



Education Report: Options for senior secondary school attendance under Covid Level 3

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	17 August 2020	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1238437
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	N/A	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

You have asked for options to give schools flexibility to bring some senior students back to school under Covid Level 3. This report sets this out.

Summary

- Under Covid Level 3, students in years 11-13 are required to learn from home.
- The numbers of those students in Auckland are:
 - As at August 16, 2020, there are around 57,600 currently enrolled year 11-13 students attending school located in the Auckland Regional Council (boundary definition of the Auckland Super City)
 - By year level, this is around:
 - 20,500 year 11 students;
 - 19,400 year 12 students; and
 - 17,700 year 13 students.¹
- Secondary school principals, in Auckland, are concerned for some of their senior students. While some students have thrived on remote teaching and learning, others have found it difficult, and, as relatively high stakes exams draw close, anxiety levels are rising. Those facing NCEA Level 3 exams are the priority group followed by those studying towards NCEA Level 2.
- We suggest that you seek an approach whereby schools be given flexibility to bring some senior school students back under Level 3, rather than a wholesale decision that

¹ With Baccalaureate and Cambridge numbers to be confirmed.

all can return. This is because there will be mixed attitudes to a return to school, with some young people keen to return to school to progress their NCEAs, and others anxious about returning to a school environment under Level 3. Based on that, we do not anticipate large numbers to return, and only under strict health observance.

5. There are several options for achieving this change for senior secondary students, including an updated Health Order, a delegation from the Director-General of Health to the Secretary for Education under the existing Order, and the new powers of direction that the Secretary for Education has under the Education and Training Act. If you agree to allow some senior secondary students to attend school in the Auckland region, we will identify the best means to implement that decision and put the necessary arrangement in place.
6. We are most concerned about those students who are close to Level 2 or 3 NCEA exams. For that reason, we suggest you ask for students at that level to be able to return to school, including those who are doing Baccalaureate and Cambridge.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

- a. **note** that you have asked for advice on options for senior secondary school attendance in Auckland under Covid Level 3
Noted
- b. **note** that we advise you seek an approach whereby schools are given flexibility to bring some senior school students back under Level 3
Noted
- c. **note** that we recommend to give flexibility for years 12-13 students (with year 13 students being the priority)
Noted
- d. **agree** to give flexibility to schools to bring back years 12-13 students, balancing education and health outcomes
 Agree **Disagree**
- e. **note** that this exclude offsite programmes like, for example, Trades Academies and Gateway, given that this would be mixing bubbles
Noted
- f. **note** that the Ministry of Education is working through the options for achieving this, and will give you further advice, should you agree to a recommendation in d above
Noted

Proactive release

- g. **agree** that this Report will be proactively released.

Agree **Disagree**



Dr Andrea Schöllmann
Deputy Secretary
Education System Policy
17/08/2020



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

17/8/2020

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Background

1. You have asked for advice on options to allow some flexibility at senior secondary school under Alert Level 3 in Auckland for senior students to return to the physical premises of their school. At present, year 11-13 students are not able to attend school and need to learn from home.
2. Given the uncertainty about the timing of lockdown levels, the Ministry has been working with NZQA on developing urgent advice on the immediate actions required and decisions available to maintain the fairness, robustness and credibility of the NCEA system in 2020.
3. NZQA is confident it can run examinations nationally and regionally in an Alert Level 2 environment, but not if we are at Alert Levels 3 or 4 on or beyond November 1.
4. Unlike most jurisdictions, New Zealand already has processes in place to provide school-based grades in the event that a student or groups of students cannot sit exams. These are, of course, reliant on schools collecting evidence that students meet the required standard.
5. Because of this, as you know, some principals in the education sector have expressed concerns about the potential impact on achievement of senior secondary (Levels 11-13) students during the Covid 19 Level 3 alert in Auckland. For students, there will be a mix of experiences, with some students keen to return to school and others being anxious about returning to physical school premises.

Options

6. There are three potential options to progress this flexibility, under Covid Level 3, subject to health measures being adhered to:
 - a. For years 11-13
 - b. For years 12-13
 - c. For year 13 only.
7. We recommend that you seek flexibility for years 12-13 in 6(a) above.

Risks and mitigations

8. The main mitigation of risk is for schools to adhere to the messages put out in the Saturday 15 August Ministry of Education bulletin as follows in relation to senior secondary students returning to school.

Requirements at Alert Level 3
Children at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are encouraged to stay home wherever possible.
Distance learning will continue to be available to those who are able to remain at home.
Staff who are have a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should stay at home. If they want to come to school you may agree to the request only if it can be assured that it is safe for them to do so.
Staff to work with their GP or specialist if they need help understanding their own level of risk and how best to stay healthy.
Hand sanitiser at entry to classrooms and in shared spaces where available. Soap, water and the ability to dry hands must be provided in bathrooms. If hand sanitiser is in short supply, washing and drying hands with soap is still the most effective hygiene measure.

Physical distancing:

- Everyone must maintain a 2 metre physical distance outside and 1 metre inside
- Visitors, including parents and caregivers, should maintain a 2m distance from those who are not part of either their household or workplace/school bubble.
- 'School bubbles' of no more than 20 children formed.
- To reduce congestion, consider introducing staggered entry times into classes
- Breaks, starts and finishes should be staggered and children stay in their bubbles, to minimise congregation of students in shared spaces.
- NB school bubbles can move classrooms but only if high-touch surfaces are cleaned in between bubbles and no bubbles mix that aren't already sharing a space.

Recommended to keep any movement to a minimum.

Disinfect and clean all surfaces daily.

Schools and early learning services, like workplaces, are not considered gatherings – however for visitors including parents and caregivers, they must keep a 2 metre distance from others outside their household bubble and where possible should not come on the school site.

Physical education classes and break time activities cannot include sports with <2m physical distance or where the same equipment is touched by different students (balls, ropes, sticks, etc.).

Playgrounds closed.

Contact tracing remains a priority through your visitor register, timetable and attendance register. You are required to display QR code posters for the NZ COVID Tracer App. To support contact tracing, record all visitors who are on-site for a period of time, including parents and caregivers, in your visitor register (as is usual practice but also to assist if contact tracing is necessary). For drop offs and pick-ups, if the parent or caregiver uses the app you don't need to capture them in your visitor register. For parents and caregivers who cannot use the App, you may wish to continue to record their details in a simple register when they do pick-ups and drop-offs.

No non-essential visitors.

There should be no volunteers for classroom activities.

Consider how you might monitor those entrances to minimise non-essential visitors from coming on site. If staffing on site is limited, one entry point may be the most practical way to manage visitors, coupled with staggered starts.

You should already have contact details for all your students, parents, caregivers and staff so shouldn't need to record this (perhaps remind families, whānau and staff to update you if their address or phone number has changed, or changes).

Please keep your visitor register for at least 2 months.

Where possible, it is recommended that teachers stay with the same school bubble of students.

In practice there may be a need to have a designated relief or back-up teacher identified for each school bubble

If you prepare food on site you must check the MPI guidance on re-opening food businesses and ensure your school and any suppliers meet all health and safety requirements before you recommence the supply of food to your students.

Libraries can be operated as the virus does not survive for long on paper and cardboard (less than 24 hours), so books and other paper and cardboard can be put aside overnight and used the next day by other students. Books with plastic sleeves should be wiped down with a disinfectant wipe before re-issuing the next day.

No external students and external staff onsite.

Avoid using shared supplies

If shared supplies are necessary within a bubble, consider using designated bins for clean and used supplies. Shared supplies are considered high-touch and should be cleaned frequently

Do not share instruments between students or school bubbles. For example musical instruments unless they are student-owned and only handled by that student, should not be

used.

Playing wind instruments (e.g. recorders) is not recommended in Level 3 (except at home in their home bubble)

Drinking fountains should not be used at Alert Level 3. Water bottles should be used and appropriate health and safety considerations followed.

9. Specifically, at level 3, schools are required to strictly adhere to bubbles of 20 students. This means that secondary schools could not operate as normal, with students moving from subject class to subject class throughout the day. Schools will instead need to move teachers to the students, with each group of students not exceeding 20, and no inter-mixing of student bubbles. Staggering of arrival times in this context may be required.
10. Due to the need to meet public health requirements across multiple settings, secondary-tertiary programmes like Trades Academies and Gateway will remain challenging to deliver, so should not be allowed in either of the year 12-13 or year 13 options, given the potential to mix bubbles. The Ministry will work with Trades Academy lead providers and schools in the coming days to produce guidance on what is possible under the amended requirements.
11. With more students potentially attending their school in Auckland in person, there are some risks to increased volumes on public transport, with the possibility that some public transport services could reach capacity sooner, resulting in people needing to wait for the next scheduled service. School bus routes could also be affected.
12. It is also important to note that some secondary schools will be unable to open for years 12-13 students where they have a COVID-19 positive student or staff member. This means that year 12-13 students from such schools will need to continue to learn from home. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

Next Steps

13. If you agree to this report, we will provide you with advice on the mechanisms to achieve the outcome of allowing flexibility for schools to allow some Levels 12-13 students back onto school premises.