

22 July 2020

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier & Minister for Education
Level 3, 1 Treasury Place
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Dear Deputy Premier

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the IEU has consistently encouraged employers and staff in non-government education to follow the advice of the Chief Health Officer.

We are increasingly concerned, however, that the current stated position of the Department of Education regarding staff and student attendance may put school communities at risk.

In particular, the published advice that “school staff are required to attend for duty at their school in accordance with normal arrangements” is at odds with the state government’s advice to other Victorians in the areas covered by Stage 3 Restrictions that those who can work from home should do so. During the previous period of remote learning, staff across all Victorian schools demonstrated that quality education and student support can be delivered remotely from home.

We accept that some staff are required on campus to supervise students who cannot remain at home and to support school operations, but believe that these workers are safest if contact with colleagues is minimised. Many schools in our sector have taken effective steps to minimise on-campus staffing, but Departmental advice is very influential – and it is becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile public messages about safety and transmission risk with the advice given to schools. We ask you to review Departmental advice and to encourage schools to ensure that only those staff who are operationally required physically attend the workplace.

Further, we have publicly stated that we understand the reasons for the decision to hold VCE/VCAL classes on campus. In light of the continuing high case numbers and the growing reports of positive cases of COVID-19 in schools, however, we believe it is time to review this. In particular, it is essential that individual schools are equipped to make proactive decisions around the delivery mode of senior classes based on an assessment of risk factors in the school community. The best way to minimise long-term disruption for our students is to take action to rapidly and effectively reduce the transmission of COVID-19. We believe school leaders need to be afforded the trust and flexibility to make the best decisions for their local circumstances in consultation with their staff.

These are challenging times for everyone, and we recognise the complexities of decisions around schooling arrangements as well as the broader ramifications of further changes in this already deeply disrupted year. However, we believe that the safety of our students, school staff and the broader community necessitates a review of the matters outlined above.

Yours sincerely



Debra James
General Secretary