

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for the Coordination of Education and Training – COVID-19

Minister for Education



Tuesday, 26 May 2020

FIRST WAVE OF STUDENTS BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Schools across Victoria today welcomed back around 400,000 students as part of a staged return to classroom teaching.

Minister For Education James Merlino congratulated principals, teachers, school staff, students and families for their incredible efforts to make remote learning work, and announced a summit to discuss lessons learnt and investigate what improvements can be made to the education system as a result of the remote learning experience.

While remote learning has presented challenges, a significant number of schools also reported benefits from remote learning – for students who have previously been disengaged or distracted in the classroom, and for high-ability students who have been able to learn at their own pace.

Some students whose learning has been affected by anxiety or other mental health conditions have also shown significant benefits from remote learning.

The summit will be held in June, following an independent analysis of the experience at schools across the state, and bring together education leaders from the government, Catholic and independent school sectors.

Around 257,000 government school students from Prep, Grade 1, Grade 2, VCE and VCAL, and specialist schools returned to classrooms today – the first step in all students returning for face-to-face learning on 9 June.

Until then, most Grade 3 to Year 10 students will continue learning remotely, allowing the Chief Health Officer to monitor and evaluate the effects the return to school by other year levels has on the increased movement of people and transmission of coronavirus within the community.

As students return to on-site learning, schools are implementing staggered drop-off and pick-ups to reduce the number of adults around school grounds at any one time, as well as staggered break times to manage the number of students mixing across year levels.

All schools will implement physical distancing measures for their staff, and school staff have been prioritised for voluntary coronavirus testing in the lead-up to today's return to on-site schooling. The Victorian Government is also investing up to \$45 million for increased daily cleaning at every government school for the rest of Term 2 and 3.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

"Remote learning hasn't been easy, but I couldn't be prouder of how our principals, teachers, support staff, students and families have responded to the challenge."

"The advice from the Chief Health Officer is for students to begin a phased return to face-to-face learning – and that's what's happening today. Having close to a million students learning from home has made a huge contribution to limiting the number of people moving around the community and reducing the spread of the virus."

"This is a real opportunity to improve our education system and learn lessons from this remote learning experience. This summit will be a way for all of our school sectors to come together and report back about the benefits they experienced."