

August 10, 2020

## Borders are open for boarders

### Arusha students enrol for new academic year in Corona safe environment

As Tanzanian private schools ready themselves for the new academic year, Kenya and surrounding countries remain closed fearing the increased costs of protecting their students from the deadly virus that has ravaged the world.

However, with reporting of the majority of cases being recorded in Dar es Salaam, the region of Arusha is seen to be a safer option for students and many who were aiming to study in Kenya have revised their plans to remain in their home country.

Further, the ability to have students in a secure, safe and hygienic boarding environment offers a much higher level of protection than those living in more open circumstances.

“St Constantine’s International School has always had a solid Infectious diseases policy,” said headmaster Tony Macfadyen, “but we have made even more adjustments for the health and safety of our students. Regular handwashing was always enforced with antibacterial soap and handbasins placed at the entrance to the cafeteria as well as throughout the school, but we are now introducing social distancing and teachers have rearranged classrooms to enforce this,” he said. “At all times we have used international best practice to guide us.”

St Constantine’s and UWCEA students and teachers will be returning on August 23 and 17 respectively, with St Constantine’s looking at a reduced boarding roll to enable more space and ensure student safety.

Joyce Ndalichako, Tanzania’s Minister for Education, Science and Technology, said education will resume with strict adherence to health protocols in order to ensure safety for learners and teachers.

“Parents are anxious that their children continue to receive the highest level of education, but in a safe and hygienic location,” Mr Macfadyen said. “We have put a dedicated team in place specifically for our boarders, under the leadership of Mr Emmanuel Ian Mulima.”

In addition to the basic steps above, Mr Mulima and his team will instigate temperature checks, reporting in a staggered system rather than groups, 1.5 metre seating arrangements for eating and study, regulated visitor contact, the school’s own designated driver to avoid the risk of unknown taxis and public transport in an emergency, and the qualified nursing matron living on campus.

“It is my job to ensure a fair, productive and happy social, working and boarding environment,” Mr Mulima said, “and above all, ensure the safety and welfare of the students.”

Boarding school has always been a secure option of children with working and/or travelling parents and many find that they not only make lifelong friends in the boarding house, but secure higher academic and sports results with the distractions of the outside removed.

Assistant Head of Upper Primary, Frances Peacock, personally tutors students after school in their study time.

“The duty teachers and I are responsible for overseeing students completing their homework tasks in structured study by assisting them when they need help, answering questions on the spot, hearing students read individually and revising concepts with children who need additional help. Many parents are just too busy to be able to do this,” Miss Peacock said, “while my main role is to ensure their wellbeing while supporting both their pastoral and academic needs, promoting high standards of behaviour and ensuring they make progress in their year group.”

With Boarding Master Mr Mulima having trained in Special Needs, he is additionally able to liaise with teachers like Miss Peacock, to plan for students according to their developmental levels, model instructions and provide consistent one-on-one or small group interventions through prep time. Students also have internet access during ‘prep’ as well as full use of the library.

Miss Peacock pointed out the advantages for students from small families having the opportunity to socialise safely with children their own age, and enjoy excellent facilities they might not have access to at home, such as athletic tracks, supervised use of the school’s swimming pool - including lifeguards - and the opportunity to join and practice with sports teams. Many boarders are involved with inter-school tournaments, while others are their most enthusiastic cheerleaders on the sidelines. All boarders get the chance to play both indoor (such as table tennis, pool, Lego and Scrabble) as well as outdoor games and sports.

“They have a good balance of free time and study time,” Miss Peacock says, “and boarding boosts many skills that are required in life such as being able to communicate and cooperate with a diverse group of fellow students and staff; being able to adapt to a new environment/routine/challenge that occurs in daily life and, in preparation for adult life, being responsible for their belongings, behaviour and their own learning.”

Students who come to the school speaking neither English nor Swahili are provided with a ‘buddy’ who can help them with their language outside of the classroom after formal lessons, this assisting them in picking up the conversational nuances needed for a highly performing global leader in the future.

Former Head of Boarding, Mr Noel Fitzpatrick, said that the boarding house ensured both the students safety and good behaviour, with secure locks keeping the boys and girls separate and safe, boarding supervisors on each floor, CCTV cameras in the corridors and guards throughout the grounds. Following on from him, Mr Mulima will continue to provide entertainment, competitions and supervised weekend activities such as bike racing and nature walks – healthy pursuits that still adhere to the necessary precautions in this Coronavirus situation.

Students appreciate the opportunity to develop a regular routine to assist them for future advanced studies, although senior student Lisah Nsanzugwanko admits that “it took some getting used to.” Originally starting her boarding school experience in Nairobi and several other schools, Lisah’s parents – from Dar es Salaam – decided to change their daughter to St Constantine’s for her final four years, to study in the British Cambridge curriculum.

“After visiting St Constantine’s, I felt like it was somewhere I could become part of a family,” Lisah said, “and I did. There’s just a sense of family here and the fact that I know I have these people around when I’m feeling down, or when I need support. At Brookhouse in Nairobi where I went previously, there is a very big population of boarders and you get lost. Here at St Constantine’s we are mixed religions, nationalities and age groups – like a real family. It has

taught me that family is important and that family is not only the people that you are related to.”

Lisah, who is going on to University to study journalism and media, took full advantage of all that the school had to offer playing both netball and football, becoming involved in the Leadership team on the Student Council and was a Prefect. She was an active debating team member and participated in the World Scholar competition.

A whole new “team challenge” has arisen now for her school with the Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic.

“We are all ready to learn during this time,” Mr Malina says. “This has shown how all of us from different races, religious beliefs and families can come together to fight a common cause. The boarding house is a good place to start.”

President Magufuli ordered the reopening of schools during the final session of parliament on June 29 and Officials in Tanzania this month say they have enforced internationally recommended measures, whether dealing with public gatherings or arriving tourists, and that they continue to work with the W.H.O. and other countries to curb the spread of the virus. The President’s announcement makes Tanzania the first country in East Africa to reopen schools, according to The Citizen website.

At the same time, a government spokesman, Hassan Abbas, said that the world should not “shy away” from emulating what he called the country’s best practices.

Neighbouring Kenya is not able to reopen in September as planned due to the inability to implement Education CS George Magoha’s proposal to accommodate reduced numbers of students; Uganda could be facing up to 5,000 private school closures; while parents in Namibia who opt to keep home-schooling their children during the ongoing state of emergency, will be jeopardized twice since they will have e-Learning expenses while still having to pay school fees in full, according to Maitri Capital’s weekly news on education and ed-tech in East Africa.

In contrast, Tanzania’s decision to reopen schools has been lauded by China, according to the newsletter. “Tanzania’s full account of three aspects which include epidemic control, economic development, and protection of people’s livelihood that has facilitated the reopening of important sectors such as education, was laudable and extraordinary,” the Chinese spokesperson has been quoted as saying.

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For further information, contact:

Leonie (Lee) Trubshoe

Email: [leonietrubshoe@scis.sc.tz](mailto:leonietrubshoe@scis.sc.tz)

Phone: Tanzania +255 (0)783 642 384

New Zealand +64 (0) 210 296 6685

[www.facebook.com/scistanz](https://www.facebook.com/scistanz)

Photos attached:

Frances Peacock, Assistant Head of Upper Primary, personally assists boarding students with their homework and after-school studies.

Gold medal winner, Lisah, puts her success down to being a boarder and part of the boarding house "family".

Meti (from Ethiopia) and Lisah (from Dar es Salaam) welcome the study time as boarders, away from the distractions at home, but with fellow students with whom to discuss issues.