

## **Non-government schools must be COVID-safe**

10 August 2020

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch, the union representing staff working in all non-government schools in NSW and the ACT, echoes the NSW Premier's warning to non-government school employers that they need to be adhering to COVID-safe plans, following recent outbreaks of cases in schools around Sydney and Newcastle.

"We are constantly monitoring the situation in schools across the state with regards to ensuring the ongoing safety of our members and their communities," said IEU Secretary Mark Northam.

"We are seeking that COVID-safe protocols are reviewed to ensure the highest safety levels possible in schools are achieved.

"This includes ensuring that there is no unnecessary mixing between schools or with outside members of the community, appropriate physical working arrangements are maintained, as well as ensuring adequate supply and use of hygiene and sanitising materials.

"From the outset of the pandemic, the IEU's priority has been the welfare of our members and the communities they serve.

"In schools where there have been confirmed infections, the IEU has been in contact with affected members and is providing advice and support."

The IEU shares the concerns of the Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant, in particular when it comes to older school students, many of whom have more in common behaviourally with adults than with their primary school aged counterparts, and so present higher risks of transmission both within and outside of the school gates.

"Older school aged students, those in Years 11 and 12 in particular, are often working part time jobs, doing extra curricular activities, and are otherwise mobile in our communities in a way similar to adults," Northam said.

"They are facing confusing mixed messages when it comes to social distancing, being told that there is something special about passing through the school gates that causes it to no longer be necessary.

"These contradictions can cause angst among our members, particularly among those who are classified as vulnerable staff members."

The IEU would like to clarify information about what constitutes a vulnerable staff member and how they might be better protected, as well as issues surrounding social distancing 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 our members feel safer wearing masks, particularly during this critical phase, then we will certainly support them to do so.”

The IEU envisages that we will continue to work collaboratively with non-government school employers to ensure that the concerns of union members, and those of the Premier and Chief Health Officer, are resolved.

### **Contacts**

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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.*

**Authorised by Mark Northam, IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary**