Maitland High School

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Tuesday 19 October, 2021

Dear Parent / Carer,

As the return to face-to-face learning begins this week (Year 12 2021), I would like to update you on key dates and important information about the return to school and COVID-safe plans onsite. Please read through the information below and get in touch if you have any questions.

Return to school roadmap

During Term 4, students will return to school in a staged approach, with no mingling or on-site activities.

In schools like ours where we have been learning from home for extended periods of time, students will return to face-to-face learning with NSW Health-approved COVID-safe settings on school sites in the following order:

- from 18 October – Year 12 2021
- from 25 October – all remaining year groups.

The return to school roadmap is subject to change depending on advice from NSW Health. You can stay up to date with the most recent information on our Advice for families page.

For those families who have siblings across year groups I know it will be difficult to keep some at home while others are back at school. But to re-iterate the message above – we need this time to prepare our school and staff for having all our students back, so it's essential that you only send your children to school in line with our set plan.

Virtual Assembly

To welcome you and our students back to school and to discuss the roadmap to the return to face-to-face learning, we will be holding a virtual 'return to school' assembly at **6:00pm** on **Wednesday 20 October, 2021**.

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To join the Zoom Meeting using the Zoom client, please click the following link:

https://nsweducation.zoom.us/j/68592793048?pwd=d3dDT013UWo2QjRvWjFPQ0tGVGtWQT09

Please note: You will need to be signed in with a free Zoom account.

If you need to enter the details manually:
Meeting ID: 685 9279 3048
Passcode: 252665

You can also join by calling any of the following numbers and following the prompts:
+61 7 3185 3730
+61 8 6119 3900
+61 8 7150 1149
Meeting ID: 685 9279 3048

During the assembly we will outline our school's plan for bringing students and staff back on site in a COVID-safe way this term; what to expect when face-to-face learning resumes; and where we need your support to ensure a successful return to school.

If you can't make the assembly, we will share an outline of our return to school plan in an email and via the Skool Bag app.

We look forward to connecting with you at assembly. Please send any questions you would like answered to maitland-h.school@det.nsw.edu.au (with the subject line: Question) in advance and we will make sure we cover as many as possible.

Information about close contacts, self-isolating and COVID-19 cases at school

The department has updated its pages with detailed guidance for parents and carers about what will happen should there be a confirmed case of COVID-19 at school and students are identified as a close or casual contact.

All schools have COVID-safe plans and are taking precautions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission on-site. This includes enhanced cleaning two times a day in all schools in line with the latest advice from NSW Health and SafeWork Australia.

It is important to note that medical advice suggests transmission among children is lower and when they do catch COVID they generally only have mild symptoms.

Contact tracing

NSW Health will notify the school if there is a positive COVID-19 case who has been infectious while at school and we will in turn notify parents and carers. Contact tracing will be undertaken as it is in all other venues. The action we take will in relation to the operation of the school will depend on how many people the person has been in contact with. In some cases, this may mean that the school may need to be made temporality non-operational.

Some staff and students may be asked to self-isolate as a precaution while contact tracing is completed.

Self-isolation

NSW Health have made changes to self-isolation requirements for people who are identified as close contacts who are fully vaccinated.

- Close contacts who are fully vaccinated must self-isolate for 7 days (and limit their movements for the next 7 days). Close contacts who are not vaccinated must isolate for 14 days.
- Casual contacts need to get tested and self-isolate until they get a negative test result - even if they are vaccinated.

A reminder that anyone who has the mildest of COVID-19 symptoms must get tested immediately and self-isolate until they get a negative result - even if they're vaccinated.

Please visit the COVID-19 response protocols page for factsheets on close and casual contacts, isolation guidelines for children and to answer your questions.

Vaccination requirements for staff and students

I want to let you all know that from 18 October all staff onsite required to support the staged return of students will need to be fully vaccinated. You can have confidence that we are handling the evidence requirements with the department and anyone interacting directly with your students will be fully vaccinated. The only exception is staff supporting Out Of School Hours Care who are required to be vaccinated from 8 November.

There may be some staff members who are not yet fully vaccinated or who have an approved medical exemption to not be vaccinated that we are still undertaking a risk assessment around. For this reason, some classes may be covered by another teacher. We appreciate your understanding and the need to ensure staff privacy is protected.

COVID-19 vaccination is the best protection against severe illness and also reduces the risk of spreading COVID-19 to others. Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 now will help to protect both you, your family and our school community.

NSW Health are urging all students 12 and over to get vaccinated with the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible before returning to school.

There is currently sufficient supply of the Moderna vaccine to community pharmacies and the Pfizer vaccine to General Practitioners. Bookings can be made via the Vaccine Clinic. Depending on location, bookings are available within the next few days.

Updated mask requirements

To reflect the changes in community settings mask wearing requirements have been updated for schools.

When students and staff return to school, the following requirements are in place:

- masks are required for all staff and students in Year 7 and above in all indoor settings.

Masks are mandatory on public transport. This applies to students aged 13 years and over, and to staff when travelling to and from school and during school excursions by public transport or by chartered or private transport services.

Ventilation in schools

Ventilation is an important layer of support under COVID-safe operations alongside vaccinations, mask wearing, reducing mingling across year groups and good cleaning and hygiene. The department's ventilation recommendations have been informed by NSW Health advice, expert advice from the Doherty Institute and the World Health Organisation.

This advice tells us that maximising natural ventilation in our learning spaces is the most effective method for minimising the spread of COVID-19 as it is a very effective way to disperse particles in the air. This can be best achieved by opening doors and windows.

To maximise our school's readiness for the return of students and staff, the department also conducted a statewide review of all windows, fans and ventilation systems to ensure schools can operate them as intended.

The audit confirms the majority of spaces in schools can be adequately ventilated through natural and mechanically assisted ventilation. We are taking action and working with our local Asset Management team to make sure classes can go ahead within the advice received on ventilation for our school. The intent of the individual school ventilation audit reports is to enable our local Asset Management teams to work with schools to discuss our individual spaces and confirm settings on our sites. We are taking action and working with our local Asset Management team to make sure classes can go ahead within the advice received on ventilation for our school.

Any necessary repair works identified by the review, such as easing and adjusting windows to ensure they operate as intended, will be completed before the full return to face-to-face learning from 25 October.

If you'd like more information, refer to the department's Ventilation page.

HSC

Year 12 students and those sitting HSC exams in schools will have access to school sites up until their HSC exams. This time can be used for:

- essential curriculum revision and wellbeing support from appropriate staff
- participation in scheduled small group face-to-face learning with the class teacher to enable essential course completion and revision
- participation in organised peer study bubbles.
- HSC exams will proceed for all students from 9 November 2021 in a COVID-safe way, in line with NSW Health advice.

The department's Stay Healthy HSC website had been used to keep students active and connected during the HSC with resources developed in partnership with ReachOut. We have also provided support resources for HSC students' parent and carers which includes practical advice and information about mental health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing resources for students and families

Please take some time to check out our wellbeing resources for students and families. You'll find useful tools for mental health and wellbeing. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can do anything to help you and your children to prepare for the return to face-to-face learning or if you have any concerns about the return to school.

Thank you again for your continued support during what has already been a fast-moving school term.

Take care and stay well.

M. Schatz

Melissa Schatz

Relieving Principal