

# Webinar | Returning to school in a COVID-safe way

*Held: Thursday 12 August 2021 at 7:00pm*

## Unanswered questions

### Question topic

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## HSC

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- **Is NESA looking at a secure online exam system that is already in use (universities use them) that could be used for HSC exams this year so it is easy and secure to do exams online from home?**
- **What alternatives are being considered to written HSC exams in October?**
- **What will be the mechanism for cancellation of written HSC examinations if there is positive COVID case in the school?**
- **How are we going to keep safe all the supervisors who work at the HSC exams?**

All decisions about the HSC prioritise the health and safety of students and everyone involved in the HSC.

NESA is working to reschedule the HSC written exams to start on 9 November and will release an updated timetable in early September.

We are continuing to work very closely with NSW Health and the school sectors to develop comprehensive COVID-safe protocols for running the exams which will be released to schools imminently.

For further information visit the [NESA website](#) or contact our COVID-19 Support Team on 1300 138 323.

- **Given the scrapping of trials in some schools and the redistribution of weightings of other assessment tasks, do schools have to tell students their rankings? Or can they keep this hidden from students?**

Schools should maintain their usual practices this year.

- **How can we ensure our Year 10 students who plan to leave get there ROSA considering COVID restrictions and online learning?**

The Record of School Achievement (RoSA) is a cumulative credential for students leaving school between Year 10 and 12 and there are no changes in 2021. Teachers will continue to assess whether a student qualifies for the RoSA based on their participation, engagement and completion of the course requirements. Find out more [here](#).

- **Several questions and concerns about ensuring integrity of school-based HSC marking, potential for teacher bias, how will integrity of marking be ensured, moderation of marks fairly across schools, transparency of process and the appeal process-possibility to request review of marks outside of school.**

The health and safety of everyone involved in the HSC exams is the priority.

NESA has moved to teacher marking of the oral and performance exams and some major projects because NSW Health said that NESA markers should not be moving within or beyond Greater Sydney if there was an alternative.

This is the safe and sensible alternative and we trust the professional judgement of teachers.

Teachers know their students best and will account for the impact of COVID restrictions on students work and ability to prepare for their oral exam, performance exam or major project.

The marks will be moderated by NESA. Find out more [here](#).

## Vaccination of students and staff

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- **What is the plan for vaccination of HSC students not in LGAs of concern or students not choosing to be vaccinated? Will there be another round of vaccinations for HSC students?**
- **Will other students be vaccinated before they return to school?**

Currently HSC students who are aged 16 and above who live or attend school in an LGA of concern are being targeted in the vaccine roll-out. Further information on the expansion of vaccination initiatives for HSC students will be communicated by the NSW Government. The NSW Department of Education continues to work closely with NSW Health on our student and staff vaccination programs and our community will be notified as soon as advice is updated.

- **How will children with disabilities be protected with the vaccine rollout?**

Students with disabilities who require additional support to access their vaccination will be provided with an alternative option. Further details on the alternative booking arrangements will be provided to schools.

- **Will teachers and other school staff be vaccinated before return to school?**

Yes, they will be vaccinated before return to school. On 27 August 2021 the Premier and Minister announced that from 8 November all workers who attend a NSW public school, preschool or early childhood education provider for their work will be required to be fully vaccinated.

## Return to School - COVID safety

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- **Will there be on-site rapid COVID testing at schools?**

NSW Health has advised [Rapid antigen testing](#) will no longer be an alternative to vaccination.

In line with the amended public health order, if an authorised worker is not vaccinated or does not have a medical contraindication form, they will not be able to work outside their LGA.

- **What is the policy for safe ventilation in schools on return? E.g. Many schools are over capacity or have shared open learning spaces with more than 90 students and shared air conditioning? How will ventilation be assessed for COVID safety? Are there any publicly available documents on this?**

The NSW Department of Education will be following the NSW government's [COVID-19 guidance on ventilation](#). Schools will be taking the following precautions when welcoming students back to on site learning:

- Opening windows and doors where possible.
- Avoiding directing fans towards people's faces, such as by aiming them continuously towards the ceiling or floor.
- Limiting oscillation and turbulence of fans.
- Regularly inspecting, maintaining and cleaning heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.
- Avoiding using only recirculated air in HVAC systems and increasing the outside air intake.
- Considering disabling ventilation controls with automated settings that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.
- Ensuring exhaust fans are operational if in place.

- **Will additional on-site cleaning of school handles railings and desks be provided?**

Enhanced cleaning arrangements remain in place across NSW schools which are:

- An additional 25% of cleaning provided to schools for the daily clean.
- Day cleaners wipe down high-touch surfaces.
- Schools and workplaces have supplies of hygiene products.
- Ensuring bathrooms are well stocked with hand soap and paper towels or hand dryers.
- Providing hand sanitiser where appropriate.

- **Could the return to school be on staggered days for different year levels?**

- **Will K-1 be given a priority for return to school?**

In Greater Sydney and other areas currently operating under [Level 4 restrictions](#), the NSW Health advice is that it is safest for students to return in stages rather than all at once or depending on the day.

Students in Kindergarten and Year 1 will return first given the importance of developing their foundational learning in the early years and their disrupted experience to date. Year 12 and HSC students will also be prioritised as they prepare to complete their final year of schooling and transition to further education, training and work.

- **What measures will be taken to ensure sporting activities, transport to school and school playground and lunches are COVID safe?**

As students return to school, strict COVID-safe measures will remain in place to ensure the safety of our students and staff.

When at school, NSW Health advice requires that all staff must wear a face mask or covering at all times including when working outdoors – this includes in playgrounds and elsewhere on school grounds. This includes adults in all early childhood education and care settings, including when caring for and educating children.

While on school sites masks are required indoors and outdoors for all staff and all students Year 7 and above. Masks are strongly recommended for primary students.

- **What measures will be taken to ensure public transport to school is COVID-safe?**

NSW Department of Education will work with NSW Health and Transport for NSW to ensure COVID-safe measures are in place on public transport.

- **What will the policy be for visitors including contractors to school sites?**

From 8 November the following groups will need to be fully vaccinated to be on a school site:

- Any staff members who work in a school setting and are paid by the NSW Department of Education.
- Out of school hours care, canteen and uniform shop staff.
- Contractors working on a school site in close proximity to students and staff (whether engaged by a school or not).
- Volunteers.
- Department staff undertaking regulatory activities in schools, preschools or other early childhood education settings.

More details should be available soon via a Public Health Order.

- **Will students be required to wear masks when they return?**

Students in Year 7 and above, like staff, will be required to wear a mask or face covering both indoors and outdoors when at school.

- **What are the plans for transitioning children in Year 6 to Year 7 in new schools?**

Currently schools have been advised to move orientation and transition programs to later in Term 4. More information on transition will be provided as soon as updated advice is received from Health.

- **Will the Department of Education bring students and teachers back earlier for those regions that aren't affected with lock-down settings?**

Areas across NSW that are removed from stay-at-home rules will return to school under Level 3 settings. This is a full return for **all** cohorts to schools, with reduced mingling and on-site activities. Refer to [Level 3 schools](#) for further details.

- **If this lockdown continues into next term, is there a plan to have Year 11 return face to face as they will enter into Year 12 next term?**

When stay-at-home rules are still in place but other community vaccination and transmission conditions are met, students will return to school in a staged way. This is a staggered return for prioritised cohorts, with no mingling or on-site activities.

Students will return to face-to-face learning with NSW Health-approved COVID-safe settings on school sites in the following order:

- From 25 October – **Kindergarten and Year 1**
- From 1 November – **Years 2, 6 and 11.**
- From 8 November – **Years 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10.**

Refer to [Level 3 plus schools](#) for further information.

## Online learning

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- **What systems are in place to assess student learning during lockdown in order to identify and address resulting deficits?**

Each school will have different practices in place to assist teachers to understand student's learning progress whilst at home. Teachers can use a range of informal and formal assessment tasks. Informal assessment can include quizzes, participation in learning and classroom discussions or written tasks. In some schools students submit learning tasks to teachers on a daily basis and feedback is provided. As the term ends, more formal assessment tasks may be delivered to students to identify their learning and understanding of the term's content. In most primary schools, assessment has occurred online and through hard-copy learning packs delivered to parents and back to teachers. Schools should be using a range of ways to communicate with parents and check in on students learning and wellbeing. If parents are concerned about their children's learning progress they should contact the school.

- **Could teachers set up online groups of students to connect and study every day together?**

The Department's guidelines require teachers to supervise online lessons.

- **Why are not all schools using zoom learning? There are inconsistencies across schools.**

There is no right or wrong way to approach learning from home. The circumstances for families will vary depending on a number of factors including the need for parents to work at home as well as supporting their children to participate in their learning.

Schools are best placed to know their students and community. The use of digital platforms may enhance the learning experience for students.

Schools should establish clear lines of communication with their community. Communication may take the form of:

- Pre-recorded instructions to assist with completing activities.
- Video conferencing sessions.
- Emails and messaging through digital platforms to provide instructions and feedback
- Phone calls.

Each child has particular needs and ways of interacting with their learning. It is recognised for some families it will be difficult to complete the learning from home program while for others they will require more activities and challenges to keep their children engaged.

One of the common issues parents face with learning from home programs is wanting to keep their child focussed on learning for the whole day. Similar to the working day for adults, children need to take breaks from their learning and get time to play, socialise or have physical exercise. For some of us a routine is important, others prefer to mix it up.

The Department has provided parents a range of supports that can be accessed on line to supplement the work provided by the school. The Department's website has a range of activities, ideas, advice and helpful hints to assist parents make learning from home a more enjoyable experience for everyone. The website may be accessed at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/learning-at-home>.

The Department has also partnered with ABC TV and produced its own educational live series and a range of specific resources to engage students and assist students with a range of special needs.

It is important for parents to reach out to your school if you need further advice or help to support your children. Your child's teacher, the school executive team and counselling service are all available to help the school community during this time.

Please contact your school principal for localised support or visit the Department's website, which is regularly updated with the latest advice and information about school operations at <https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>.

- **What are schools doing to monitor and measure online learning and attendance?**

Teachers provide feedback to students on a daily and/or weekly basis, according to the lesson and content.

Attendance is recorded each day by teachers, for those students on site and at home. Non-attendance is recorded and followed up by teachers and school executive. Welfare checks occur by telephone.



## P&C Association queries

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- **Will P&C canteens be able to function as takeaway for teachers and Year 12 students when they return?**

Yes, canteens will be able to operate where appropriate hygiene measures are in place as long as:

- They can ensure that they are accessed by one cohort at a time.
- Physical distancing is in place.
- Canteen staff follow normal COVID-safe protocols around vaccinations and testing.

- **How will P&C executive members be advised if they can enter the school and how?**

Under Level 3 and Level 3 plus, P&C members will not be able to hold activities (including meetings) on school sites, they will be allowed to conduct meetings online however.

- **When school resumes, will support staff roles return? Will canteens/uniforms shops be able to open?**

When schools return canteens can operate where appropriate hygiene measures are in place, as long as:

- They can ensure that they are accessed by one cohort at a time.
- Physical distancing is in place.
- Canteen staff follow normal COVID-safe protocols around vaccinations and testing.

Uniform Stores can only operate if they:

- Are online.
- Have pre-ordering arrangements in place, with one dedicated staff member attending outside of school hours to arrange distribution.