

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

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

Minister for Education

Minister for Mental Health



Monday, 26 October 2020

EVERY STUDENT RETURNS TO THE CLASSROOM

All remaining Victorian students will begin returning to classrooms from today, with 163,000 students in Years 8 to 10 in metropolitan Melbourne joining their classmates in the final stage of the staggered return to on-site learning.

It will mean that more than a million students across the state have transitioned from flexible and remote learning back to on-site learning.

Graduation ceremonies can also commence this term allowing year 6 and year 12 students and school staff to gather to celebrate their final year at their school.

COVIDSafe measures must be in place and they can only be attended by students from the graduating year level and school staff but can be broadcast to families. This applies to schools in both metropolitan and regional areas.

Schools will also be provided with additional expert advice as part of a program being rolled out to provide additional support as students return. The COVIDSafe Assurance Program for Schools program includes visits from trained Occupational Health and Safety professionals and infection prevention specialists who plan to visit all government and non-government schools.

These visits will help schools identify and address any gaps in the implementation of health and safety strategies and ensure the right measures are in place for programs, such as mental health and wellbeing supports for staff, students and school leaders.

The program will support measures already underway at schools through checklists of safety measures to review and apply the school's COVIDSafe plan. It will ensure the display of signage for physical distancing when required, record keeping processes for on-site visitors and contractors, and promoting strategies for safety of the school community during school drop-offs and pick-ups.

Primary school students, secondary students in Year 7 and studying VCE and VCAL subjects, and students attending specialist schools in metropolitan Melbourne returned on site from 12 October. Those in regional and rural Victoria started their staggered return at the start of Term 4 from 5 October.

The staggered return has been based on the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer and was designed to manage the increased movement across the community. A return of Years 8 to 10 students at a later stage has provided enough time to monitor the impact of the first stage of students returning to school.

As students settle in the classroom for face-to-face learning, schools will focus on supporting students' mental health and wellbeing and identifying students who will need help catching up.

The Government is also investing \$250 million to deploy more than 4,100 tutors across Victorian schools in 2021 so no student is left behind in the wake of the pandemic. This package will make tutors available in every government school and support more than 200,000 students across the state.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

"We've been working to get Victorian students back to school as soon – and as safely – as possible and as a parent of three kids, I'm thrilled we have been able to do just that."

"I'm incredibly proud of all the work our dedicated school staff and parents have done in supporting our students during their period of remote and flexible learning and getting them back into the classroom."

Media contact: Matthew Dixon 0438 190 148 | matthew.dixon@minstaff.vic.gov.au