

# Independent Education Union

Unit 10, 40 Brisbane Avenue  
BARTON ACT 2600  
PO Box 177  
DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600



Telephone: (02) 6273 3107  
Fax: (02) 6273 3710  
Website: <http://www.ieu.org.au>

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The Hon Scott Morrison MP  
Prime Minister  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

## **RE: COVID-19**

In light of the unfolding health crisis and the requirement that schools remain open, the IEUA is requesting the following matters be addressed by the National Cabinet.

Our primary concern is that schools cannot meet either their legislative Work, Health and Safety obligations or their duty of care to both their employees and students.

In accepting the recommendations of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee governments have already committed to a range of preventative strategies including measures specific to schools. These strategies are not being resourced and/or implemented and, in any event, they are manifestly inadequate. A continuation of this course will place the health of employees in non-government schools and their families at grave risk.

Governments have been asking school staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools based primarily on a strategy of personal hygiene and social distancing. This strategy has not been implemented. Many schools and school systems are not adequately supplied to implement even these basic hygiene/safety measures. Additional resources have not been supplied to clean schools to the requisite standard. More importantly this strategy completely ignores the reality of the working environment in schools. Social distancing is not and cannot be applied to students. Teachers, particularly in primary schools, must necessarily come into contact with students.

## **Provision of Information**

National Cabinet and governments should provide the community and school employees with the full detail of the medical advice that is the purported basis for schools remaining open. There must also be available, clear and universally applied guidelines as to when schools will be closed.

## **Vulnerable Employees**

Employees with underlying health conditions, those who are pregnant and those who provide care for elderly relatives within their own household should, with immediate effect, be permitted to work from home or granted ex-gratia leave.

## **Additional workload**

Given the Governments' policy of keeping schools open teachers cannot be expected to deliver face to face lessons to classes and then in addition remain in contact with/provide lessons for those students whose parents have elected to withdraw them from school.

To cater for the eventuality that schools may transition to remote (online) learning, systems must provide teachers/administrators with additional release and support to prepare such lessons. School systems should also centrally prepare resources and make them available to all schools.

Any sustained continuation of the current Work Health and Safety risks in non-government schools can only lead to a steep and prolonged increase in employee absences which will result in schools being unable to function.

National Cabinet and governments must commit to providing employees in schools, through their unions, with full consultation about, and direct involvement in, decisions about their safety at work and that of their families at home.

We seek an urgent meeting with you and/or the Minister for Education to discuss the matters raised in this correspondence.

Yours sincerely



**CHRIS WATT**  
**Federal Secretary**

Cc Jacinta Collins NCEC      David Mulford ISCA