



Hon. Mark McGowan MLA  
Premier



Hon. Sue Ellery MLC  
Minister for Education and Training

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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

Thursday, 14 May 2020

### **All WA students to return to school from next week**

- School students required back at school from Monday, May 18, based on health advice
- Students who are medically vulnerable can continue to learn at home
- ATAR written exams to go ahead as scheduled from November 2
- Vulnerable staff members should continue to seek medical advice
- Students at residential facilities can return home on weekends subject to the discretion of the Principal or residential manager

All Western Australian school students will be required to return to school from Monday, May 18, following a review of the current arrangements and health advice.

Premier Mark McGowan and Education and Training Minister Sue Ellery today announced the return to normal school operations after consultation with stakeholders and health experts.

There are exceptions for students who are medically vulnerable or those who have a family member with chronic health issues. These students will be assessed and can continue to learn from home and will be supported by their schools and the Department of Education.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advises of a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. Additional measures, such as the \$43 million investment in extra cleaning at public schools, will continue to reduce the risk further. Ahead of Term 2, the WA Chief Health Officer provided advice that schools were safe for face-to-face learning.

Should they remain away without good reason, they will no longer be provided with learning packages and their absence will be marked as unauthorised.

Up to 20 additional teachers will be employed to support students who have been medically referred to learn from home and up to 36 additional staff will be employed to help students who need additional support to re-engage with their school.

Teachers and school staff who are aged over 70 and those aged over 65 with a health condition, should seek medical advice before returning to work.

Drop off and pick up arrangements that restrict parents and carers, and non-essential visitors, from entering school grounds remain in place. These arrangements will be reviewed as part of Phase 3 of the McGowan Government's WA roadmap.

Whole school assemblies, camps and interschool activities will still not be permitted.

Students in residential facilities will be now permitted to return home at weekends at the discretion of the principal or residential manager. The health advice remains that visits home should be reduced.

For Year 12 students, the 2020 ATAR course written exams will go ahead as scheduled from November 2. Written examinations will take the same form as previous years, with a three-hour duration.

For Year 9 students who were unable to sit the NAPLAN this year due to COVID-19, more flexibility will be introduced into the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA). This will give Year 9 students the opportunity to demonstrate the literacy and numeracy standards required to achieve the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE).

Teachers will be required to report to parents with information about students' learning progress to date in semester one but they will not be required to assign an A-E grade. Teachers will continue to provide informal feedback to parents and carers throughout the semester as required.

These changes recognise the impact of COVID-19 on teaching in Western Australia, and provides parents and carers with reliable information regarding student progress.

Strict environmental cleaning throughout the school day, including high-touch surfaces and playground equipment, will continue as will reinforced hygiene measures.

#### **Comments attributed to Premier Mark McGowan:**

"Once again Western Australia is leading the way when it comes to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, and this is great news for WA students and the general WA community.

"This is an important step forward as we look to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and I'm pleased that all WA students will return to the best place to continue their school journey - the classroom.

"Our cautious, staged approach to re-opening WA schools allowed us to carefully transition students back into the classroom, while managing the risk.

"I acknowledge it has been a challenging time for many, and I thank all Western Australian students, parents and teachers for their efforts to get us to this point.

"We are now in a position where Western Australian parents can feel confident that schools are a safe place for their children, with a rigorous cleaning regime and other additional protections in place.

"As has always been the case, this decision was based on the health advice that recognises there is a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. We will continue to monitor the situation in coming weeks."

#### **Comments attributed to Education and Training Minister Sue Ellery:**

"From May 18, schools will return to normal operations and any student without a valid health reason who does not return will no longer be provided with learning packages and their absence will be marked as unauthorised.

"These students will be supported to reconnect with their schools.

"This decision has been made following extensive consultation with health experts and stakeholders.

"The majority of stakeholders we've spoken with have said they wanted a return to compulsory school attendance for all students and strict hygiene measures to be maintained.

"Attendance continues to increase in WA schools, with an 85.2 per cent average recorded on

Wednesday this week which shows parent confidence in the health advice and the public school system.

“Research tells us there is a direct relationship between attendance and student achievement - achievement declines as absence increases - particularly impacting students from disadvantaged communities the most. This is why we want every student back at school, learning in class with their teachers.”

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