

FAQ – Managed Return to School

1. Why is a managed return to school being implemented?

To ensure that every student is able to directly engage at school with as many of their class teachers as possible, as this is necessary to optimising continuity in learning and to support wellbeing in these challenging times

2. On what health basis is a managed return to schools possible?

The position of the federal and state governments, the peak health bodies advising government (the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee –AHPCC—and NSW Health), and the senior leadership of the Department of Education is that schools are safe for students and staff.

3. What of infection control practices in schools?

As we work to optimise the engagement, learning and wellbeing of students, we will implement infection control processes that are in keeping with current health advice and achievable within the practical limitations of the school setting.

The Prime Minister, Mr Scott Morrison, publically announced on 24/4/20 that AHPCC advice is that “the ‘venue density rule’ of no more than one person per four square metres is not appropriate or practical in classrooms or corridors, nor maintaining 1.5 metres between students during classroom activities.” This advice has been recognised by the Secretary of the Department of Education, Mr Mark Scott in his live streams to principals and teachers. For example, when he said “social distancing rules that have applied in enclosed spaces do not apply to classrooms” (23/4/20). AHPCC believes that the “greatest risk of transmission in the school environment is between adults”. Secretary Scott has emphasised that “staff need to pay attention to social distancing with each other”, for example in staff rooms. He has also urged parents to “maintain physical distancing between themselves and each other at school”, for example when children are being dropped off at school, or when a parent wishes to speak with a staff member in the front office.

AHPCC suggests a range of measure for schools to manage the risk of transmission “within the practical limitations of a school environment”. For example, advice has been given regarding good hygiene practices. The Department of Education is providing resources, assistance and further guidance to schools in implementing these. When and as required, the school will seek to obtain what resources it might need from those that are publicly available.

4. What of students and staff who are vulnerable or at risk?

Protecting vulnerable people who are at an increased risk if they contract COVID-19 is critical to the school being a safe environment. When and as needed, existing advice will be followed in allowing staff to work from home each day. This supports teachers and staff who are vulnerable, as well as those with responsibilities to care for vulnerable people. When needed, as guided by NSW Health and/or medical advice, students at risk will be supported to learn from home.

5. What is informing the considerations for HSC students?

The 2020 HSC is continuing and NESA emphasises the following to students: “Keep learning, keep submitting your assessments and listen to your teachers.” It is therefore incumbent upon the school to optimise learning engagement and continuity for HSC students, establishing the conditions in which they will be able to do as well as they possibly can in each of their subjects. Maximising direct engagement in class with teachers is a powerful way to help establish the conditions for optimal teaching and learning, and to also bring about increased certainty for HSC students in these unsettled and unsettling times. It is possible to bring HSC students back to school every day, and for them to follow their regular timetable.

6. What is informing the considerations for students in Years 7-10?

Underpinning the state focus for public schools to begin a managed return of students to school is an essential need for “face-to-face” teaching. The learning and teaching that happens for students in a (physical) classroom with their regular teacher is essential to the quality and continuity of students’ learning and their wellbeing.

For the rostered days at school of Years 7-10, the timetabled class teacher is the best person to engage with students. She or he will know the class members best, and will be continuing to produce and respond to the online learning that will be happening on the other days of the school week. The class teacher will be providing feedback to students, getting feedback from students about online and remote learning, and monitoring and following up on student progress and engagement issues in the remote environment. On this basis, seeing students, if at all possible, on the rostered day at school for a Year group is ideal for teachers in supporting their students as fully as possible in our present circumstances. For this reason, we will make adjustments to our timetable, enabling students to have direct engagement with as many of their teachers as possible.