prepared.
- Day-to-day running of the school will be organised according to the following principles:

1. Reduction of the number of pupils through a shift pattern
2. Teaching content: less is more
3. Assessment with a sense of proportion
4. Observance of hygiene regulations
5. Exceptions made for certain groups of people

I have requested that headteachers organise the shift patterns in their schools by the following dates:

- For pupils in primary schools, new middle schools and the junior classes of the Gymnasium (Unterstufe) by 4th May.
- For other pupils by 8th May.

The intention is to give you enough time to organise a daily routine and for you and your family to adjust to the new circumstances. All further information will be provided by your child's school.

We will make every effort to ensure that all pupils returning to school will be protected, not only by the re-opening of schools in stages, but also through the introduction of strict hygiene regulations. However, should you be concerned about sending your child to school because of a potential risk to his/her health, he/she will be excused. Please inform the headteacher or your child's form teacher of this; your child will then be expected to work through the content in the respective school subjects from home.

We know that we are treading a fine line with this path. On the one hand, we must protect our health, and on the other, we have a duty to provide our children and young people, in the medium and long term, with the best possible educational and career opportunities. Please help us to achieve this.

I wish you and your families all the best. Together, we can succeed in giving our children and young people the best possible chances for the future.

Kind regards,



Heinz Faßmann

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