



BOARD OF DIRECTORS-INDIAN SCHOOLS IN OMAN

COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

In light of the Covid-19 situation, the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman has been receiving several queries and concerns from the parent community. With this document, we aim & hope to address the most frequent questions and offer clarity & transparency.

Covid-19: Financial Measures

1. As parents are affected by Covid-related lockdowns and closures, what are the measures taken by the Board to support us during the Covid situation?

- Although Indian Schools remain closed to curb the spread of the infection, **online classes are being organized by schools w.e.f. April 2020**, in order to cater to the educational needs of students.
- In light of the financial constraints due to the pandemic, **the fee hike proposed for the term 2020-21 has been deferred** until the end of July 2020.
- With effect **from May 2020 until August 2020, the schools shall be collecting only tuition fee from students.** The students shall be exempted from payment of all other non-tuition related fees during this period of four months.
- In the unfortunate situation in which any member of the Indian school family – parents or students contract the SARS CoV-2 infection and become **Covid-19 positive during this academic term, the schools shall support the concerned ward through a 50% concession on the tuition fee until the end of the academic term 2020-2021, provided the request is submitted to the school on/before 31 August 2020.**
- **Parents have also been given the option of remitting the applicable school fees in a monthly manner, instead of the quarterly mode,** in order to reduce the cumulative burden on them.
- Additionally, if any parent requires **special consideration for fee concessions**, such requests may be submitted to the school, along with supportive documents as applicable.
- **The Schools are setting up Help Centres with dedicated Hotline numbers** in each of the 21 Indian School campuses in the country, with the specific goal of ensuring that all parents and students have access to food and other essential supplies during this challenging period. Parents may also access these hotlines for any Covid-related or fee- related query or need.
- Parents and students have also been **provided access to tele-counselling services**, through the dedicated 24-7 tele-counseling service, Here4U Let's Talk or through the school counselors.



2. What are the parameters taken into account while arriving at the decisions?

The Indian Schooling system in Oman is a complex one. There are 21 Indian Schools in Oman operating with different fee structure and financial positions. We have schools ranging from students enrolment of 8500+ students to less than 40 students per school, with different fee structures and salary structures. Therefore, there are diverse financial challenges & complexities.

The decisions taken by the Board have to be such that the sustainability of all schools is ensured while offering maximum relief to the community.

3. The fee reductions have been applied from the month of May. What if the non-tuition fee (like term fee, exam fee etc.) is already remitted in the month of April 2020?

For the students who have already remitted the non-tuition fee for the period from May 2020 - August 2020, the additional amount paid shall be adjusted in the fee for the following months proportionately.

4. Can we expect more relief measures from the Board/ schools?

We are closely monitoring the situation and shall be exploring new options & solutions, based on our financials and the economic environment.

However, at the moment, common, centralized relief measures could severely hamper the working of various schools. Therefore, additional relief measures, if any, shall be at the level of individual schools, as per the individual capacity of each school, as determined by the respective School Management Committees. According to the changing scenario & based on the financial viability of each school, the SMCs shall determine the scope and implement new measures.

Additionally, we are also reaching out to various corporate & other relevant government & non-governmental organizations for monetary aid/ sponsorships.

5. As the schools are suspended, the expenses for the schools must be low. Why can't we get additional concessions on fees & tuition?

We are unaided community schools, depending only on the revenues from fees for our operations.

On an average across all schools, 85-90% of entire operational expenses go towards meeting staff-related expenses like salaries and HRA. As the closure of schools only means the closure of school buildings, our expenses have decreased only minimally and our major expenses remain intact without any change.



6. *How is the financial situation of the schools? Is it true that the schools have enormously accumulated reserve funds?*

The schools too have been drastically impacted by the pandemic. All the schools are having negligible reserves currently for operational expenses. (Only liability-based reserves remain, for the end-of-service & such benefits are available which cannot be utilized for operations).

As per the social enterprise model followed in our system for years, the revenue reserves from the schools are utilized for the growth of the schooling system. Therefore, like all other Indian schools, the newest school, Indian School Bousher was established collectively by the contributions from various other Indian Schools, without any external liabilities. These contributions from other schools were expected to be returned through revenues in the upcoming years, as has been the practice. We have been managing these years with only minimal financial burden on parents, due to the volume of students.

However, at this point this means that the financial situation of most schools are dire. Currently, about 6 Indian schools are in red alert financially, meaning that they are already having cash-flow difficulty in providing the monthly salaries for the staff from April.

7. *What all are measures taken by board/SMC to reduce the expenses: We can cut short many activities proposed for this year.*

In March 2020 itself, the Board has directed all School Managements to review the operational budget and minimize the non-essential expenses. The schools have already implemented this and have kept all projects on hold. It is worth noting that even in the previous years all large-scale inter-school extra-curricular events & international/domestic staff training programs were conducted primarily through corporate sponsorships and therefore had minimal impact on the school budgets/ expenses.

Covid-19: Academic Measures/ Online Lessons

8. *What are the learning plans implemented by the schools during the suspension period due to Covid-19?*

Indian Schools aim to provide continued holistic education to the students and ensure quality learning. Virtual classes and other means of online teaching are implemented by the schools in compliance with the directives of the Ministry of Education of the Sultanate and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), India to upkeep the student learning during this suspension period.



9. *Why are Indian schools conducting online lessons when the schools are closed?*

We are not alone in conducting the classes virtually. Children across the world have been affected by school closures due to the pandemic. But across the world, most of the educational institutions from schools to universities have immediately transitioned to online lessons with the larger goal of ensuring that children are not adversely & disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

UNICEF has implored all nations to ensure that learning is not disrupted. The Ministry of Education, Oman and the Central Board of Secondary Education, India too have recommended that lessons continue through online platforms, in order to engage students, ensure academic learning & mitigate the stresses of lock-downs and other infection control measures.

As the recommencement of the schools after the end of Covid-19 is uncertain and unpredictable, it is essential to give access to education for the students. It is also predominant to consider the preparation to be made by the students appearing for the CBSE Board Examinations this year.

10. *How prepared are the schools in offering online lessons?*

Although the BoD introduced online learning platform ISO-VLE in the beginning of 2019, this platform included only recorded lessons for higher grades alone. Therefore, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian schools had been unprepared for the sudden shifting of lessons from classrooms to online.

There were many technological challenges, gaps & glitches. However, it is a testament to the dedication of our teachers and schools that in record time, all teachers and schools have adopted various digital tools for offering e-learning.

We are learning too and are thankful for the constructive suggestions and feedbacks received from parents and students regarding these virtual classes. We have been able to accommodate many of these suggestions and the entire system is now geared up & improving constantly on a daily basis. We expect to completely smoothen our all glitches within the next coming weeks.

11. *How effective is the virtual teaching? Is it helpful to student learning?*

The teaching fraternity of the Indian Schools is on the frontline. The teachers construct holistic lesson plans with effective learning materials to ensure quality teaching. They are also constantly working with utmost dedication to make their teaching most impactful.

A survey was conducted by few schools to assess the effectiveness of online classes. It was found that more than 95% of the students are benefitted by attending online classes that keeps



their time at home constructive. A large majority of the parents were appreciative of the initiatives taken by the schools to impart online education.

12. Why are schools conducting online lessons for KG students? Are online classes relevant for KG students?

The schools and Board have received mixed feedback from parents about conducting online lessons for kindergarten students. While some parents are encouraging the creative, academic

& social engagement of children, there are some who object to too much of screen time usage at this age. Therefore, individual schools are now carrying out increased parent & student surveys to assess feedback and take a balanced approach.

13. What is the alternative for the students who may not participate in the online classes due to lack of devices /internet facilities etc.?

In order to facilitate the students who lack access to devices and internet, the recorded lessons of the classes will be made available. In addition, after the recommencement of the schools special classes will be conducted for such students after the regular school hours to ensure their learning needs are met.

14. What are the platforms / communication tools used for virtual teaching?

The schools have identified mutually convenient communication tools that are accessible by the teachers as well as the students. These include

- Indian Schools Oman – Virtual Learning Environment (ISOVLE) portal that enables the schools to have a unified Learning management system and network to share learning resources, develop interactive contents including videos. Students of Class X & XII are taught via webinar sessions through ISOVLE as per the scheduled time table for respective subjects.
- In addition to ISOVLE, the schools are also utilizing certain easily accessible tools for the students such as ISM-VLE, Microsoft Teams, Google Classrooms, GoToMeeting, Zoom, WhatsApp etc.

15. Are the platforms used for virtual teaching safe in terms of security? How are schools ensuring cyber security?

We are mindful of the security challenges and are trying the best to address these concerns. As this is a first-time attempt in virtual teaching made by the schools, initially there were a few security breach issues witnessed. However, they were addressed and resolved instantaneously. Most schools are now using reliable digital platforms, with professional/paid versions of software to conduct online lessons. Only the professional paid version of Zoom application is being used now, to improve security.



As cyber -attacks can originate from any connected device, students too are advised to keep their device up-to-date on software updates & anti-virus protections.

16. I am having some connection issues and not able to access online lessons. How can my child's education be uninterrupted?

Each school has issued details of contact persons handling various responsibilities. In case any parent is having technical difficulties in accessing the online classes, you may contact the relevant person nominated by the schools to get your queries or glitches resolved.

17. How long will the schools be closed? When can we expect schools to reopen?

It could be anything from few weeks to few months. We are yet to receive any official information from MOE in this regard. It would depend on the Covid-19 situation in the country and the guidance from Supreme Council and MOE.

Indian Schooling System

18. What makes Indian Schools in Oman unique?

- Indian Schools in Oman are Community Schools. Community schooling is a unique system where the schools are operated & run by the community, for the benefit of the community. This means that the Indian schools here are not established for profit and they are not run as businesses. But the revenues are essential for self-sustaining the schools. We are social enterprises where any revenue generated from the schools are invested back into the schools, for the running, maintenance and growth of the Indian schools in Oman.
- Indian Schools in Oman are among the lowest charged private schools in the Middle East. Yet, we have also been consistently attaining the best results in the region. In effect, we offer the most affordable, economical, best quality education in the region itself.
- All Indian students are assured of an education, with 100% admissions.
- The schools are inclusive, offering Special Needs children too education & training catering to their needs.



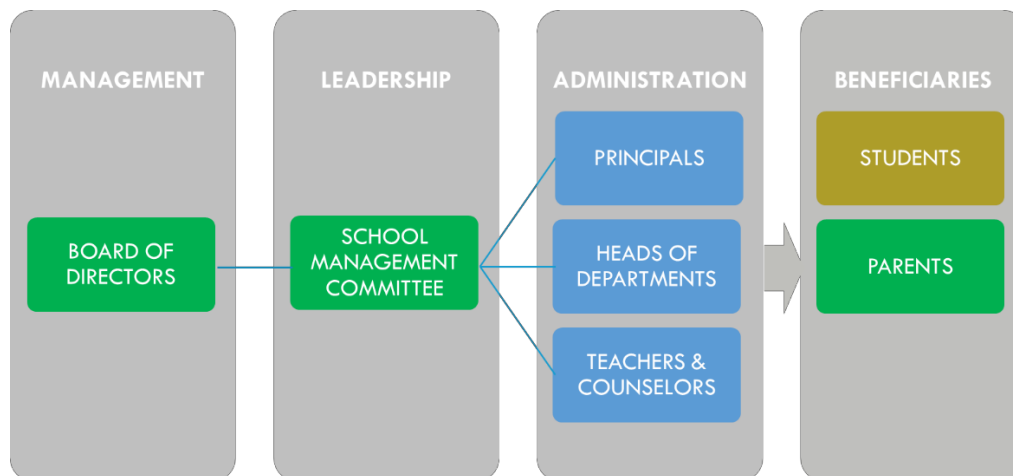
19. Who operates the schools? Who manages the funds of the schools?

The Indian schools in Oman are considered by the Oman government as a consortium, falling under the management of the Board of Directors (BoD), under the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Oman.

However, on an administrative and operational level, every school is managed by a separate School Management Committee (SMC). The Schools are further administered by the Principals and senior administrators.

The Board is only a governing body and does not hold any funds; as such the Board does not have reserve funds to aid the School. The revenue & expenses of each school is being managed by the respective school. Each school runs on the revenue generated by collecting Fees and it is monitored by the Respective School management committee.

The organogram would look like this:



20. Who verifies the finances of the schools? Does the Indian Schools have a transparent financial system?

The schools are regularly audited by the internal audit team of the Board, followed by external auditing firms. The audit reports are submitted to the concerned Ministries. Further, the audited reports are also displayed at the school's notice board every year as information to the stakeholders, to ensure utmost transparency.

21. Are Indian Schools in Oman funded by the Indian Embassy in Oman or the Indian Government?

No. Indian Schools in Oman are not aided schools. We do not get any funds from the Indian Embassy in Oman or the Indian Government. Each Indian school in Oman is run from the revenue generated by that school.



22. Are BoD or SMC members earning revenue from schools?

No. The BoD members and all the SMC members are offering voluntary community service and as such do not get any kind of financial remunerations for their services from the Board or from the schools. They offer their services, under the bye-laws approved by the Ministry of Education.

23. What can parents do to support the schools?

The community model schooling system we have in place in Oman is truly unique. However, our schools and this model itself can be sustained only through the support and understanding of all stakeholders, especially parents.

- Verify from official sources the information you receive. Stop the spread of misinformation and rumors.
- As a parent, please try to support the schools through regular monthly payments in order to ensure that functioning and sustainability of the system and our schools.
- We call upon the Indian diaspora in Oman to come forward and protect the schools in every way they can.

For any fee-related or Covid-related concerns or clarifications, you may contact the School Hotlines or the School Contact Points. For further clarifications, you may also write to info@indianschooloman.com