DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Guidelines for commencement of Term 2, 2020

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NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Guidelines for commencement of Term 2, 2020

1 Introduction

These operating guidelines have been developed to support the operation of Northern Territory (NT) Government schools and associated early childhood services from the commencement of Term 2, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.

The Department for Education will follow health advice provided by the NT Chief Health Officer, and Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) on the operation of schools, including closure of schools.

The Department will work in support of government schools and early childhood services by co-ordinating and responding to health advice; leading communication with principals, co-ordinators and staff and supporting communication with parents and families; providing additional resources and curriculum materials; assisting with supplies; establishing systematic responses where needed; and supporting site autonomy and decision-making.

1.1 National Principles for School Education response to COVID-19

The following principles are guiding decision making nationally in relation to the operation of schools and early childhood services:

1. Our schools are critical to the delivery of high quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus.

2. During the COVID-19 crisis alternative flexible, remote delivery of education services may be needed.

3. Our schools must be healthy and safe environments for students, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of education to students.

4. State and Territory Governments and non-government sector authorities are responsible for managing and making operational decisions for their school systems respectively, subject to compliance with relevant funding agreements with the Commonwealth.

5. Decisions regarding the response to COVID-19 in the schooling sector must continue to be informed by expert, official, national and state-based public health and education advice, consistent with these national principles.

6. All students must continue to be supported by their school to ensure participation in quality education during the COVID 19 crisis.

7. The health advice consistently provided by the AHPPC is that attendance at a school campus for education represents a very low health risk to students. The advice also notes that appropriate practices must be employed at schools, like at other workplaces, to provide a safe working environment for school staff, including teachers, and that the specific AHPPC advice regarding school campuses should be followed.

# 2 Continuity of Education for Children of School Age

The Chief Minister and the NT Minister for Education have stated that education is compulsory for Term 2.

All NT students are expected to physically attend school from day one, Term 2. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has **advised** that schools are safe to remain open. In the NT, with no community transmission of COVID-19 and strict border controls in place, students are expected to physically attend school. Students attending school recognises the importance of the teaching profession, and that education is best delivered by teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus.

3 School Operations in Term 2

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented and fast moving situation. Future changes to our school operations to support management of the pandemic in the NT will occur on the basis of advice from the NT Chief Health Officer (CHO). This may occur at a school, cluster, region or at whole of NT level.

At the end of Term 1, teachers and school leaders prepared for three operating scenarios for education provision. This preparation means that schools in the NT are now ready to respond to changes in school operations during all stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.
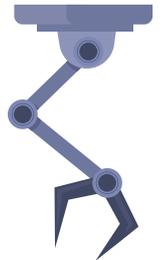
4 Students

From the start of Term 2, all students are expected to physically attend school. Students who are unwell must remain at home. Parents/guardians of children at school that are unwell will be required to collect them as soon as possible.

Where families elect not to send their child to school, the child must be learning from home.

Parents/guardians must notify the school of their plans for their child to learn from home. Notification of daily attendance/absence will also be required in line with current processes, with variation on how attendance and absence are recorded (refer Section 13, below). Where children are not at school, parents/guardians are responsible for the child's learning, safety and wellbeing at home or elsewhere. Information will be provided to parents/guardians to support learning from home, including links to resources on the **Learning Together** website.

5 Supporting student learning

Schools will return to regular student learning practices as much as possible from the start of Term 2. This means that students who attend school will receive education that aligns to the Early Years Learning Framework, the Australian Curriculum or relevant senior years programs of study. All children staying at home have access to resources on the **Learning Together** website.

Schools will support learning:

1. At school on site for all students attending;

2. At home, for students who are not physically attending school sites due to vulnerabilities to COVID-19 or direction by a health professional to self-isolate*. These students should be supported by schools in line with their pandemic plans.

    For schools that have identified a work package or blended mode of education delivery, they may elect to use the *Keep Kids Learning* book and/or resources provided on the **Learning Together** webpage. For schools that have focussed on digital education provision, consideration should be given to loaning students devices where they do not have access to digital technologies at home. Parents are responsible for supporting their child's learning at home.

3. At home, for other students who are not physically attending school sites. In the event that a student is not physically attending school and there is no medical reason to not attend, schools will continue to work with the student(s) and their parents to encourage and support the student to return to school. Parents are responsible for supporting their child's learning at home. A range of resources are available on the **Learning Together** webpage to support students learning at home.

    Where there is capacity, and considering the workload of staff, a school may elect to provide educational provision to that student. Upon request from a parent, the school may provide printed materials and workbooks for the student to complete.

    Principals will exercise their professional judgement, considering prior knowledge of medical conditions, current medical certificates, and information from health authorities/parents.

Assessment and reporting expectations remain the same, that is every student in Transition receives a comment, and in years 1 to 9 students must receive an A to E grade for each subject studied.

For students learning from home each school is to develop an assessment and reporting schedule that identifies evidence of learning from Term 1 and 2 to make an assessment of the student's progress and achievement. These students can still receive an A to E grade for each subject studied. Each school should determine how teachers will collect evidence of learning if students are learning from home.

Two-way communication between teachers and families will be essential to ensure no student is left behind. Schools should continue to engage with students and families using existing communication platforms, to provide timely updates specific to their school. It is imperative that schools maintain contact with students and families, and staff continue to maintain their obligations in relation to mandatory reporting.

Schools are required to follow daily attendance practices, including following up physical non-attendance and recording reasons for non-attendance (refer Section 13, below).
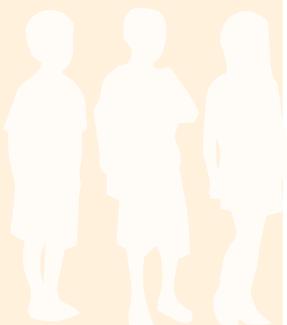
6 Senior Years Students

Supporting senior secondary students to continue their final stages of schooling is a priority for all NT schools.

The department will support schools:

- to adjust subject specific assessment to meet curriculum requirements;
- to case manage students, enabling pathway completion;
- to modify pedagogy to meet curriculum requirements;
- to flexibly collect evidence for learning; and
- to ensure the NT stays abreast and is consistent with changes at the national level.

The department partners with the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Board to deliver the NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET). The department will continue to work with SACE and provide schools with the advice regarding senior years students. Additional information is also available online:
https://www.sace.sa.edu.au/covid-19-coronavirus

Access to digital technologies may be important for students in senior years. Many students in senior years have, and use, ICT devices to support their learning. Where lack of a device or connectivity is a barrier to senior years students engaging with their learning, and students cannot attend school due to vulnerability or medical advice, schools should lend students devices to support their learning from home.

Schools that need additional support to procure devices should follow the process **process published on the iCentre**. Support for orders can be requested by contacting **ICTOrders.DoE@nt.gov.au**. It is expected that where possible, schools will fund these devices in line with ongoing investment in digital resources.

6.1   Vocational Education and Training (VET)

VET courses will resume in Term 2, 2020. Courses run by Charles Darwin University in Darwin and Palmerston will recommence from Week 2, Term 2, 2020.

Any changes to VET courses will be communicated directly from the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to the school and to the enrolled student.

Structured Work Placement (SWP) for students undertaking a VET course will continue if agreed to by the employer and parent.

Please contact the relevant Industry Engagement Officer with any concerns or queries.

6.2   Employment Pathways

Employment Pathways will continue in Term 2. More information on Employment Pathways is available online:
https://elearn.ntschools.net/connecting-learners-hub/ years-10-12/employment-pathways

7 Principals

We value principals and acknowledge their leadership to deliver quality learning to students and young children. Principals will continue to exercise their professional judgement and make local decisions, within the parameters and guidance provided by the Department, to ensure operations suit their school context.

Principals will:

- ensure that staff and students who are unwell stay at home;
- enable physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning practices in their school.

7.1 Communications

Principals will continue to consult with school staff regarding school operations, and staff should be invited to give regular feedback for improvement. This may include designing the way work is allocated to staff, successful methods for engaging with students and families, or suggestions for improved communications.

Principals will continue to ensure frequent and transparent communications with school representative bodies regarding school operations, including changes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic response.

7.2 Resources, workforce and programs

Where possible, principals should use relief staff to assist in managing gaps in the workforce due to staff absences, vulnerable staff working from home, or improve flexible operations of schools to support physical distancing practices (e.g. reconfiguring class structures). Principals may consider whether vulnerable staff working from home are best placed to support students learning at home.

Principals should plan for the utilisation of all school staff including NTG employees and school representative body employees, and for the continuation of internally and externally funded school programs and services (including Families as First Teachers, Child and Family Centres). Principals will ensure continuity of employment of school representative body staff.

A revised process for recruiting and relocating interstate teacher recruits has been developed, to take into account the NT's strict new border restrictions, quarantine requirements and special requirements for entry into remote communities.

All new teachers arriving from interstate, as well as their families, must quarantine for 14 days at their point of arrival into the NT. The Department of Education will coordinate and fund the costs of quarantine. The Department is working to provide wrap-around support for these teachers during their quarantine period. Further information is available in the **Quick Guide for Principals** and **FAQs for Principals and Teachers**.

Additional guidance resources will be uploaded in the near future to clarify processes for intrastate recruits.

The DoE Logistics Team is working to ensure supply chains to remote schools and staff are maintained. Further advice will be provided to support remote schools moving staff in and out of prescribed areas for medical reasons or arising issues.

Principals should ensure they capture all direct expenditure related to COVID-19 using 20O COVID (please create an operational path in MYOB). There is no commitment to reimburse for costs and schools should continue to manage within their resource allocation. Where a school is experiencing financial hardship that impacts the schools ability to deliver quality educational programs please contact your School Financial Improvement Manager or **sfis.doe@nt.gov.au**.
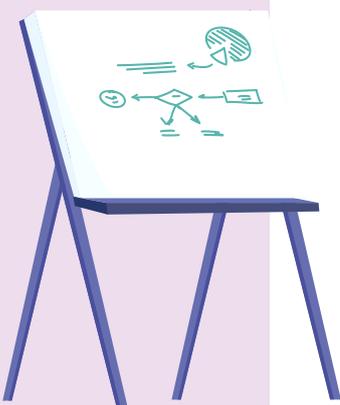
7.3   Student attendance processes

Principals will put in place a process for parents to notify their intention to keep their children at home. Schools should follow normal daily processes for recording a student's absence, and the reason for that absence. Principals will outline clear communication expectations and protocols to parents/guardians, including the times that teachers and support staff will be available to students or parents/guardians of those learning from home. Priority should be given to supporting vulnerable children or children directed to self-quarantine by health authorities.

7.4   Vulnerable staff and Working from Home - information for Prinicipals

Principals should continue to encourage staff to confidentially disclose if they consider that they are vulnerable in the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Principals will work with staff to complete Personal Action Plans, and if required, Working from Home Agreements, and once approved by the principal, submit copies of both agreements to regional HR Managers. Further information is in Section 8 below.

Where principals identify as vulnerable, they should contact their Senior Director School Improvement so that arrangements can be put in place.

8   Staff

We value educators and acknowledge the continued commitment to deliver quality learning to students and young children.

The safety and wellbeing of our teachers and school staff will be supported through a range of practices, including adjustments for vulnerable staff.

Staff must not attend school sites if they are unwell. Personal leave can be accessed to support sick staff.

## 8.1   Vulnerable staff and Working from Home - information for school staff

Staff will continue to be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose to the principal or school leadership team if they identify as vulnerable in the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vulnerable employees may include:

i.   staff with compromised immune systems (such as people who have cancer)

ii.   staff with chronic medical conditions

iii.   staff who are pregnant

iv.   staff over the age of 60 particularly when combined with a chronic medical condition

v.   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, particularly over the age of 50

vi.   Staff with vulnerable people living in their household

Current and specific advice regarding relevant medical conditions for the COVID-19 pandemic are listed on the Department of Health website. Staff may identify as vulnerable outside of this list, and consideration will be given on a case by case basis.
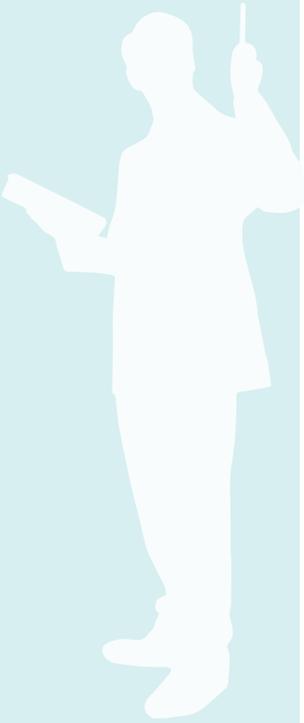
Staff that identify as vulnerable should complete a Personal Action Plan and discuss this plan with their principal/leader. The Personal Action Plan may: identify alternative work tasks, environment or ways of working to support the staff member; provide the staff member with opportunities to access their accrued leave; or provide an option to work from home, where possible. Once approved by principals, copies of approved Personal Action Plans will be submitted to the school's regional HR Manager.

Where working from home is the preferred option, staff members will need to complete a Working from Home Agreement in accordance with the Working from Home Guidelines. Copies of approved Working from Home Agreements will be submitted to the school's regional HR manager by the principal. As the circumstances of the pandemic move rapidly, agreements should be reviewed fortnightly. It is important that teaching staff working from home are provided with clear guidelines around the work that they are required to undertake, the manner in which they undertake it and how they are supported to effectively conduct this work.

8.2   Roles and responsibilities

Principals/supervisors will assign responsibilities to all teaching staff and other staff members as required. These assignments will be made in line with relevant industrial and legislative requirements, including enterprise agreements.

All staff will maintain their teacher registration, Ochre Cards, and remote community permits where applicable. Staff will support physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning practices in their school and classrooms.

Staff will continue to monitor the learning and wellbeing of their students, whether learning at school or at home, in line with school practices.

Staff will continue to follow **protective practice guidelines**, including ensuring they do not use personal devices including mobile phones for communications with students.

Support staff continue to be essential to support learning and wellbeing, and may be required to undertake duties including:

- lesson support and adjustments for students on-site and learning from home
- assisting with preparation of resources (digital and printed)
- supporting processes for school operations
- undertaking learning or wellbeing checks with students and parents/guardians
- providing a range of general and learning support to teaching staff
- providing ongoing literacy/numeracy and other learning support
- conducting wellbeing checks and intervention
- providing advice to teachers and parents/carers on behavioural issues
- continuing parent engagement and liaison
- continuing to provide support with health support needs.

Business managers, administrative staff, cleaners, grounds staff and other school staff will continue to be required to support the effective functioning of the school.

9 Health and Safety

The current advice of the NT Chief Health Officer is that schools are safe and there is minimal risk to school staff or students in continuing to attend onsite schooling in the NT. To support the wellbeing of staff, any early childhood or school staff displaying COVID-19 symptoms are eligible for testing through health authorities.

Schools are defined as delivering essential services and are exempt from many of the directions of the Chief Health Officer, including those regarding mass gatherings (internal and external), and the closure of playgrounds and libraries. Where the Chief Health Officer does issue a direction that applies to schools, schools will be required to comply. These directions will be communicated to schools if they arise.

It is extremely important that unwell students and staff members remain at home. Schools should put in place physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning practices as much as practicable. This will further support the safety of staff and students. The AHPPC has released **advice** on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. Details on how these practices can be applied in an NT school setting are available **here**. This information will be updated regularly.

Grants to support enhanced cleaning have been provided to all schools. If schools are having any difficulty obtaining hygiene or cleaning products, please contact the DoE Logistics team at **supplies.doe@nt.gov.au**.

10 Wellbeing

As the pandemic continues to evolve, it is very important that we all continue to look after our wellbeing. Staff in our schools need to support each other and know that it is okay to let somebody know when you need support.

NT Government employees can access complimentary counselling sessions. As part of the pandemic response, the Department of Education is funding additional counselling support for staff. During this period, Department of Education staff and their immediate family members can access up to six counselling sessions per person, per issue, over the next 12 months. These counselling sessions can be conducted by a range of service providers.

For more information and contacts:

- **NTG Employee Assistance Program**
- **Teach in the Territory - Employee Assistance Program**

EASA and CORP Workplace Solutions are committed to supporting all Territorians during these unprecedented times, and have developed some tips for maintaining wellbeing:

- **Calming Coronavirus Concerns**
- **Managing Stress**
- **Managing Sleep**
- **Managing Anxiety**

Good resources for maintaining mental health in the pandemic can also be found on the Wellbeing section of the **Pandemic Communications Portal**.

11   Boarding school students

NT Government operated residential boarding facilities will remain closed at the start of Term 2, 2020. Future decisions to reopen these facilities will be made in line with health advice.

In consultation with principals, children who have returned from boarding (government and non-government; in the NT or interstate) to a community in the NT may attend the local government school to continue their learning where possible, and if staffing is available. These children will remain enrolled at their boarding school, and not be enrolled at the local school. Local schools will use SAMS to record attendance for these children while they are on site at the local school.

Boarding students returning to the local school in their home community may require additional support. Engagement and Partnerships division will support local principals, and boarding schools to ensure children have continued access to education during this period. Where possible, the child's learning program and resources will be provided by the boarding school at which the student is regularly enrolled.

The local school will provide (where possible):

- appropriate staff to provide supervision and record attendance, as determined by the principal. Note the supervisor does not need to be a registered teacher (e.g. assistant teachers);
- a safe learning space (either at the school or in the community);
- internet access; and
- resources such as pens, paper and printed materials as required.

Some boarding students have returned to community with devices. Local schools can support students with these devices by providing internet access. Where students have not returned with devices, but their boarding school is relying on devices to maintain education provision, negotiation between schools for the boarding school to provide a device, with a SIM card for internet connectivity, is preferred. Where this cannot be resolved, please contact ICTOrders. DoE@nt.gov.au. Lack of devices or internet connectivity should not be a barrier to any boarding student continuing their learning.

12   Digital platforms

Online learning is a contemporary approach to delivering education in schools and supports students to learn in the home environment. Children may be online more than ever this year.

Schools should continue to use their funding to maintain their school digital environment including learning technologies and apps for use by students and teachers.

Be mindful of the risks associated with using cloud based applications, especially surrounding privacy and child safety, including bullying. It is safest to use software that has been assessed for privacy and security and approved by the Department. Refer to "Guidelines for supporting schools using online environments on the Connecting Learners Hub on eLearn under **School Leaders**.

Parents and school leaders are strongly encouraged to go to **eSafety.gov.au** for specific advice regarding COVID-19 including:

- **an online safety kit for parents and carers**
- **an online safety booklet for parents and carers**
- **advice for school leaders keeping schools and learning safe online**

Staff should also refer to the **Protective Practices Guidelines: For Teachers in their interactions with children and young people** from the Teacher Registration Board.

13　Recording attendance and absences in SAMS

In Term 2 2020, NT Government schools will record attendance in line with the **Attendance Recording and Reporting Guidelines** and **Attendance Codes** list, with the below clarifications and variations in place:

1. **Students physically at school** will be recorded as "present" or other appropriate code;

2. **Students not physically attending school sites due to vulnerabilities to COVID-19 or direction by a health professional to self-isolate** – use the **"O-Out of Class" code** (repurposed for this period). This code counts as "present" for all reporting. It is expected these children are learning at home, supported by families;

3. **Students not physically attending school sites** for other reasons will be marked with the appropriate existing code, including: **"S–Sick"** if the student is unwell; **"X Absent with unacceptable reason"** if parents voluntarily withdraw their child from physical attendance; **"T-School unavailable"** if the school site **temporarily closed**; or **"U-Unnotified"**.

The department will determine a methodology in consultation with principals to account for the unusual attendance patterns during the end of Term 1 and Term 2 2020 when calculating effective enrolment to ensure that school budgets for 2021 are appropriate.

14　Early Childhood Education and Care Services and Programs

Preschool, Families as First Teachers programs, and Child and Family Centres (CFCs) should continue to operate under the same guidance as their attached school. Non-departmental service providers operating in child and family centres (CFCs) may choose not to run their normal programs.

In alignment with national directions for early childhood education and care services, long day care, Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Vacation Care services will continue to operate. Where these services are operated by the school representative body, hygiene, physical distancing and cleaning practices as detailed above should be in place.

Under the National Quality Framework, services are required to have up to date policies and procedures including emergency action plans. Where services are co-located on school sites it is recommended the service's plan align with the school's pandemic plan.

15   School transport

School buses operated by the NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (DIPL) will continue to operate. DIPL will implement enhanced cleaning protocols for buses, including a thorough daily cleaning, and twice daily cleaning of buses for special schools.

Where schools operate transport services for students, buses should be cleaned in line with the **COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection Advice Fact Sheet**, and physical distancing and hygiene practices should be in place to the extent practicable.

16   Key contacts

- For school operation support, contact your QSSS Director
- For school improvement and leadership support, contact your Director, School Improvement and Leadership
- A list of other contacts will be included in the **Contacts section** of the Pandemic Communications Portal.

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