

7 August 2020

Newcastle schools and COVID-19 closures

The IEU understands two Newcastle schools, St Pius X, Adamstown, and St Francis Xavier, Hamilton, are now closed for deep cleaning following confirmed COVID-19 cases among students.

Between both schools, the union has in excess of 220 members.

IEU Secretary Mark Northam said, “from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IEU’s priority has been the welfare of our members and the communities they serve.

“Our trust is extended to Hunter New England Health, school leaders and the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese to oversee the process of managing what is a complex and evolving situation.

“The union has already contacted all affected members in both schools and will continue to provide advice and support.

“Our members will be seeking that workplace protocols are reviewed to ensure the highest safety levels possible are achieved. This includes ensuring adequate supply and use of hygiene and sanitising materials, as well as physical working arrangements.”

The union has so far not been contacted by any members with concerns about how the school has managed the situation, however, once members return to school after cleaning has taken place staff must be given the opportunity to make observations that might assist them to feel more comfortable returning to work.

This includes clarifying information about what constitutes a vulnerable staff member, as well as issues surrounding social distancing measures in classrooms, buses, and common areas, and the wearing of masks.

“School staff are not required to wear a mask in the classroom, but it is the expectation of the IEU that any staff member who wishes to take the precaution be supported by their employer to do so,” Northam said.

“If members feel safer wearing masks then we will support them to do so.”

It is envisaged that discussions between the IEU and the Diocese will occur to ensure that the concerns of union members are resolved.

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The IEUA NSW/ACT Branch represents over 30,000 teachers, principals and support staff in Catholic and independent schools, early childhood centres and post secondary colleges.

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