



## Education Report: Additional information to support a decision on allowing years 11-13 to return to school in Auckland on 26 October

<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education – (Māori Education) Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education Hon Ayesha Verrall, Associate Minister of Health		
<b>Date:</b>		<b>Priority:</b>	Low / Medium / High
<b>Security Level:</b>	In Confidence	<b>METIS No:</b>	1274782
<b>Drafter:</b>		<b>DDI:</b>	
<b>Key Contact:</b>		<b>DDI:</b>	
<b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b>	Yes / No	<b>Round Robin:</b>	Yes / No

### Proposal

On 18 October 2021, Cabinet authorised a group of Ministers comprising the Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Associate Minister of Education (Maori Education), Associate Minister of Education (Hon Jan Tinetti) and Associate Minister of Health (Hon Ayesha Verrall) to have Power to Act to take decisions on the options on the scope and timing for the reopening of schools and early learning services in Auckland.

The Minister of Education is seeking agreement to allow young people in years 11 to 13 in Auckland to return to school for face-to-face onsite teaching from 26 October.

This would ensure that young people with critical assessments this term are able to receive face-to-face learning onsite, while minimising the proportion of young people travelling to school. Schools expect that a proportion of learners will not return to school for onsite learning even if they are able to due to fear of increased exposure to COVID-19 for the learners and their whānau.



## Recommended Actions


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The Ministry of Education recommends that you:

**Agree** to allow young people in years 11 to 13 in Auckland to return to school for face-to-face onsite teaching from 26 October, with additional public health controls including:

- 1 face coverings will be required on school transport for people aged 12 and over (school transport services are currently exempt from public transport face covering requirements);
- 2 time outdoors for students and staff will be maximised, including breaks, lunch, before and after school (unless the weather does not allow), and rooms will be aired during breaks;
- 3 exercising and singing will take place outdoors;
- 4 groups meeting indoors, including assemblies or staff meetings, will be avoided;
- 5 exams will go ahead, but physical distancing will be maximised within the space available, with a minimum of 1.5m between desks; and
- 6 schools or early learning services near suburbs and clusters of concern will be closed if required.

**Note** that while physical distancing will be maximised within the capacity of schools, the requirements for 1 metre physical distancing and bubbles of 10 cannot be accommodated due to capacity limits within classrooms and workforce constraints.



Andy Jackson  
Hautū / Deputy Secretary  
Te Puna Kaupapahere / Policy

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Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education

— / — / —



Hon Jacinda Ardern  
Prime Minister

19/10/21



Hon Jan Tinetti  
Associate Minister of Education

19/10/2021

Hon Kelvin Davis  
Associate Minister of Education  
(Māori Education)

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Hon Ayesha Verrall,  
Associate Minister of Health

19/10/21



## Background

### What are the existing Alert Level 3 public health measures in schools?

1. At Alert Level 3 in Auckland, children and young people in years 1 to 10 can only go to school if their parents are required to work and there is no other option available. There is a requirement for bubbles of no more than 10 children, with physical distancing of 1 metre between children, young people and staff wherever practicable. There must be at least 2 metres distance from other bubbles.
2. Other public health measures include:
  - Mandatory mask wearing for staff and students in years 9 - 13
  - Children at higher risk of severe illness remain home
  - Staff who are not fully vaccinated and at higher risk of severe illness must remain home
  - only essential visitors will be permitted onsite, and all visitors will need to wear a face covering
  - staff and children who are unwell must stay at home, and get tested for COVID-19
  - good hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette
  - classrooms to be well ventilated
  - high touch surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected each day
  - physical distancing will be adhered to wherever practicable, particularly between adults
  - physical distancing of two metres will be in place from people they don't know
  - QR code posters for the COVID app will be displayed *Assess for school visitors*
  - a contact tracing register in place for everyone coming onsite including students and staff, through the attendance register, timetable and visitor register.

### What additional public health measures have been agreed?

3. Over the last two weeks, the Ministries of Health and Education have worked together to refine public health measures that would need to be in place when children and young people return to school and early learning services. Some additional public health measures were agreed by Cabinet on 11 October [CAB-21- MIN-0415 refers]:
  - a) face coverings will be required on school transport for people aged 12 and over (school transport services are currently exempt from public transport face covering requirements);
  - b) time outdoors for students and staff will be maximised, including breaks, lunch, before and after school (unless the weather does not allow), and rooms will be aired during breaks;



- c) exercising and singing will take place outdoors;
  - d) groups meeting indoors, including assemblies or staff meetings, will be avoided;
  - e) exams will go ahead, but physical distancing will be maximised within the space available, with a minimum of 1.5m between desks; and
  - f) schools or early learning services near suburbs and clusters of concern will be closed if required.
4. All staff must return one negative test prior to returning on-site, and staff who are not fully vaccinated will need to be tested weekly with mandatory vaccination of all staff by 1 January 2022.

**What public health measures cannot be implemented as part of this proposal?**

5. Bubbles of 10 and 1 metre physical distancing cannot be accommodated due to the capacity limits within classrooms and workforce constraints with one teacher to a full class.

**What are the benefits and risks of the proposal?**

6. The decision about whether to allow all children and young people to return to school and early learning services is a finely balanced one requiring difficult trade-offs between improving education outcomes and increasing potential health risks for children and young people. For many parents, there is also a significant concern about children and young people transmitting COVID-19 to more vulnerable members of their whānau, particularly older people or those with co-morbidities.
7. Young people over the age of 12 are eligible for vaccination and many have been partially or fully vaccinated in Auckland (85 percent first dose and 57 percent second dose for ages 12 to 19 years, as at 17 October 2021).
8. The decision to maintain distance learning for children and young people will have a disproportionately negative impact on education outcomes for Māori, Pacific, and disabled learners, and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. It will also be more difficult for learners in years 11 to 13 who will be sitting exams.
9. While schools are considered to be comparatively lower risk environments for transmission (particularly with public health controls in place), there is a risk of young people gathering before and after schools, and it will lead to increased movement of people across Auckland.
10. The decision is made more difficult because there have so far been no graduated options to enable more children and young people to go back to school. We are exploring with schools what other options may be available to allow the return of years 1-10 and will brief Ministers in time for decisions in the week beginning 26 October.



11. Education sector stakeholders have provided very strong feedback that they cannot successfully manage to deliver both onsite face-to-face and distance learning at the same time, without compromising education quality. Bubbles and 1 metre physical distancing cannot be accommodated if all children and young people return to school.

**Next steps**

12. The Ministry of Education is preparing communications material to support announcement of this decision on 20 October. Early announcement is important as there will be a limited opportunity for staff to take a COVID-19 test prior to returning to schools.
13. Arrangements for the Waikato will be confirmed next week if it does not return to Alert Level 2 at the next review point on 22 October.