

23 April 2010

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NSW Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC,
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Tasmanian Minister for Education and Training and Deputy Premier, the Hon Jeremy Rockliff MP,
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SA Minister for Education and Child Development, John Gardner MP, Minister.Gardner@sa.gov.au

NT Minister for Education, the Hon Selena Uibo, minister.uibo@nt.gov.au

WA Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Sue Ellery MLC, Minister.Ellery@dpc.wa.gov.au

Please be advised this letter will be distributed to members of our associations and posted on associations' websites.

Dear Ministers of Education

The federal and state and territory governments, working through the National Cabinet, are to be congratulated for all their endeavours towards a shared response to the manifold challenges posed by CoVid-19.

Our organisations represent leaders of Australian schools.

Principals are trained educators and community leaders. We recognise that the critical relationships in the education of Australia's children are those between school and parent/carers, teacher, and student and those of collegiality and cooperation between teachers, schools, and sectors.

We know and understand our school communities, and are highly experienced in managing the provision of education to students while taking into account their health and wellbeing. The agile response of schools to meet the educational needs of students and professional needs of teachers during Term 1 2020 is ample proof of the capacity of schools to manage rapid and significant transformation in education delivery.

We are aware of the stresses within families and understand the uncertainties and fears of parents and of teachers. We therefore urge governments to ask for and listen to our voice in their decision making about schools and that they incorporate our understanding and experience of what works best in schools into their planning for the safe return to school for students, teachers and their families.

We call on the local and federal Ministers of Education to work alongside us, together with health experts, in the initial formulation of policy development. This needs to occur prior to governments announcing any further strategies with regard return of students to school.

We recognise that the regulatory responsibility for schools lies with eight different jurisdictions, all with different pandemic challenges and risks. Decision making around the return to full on-site school operations will of necessity be localised. It is therefore vitally important that National Cabinet seeks greater alignment between national and jurisdictional communications on schooling issues. This may

entail the federal government refraining from generalised directions to parents which are at odds with the specifics of jurisdictional planning.

Conflicting advice erodes the trust that is required for the proper functioning of government and communities. As it is Principals who are left to manage uncertainty and loss of confidence, we therefore recommend for immediate action:

1. Federal and state and territory ministers of education establish advisory groups of principals from all school sectors or, at the least, representatives of the four peak national principals' associations
2. State and territory ministers agree to uphold and adhere to one national statement of advice on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools; differences in advised practices create uncertainty and undermine parents' and teachers' confidence as well as the confidence of the wider community.

School principals know what will and will not work for students, teachers and parents. We are ready and willing to advise governments to ensure the successful transition to full on-site delivery of school education.

Yours faithfully

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