

Level 3 schools

From 8 November, all schools will operate on updated Level 3 settings for the remainder of Term 4.

Term 1 2022 settings are under review and will be updated as soon as possible.

Updated 4 November 2021

Student attendance at school

- All students are expected to be at school unless they are unwell. Do not attend school if unwell, even with mild symptoms. Get tested for COVID-19 and follow NSW Health directions.
- Any person with any COVID-19 symptoms must be sent home and not return to school unless:
 - they have isolated for 10 days, when no medical certificate is available
 - they have a negative COVID-19 test result and are symptom free.
- In circumstances where children have other medical reasons for recurrent symptoms, a letter from their GP is sufficient to negate the requirement for a negative test.
- Anyone who is unwell with COVID-19 symptoms is strongly encouraged to get tested and self-isolate until a negative result is received. Find your local [testing clinics](#).
- Self-isolation periods and testing requirements differ for close contacts based on their exposure and vaccination status. If you are identified as a close contact, an authorised contact tracer from NSW Health or from the Catholic Schools NSW will contact you and let you what you need to do. For more information, refer to the [NSW Health fact sheet on close contacts](#).

COVID-safe measures at school

A combination of layered safety measures – vaccination, wearing masks, student cohorting, physical distancing, ventilation, hygiene and cleaning - allows us to prioritise student and staff wellbeing while we keep schools operational.

The return to face-to-face learning presents an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission among cohorts due to unvaccinated or partly vaccinated students. The updated Level 3

settings aim to balance this risk with a layered approach to COVID safety on school sites and to meet expectations for closer alignment to community settings.

COVID-safe cohorting for students

To provide a safe learning environment for students and staff, schools will be required to implement a cohort model.

Schools that were operating under the Level 3 Plus settings before 8 November are to retain their existing cohort model.

The remainder of the schools that remain on Level 3 settings need to implement a cohort model that fits the following requirements.

For more information on how cohorting can be implemented to suit school contexts, including practical case studies, refer to the previously release Return to school scenarios.

The benefits of student cohorting are to:

- minimise opportunities for COVID-19 transmission or the potential for widespread infection across the school and wider school community
- enable the most effective contact tracing and containment measures in the event of a COVID-19 case.

The principles of student cohorting are to:

- minimise unnecessary physical interaction between students on school grounds
- ensure that students learn and play only with those in their cohort, wherever possible
- enable learning to be delivered face-to-face facilitate opportunities for ongoing collaboration for staff.

Specific features of cohorting

- Schools should restrict activities to established student groupings.
- All activities should minimise mixing and mingling between cohorts.
- Where practical, maintain physical distancing and limit interactions between groups at entry and exit points, transitions between classes and during recess and lunch breaks to reduce contact between student cohorts.
- Staggered drop-offs and pick-ups are recommended where practical.
- Each cohort will be allocated a learning space, completing all lessons and break times with their cohort.

- Break times, playground and canteen access will be staggered by cohort.
- Within each cohort, students should maintain strict personal hygiene and physical distancing wherever possible.
- In some schools (such as smaller schools, or those with a stage-based class structure), school leaders may choose to amalgamate smaller classes to form one cohort, while adhering to class size policy. Students must then remain in this cohort.
- Some high schools may create smaller cohorts within year groups where subject choices and flexible timetabling allow.
- Transportation to or from an event or activity must maintain defined cohorts. For example, students may travel to a venue by walking (with adequate supervision if applicable) or via a school-owned or operated bus, providing they have sole use. Students and staff can continue to travel to and from school as per the public health advice.

Schools will manage the year-based cohort model in a way that best meets the needs of their students, if they maintain the core principles of cohorting (outlined above).

It is recognised that some schools with low numbers of enrolled students or schools that do not follow year-based or stage-based cohorts, such as central schools or schools for specific purposes, may require flexibility for their cohort model. Diocesan schools should seek support from their Executive Director and Educational Leadership.

Vaccinations required

- All staff on school sites must be fully vaccinated.
- All parents and carers, volunteers and providers who are permitted to come onto school sites must be fully vaccinated.

Wear masks indoors

- Masks are required indoors for all staff, visitors and students in Year 7 or above, and strongly recommended indoors for primary students.
- You can take your mask off when eating or exercising.

Always check in

- All staff and visitors must check in when attending a school site or gathering.
- Schools must maintain attendance records of all gatherings.

Physically distance

- Maintain 1.5 metres physical distancing wherever practicable.

Maximise ventilation

- Teaching and learning in indoor spaces will be well ventilated and as large as possible for the number of participants.
- Outdoor settings for activities and events should be prioritised wherever practical as these represent a lower risk than indoor settings.
- Where activities or events will proceed indoors, organisers must ensure the space is well ventilated and as large as possible for the number of attendees. Where activities will proceed off-site, the school should have sole use of the space.

Maintain good hygiene and cleaning

- Ensure students and staff wash hands regularly.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly as incorrect use can increase the risk of infection.
- Continue enhanced cleaning of schools. Target areas include high-touch areas and other hard surfaces, door handles, lockers, light switches and handrails in stairways and movement areas. Enhanced cleaning is delivered as part of the daily cleaning of schools.

COVID-19 response protocols

Updated 3:20 pm 29 October 2021

Catholic Schools NSW is continuing to work closely with NSW Health and other relevant agencies when a positive COVID-19 case is identified to have an impact on schools.

All reports of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a school or the school community must be reported to the Incident Report and Support Hotline on 1800 811 523 only where the person has been on school grounds within the previous 3 weeks.

For more information, refer to COVID-19 response protocols.

Updated Level 3 settings

Parents and carers on site

Fully vaccinated parents and carers will be allowed on site to support curriculum delivery, vulnerable students or students with disability, student wellbeing activities and school operations (for example reading support, canteens and uniform shops). Parents and carers must check in using the school check-in, show proof of vaccination on entry to the school site and follow mask-wearing requirements.

One fully vaccinated parent or carer is permitted to attend their child's Kindergarten orientation when conducted outdoors. For more information, refer to Orientation and transition to school.

Parents and carers must follow their school's advice regarding student drop-off and pick-up, which will usually require parents to remain off school sites at these times. This includes staying in the car when dropping off and picking up children if it is safe to do so.

This does not apply to drop-off and pick-up from outside of school hours care (OOSHC) as sign-in and -out procedures are required for OOSHC.

Parents and carers should follow the physical distancing advice for their local area and avoid gathering outside of school gates.

Assemblies and presentations

Assemblies and presentations will be allowed outdoors on site. Cohorts should be separated with physical distancing in place where practicable.

Care must be taken to avoid mixing and mingling of cohorts when entering and exiting the assembly or presentation.

Fully vaccinated visitors (including parents and carers) are only allowed to attend if completing a specific role (such as presenting) and at the invitation of the school. All visitors must check in using the school check-in and show proof of vaccination.

Schools may wish to plan for virtual end-of-year assemblies and award ceremonies.

Dancing, singing, music and performances

Dancing will be allowed indoors and outdoors in class cohorts.

Bands, ensembles, music classes and music tuition will be allowed within cohorts and only for instruments that do not rely on breath, as these pose a higher transmission risk.

If unsure, consider whether the instrument could be played with a mask on. If yes – this instrument is allowed.

Masks must be worn if playing instruments indoors. Masks are not required if playing instruments outdoors. Physical distancing must be maintained at all times.

Singing, chanting, group repetition and choirs are not permitted (except for HSC preparation and assessment purposes).

School performances, productions and concerts are not permitted.

Excursions and incursions

Excursions will be allowed outdoors and indoors if the cohort has sole use of the venue, this includes Environmental Education Centres.

Excursions are day-only and not overnight.

No reward excursions are approved for Term 4.

Transportation to and from venues must maintain cohorts.

Incursions will be allowed indoors or outdoors in cohorts. Any visitors on site to support incursions must be fully vaccinated and will be required to check in using the QR code and show proof of vaccination status on entry to the school site.

Graduations and formals

Schools can plan for these events to be held from 1 December (including Year 6, Year 10 and Year 12 formals). Year 12 formals and graduations should not be held until after the final exam for that school's HSC cohort, which may be as late as 3 December.

Graduations and formals will be allowed within cohorts, either on school sites or at external venues.

For graduations and formals held on school sites, students in the cohort may attend regardless of vaccination status. Fully vaccinated parents and guests may attend at the discretion of the school and if there is sufficient capacity based on COVID-safe capacity limits (square metre rules) in effect for indoor or outdoor venues on the date of the event.

Graduations and formals held off school sites must comply with any COVID-safe requirements in place for that venue. Note, in external hospitality venues, current public health orders (expected to be in effect until 15 December) mean:

- anyone over the age of 16 must be fully vaccinated to attend venues
- children under 16 years of age who are not fully vaccinated can attend as long as they are accompanied by a fully vaccinated member of their household.

Schools may choose to use school sites to ensure unvaccinated students can attend.

Currently masks are required for anyone aged 12 and over while indoors (and strongly recommended for primary school students) except while eating and drinking. If graduations and formals are held outdoors, masks are not required.

Using shared spaces at school

Shared spaces, such as changing rooms, libraries, school halls and other communal areas, may only be used by one cohort at a time, with adherence to strict personal hygiene protocols and physical distancing requirements.

Library activities are permitted in line with the Infection Control requirement for libraries.

Sports and swimming pool access

From 1 November, school sports are allowed, including inter-school sports outside of school hours.

Schools can access pools (both indoor and outdoor) within cohorts and with COVID-safe measures in place to reduce mixing and mingling of cohorts.

For more information, refer to School sport activities advice issued previously.

Transitions and orientations

Transitions and orientations will be allowed as long as they are designed to minimise mingling between visiting children and school cohorts.

Students only, except for Kindergarten where one fully vaccinated parent or carer may accompany their child for outdoor components. Fully vaccinated parents or carers may attend any transition or orientation event if required to support a child with additional needs.

For more information, refer to Orientation and transition to school advice issued previously.

Visitors and volunteers on site

Fully vaccinated visitors – such as volunteers, allied health partners and other external providers, and non-school-based Diocesan and RI/MPJP staff – are allowed on site to support curriculum delivery, wellbeing programs and school operations that maintain student cohorts. These include programs such as reading support, canteens, uniform shops and gardening.

Workers supporting the infrastructure development and maintenance of schools can continue to work on site. This includes contractors, general assistants, farm hands and other grounds support staff.

Other vaccinated visitors may request the school's permission to come on site to conduct relevant work duties (such as media, representatives from agencies such as the NSW Ombudsman, researchers, members of parliament and their staff, union officials). These decisions are at the discretion of the school.

Visitors may visit more than one school site in a day.

All visitors must sign in using the QR code and show proof of vaccination status on entry to the school site.

School staff should consult with their principal in the first instance to establish if a visitor is to be allowed on site or not.

School photos

School photos are allowed outdoors on school sites. Providers supporting school photos must be fully vaccinated and sign in using the school check-in app. Only individual photos and sibling photos are permitted (no class or team photos due to physical distancing requirements).

Community use of school sites outside of school hours

Community use of school sites will be allowed outside of school hours with a Community Use Agreement in place and with a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. The COVID-19 Safety Plan must be provided to the principal as part of the Community Use Agreement.

Community use of school sites should use outdoor spaces where possible.

Community use for sport, recreation and outdoor public gatherings

If community use of a school site is for any of the following purposes, the organiser must develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan in the form specified by the NSW Government to meet public health requirements:

- outdoor community sport
- indoor sport and recreation
- indoor pools
- outdoor public gathering such as a market or fete.

For more information on developing a COVID-19 Safety Plan for the above types of use, refer to [NSW Government COVID-19 Safety Plans](#).

The organiser is responsible for ensuring that all attendees meet any specified vaccination requirements. All attendees must check in using the organisation's QR code.

For assistance setting up a free QR code, organisers should refer to the NSW Government's [Setting up electronic check-in and QR codes](#).

Playgroups that operate on school sites

Playgroups are allowed to operate on school sites, with a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place.

All playgroups operating on school sites must ensure the following:

- All staff, volunteers and parents in attendance must be fully vaccinated and must show proof of vaccination status.
- Staff, volunteers and parents must check in using the playgroup's QR code. Parents should check their child as a dependent.
- Physical distancing of 1.5 metres should be maintained where practicable.
- Any person aged 12 and over must wear a mask at all times indoors unless they have an exemption.

Playgroups can develop COVID-19 Safety Plans in any form as long as the above requirements are addressed.

For assistance setting up a free QR code, organisers should refer to the NSW Government's [Setting up electronic check-in and QR codes](#).

Parents and friends associations meetings outside of school hours

P&F associations may hold meetings on school sites outside of school hours without a Community Use Agreement or COVID-19 Safety Plan.

The local President of the P&F, or a delegate, must ensure:

- All P&F members that attend meetings on the school site must be fully vaccinated. The President (or delegate) must visually sight vaccination status to verify that requirements are met.
- All P&F members in attendance at each meeting must check in using either the school check-in code or a P&C-specific QR code.

For assistance setting up a free QR code, organisations should refer to the NSW Government's [Setting up electronic check-in and QR codes](#).

Other activities permitted

If COVID-safe measures are in place – mask wearing indoors, full vaccination of adults on site, minimising mingling, square metre rules in place and good hygiene practices – then schools can continue to operate:

- canteens
- uniform stores
- early childhood services (OOSHC, vacation care, preschools etc.)
- masses and school liturgies
- emergency drills and evacuations where possible, conducted in a COVID-safe manner – this means where possible keeping classes, groups or cohorts together.

Pre-service teachers and others on professional experience placements

- Pre-service teachers and others on professional experience placements are required to be fully vaccinated by 8 November. Principals should ensure all placements meet these requirements.
- Department schools are encouraged to prioritise final year pre-service teachers. Schools may consider accommodating other pre-service teachers under Level 3 settings.
- Professional experience placements are voluntary for all schools.

VET, TAFE, SBATS and trade schools

- VET work placements can resume wherever possible in line with Public Health Orders. Some industries where vaccinations are mandated may decline to take a placement student unless that student is fully vaccinated. NESA has advised that students who cannot complete their VET work placement due to COVID-related impacts will still be eligible for the HSC. Any placements must be subject to appropriate risk assessments and approvals.
- Trade schools, VET and TAFE courses should continue to be delivered virtually where possible. Training that cannot be delivered virtually or online can be delivered face to face if the training complies with COVID-safe practices and NSW Public Health Orders.
- School-based apprenticeship and traineeship training should continue to be delivered virtually where possible. Training that cannot be delivered virtually or online can be delivered face to face if the training complies with COVID-safe practices and NSW Public Health Orders.
- Prospective and current school-based apprentices and trainees (SBATs) may undertake work experience and employment if their employment complies with COVID-Safe practices and NSW Public Health Orders.
- Non-essential work experience should be deferred.
- The white card training to school students should only be conducted via face-to-face delivery.

High-risk activities not permitted

Schools must not undertake the following activities to avoid mixing of cohorts and to avoid an increased risk of transmission:

- overnight excursions or camps
- international excursions

- student visits to aged care facilities.

Travel and public transport

- Wherever possible students should be transported to schools by private vehicle to minimise mixing of cohorts while travelling to school.
- Masks are mandatory on public transport. This applies to students aged 12 years and over, and staff when travelling to and from school and during school excursions by public transport or by chartered or private transport services.
- All staff operating vehicles are required to wear a mask or face covering.
- All students aged 12 years and over are required to wear a mask or face covering in a vehicle being used to provide a public transport service in line with the public health order.
 - Children aged 11 years and under should be encouraged to wear a face mask while using public transport.
- Students should be encouraged to not eat or drink while using public transport as this might lead to groups of children seated together removing their face masks at the same time, increasing the risk of transmission. Students should also be reminded to not share drinks, snacks or other food.
- Staff and students should be reminded about how to correctly wear a face mask.
- Adequate spacing between passengers and bus drivers should be maintained with seats cordoned off.
- Air flow and ventilation within vehicles should be optimised as fresh air reduces the risk of transmission.
 - Windows should be opened where this is possible and safe to do so.
 - Recirculation of air flow should be minimised by switching to non-recirculate.
 - Ensure heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are well maintained and operating properly.
- Transport vehicles should operate to the lowest level of density they can, noting there are existing restrictions around capacity.
- Wherever possible, physical distancing should be maintained.

Assisted School Travel Program

Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP) services are available to support students returning to on-site learning, in accordance with the following guidelines:

- All staff operating vehicles (Assisted Travel Support Officers and Drivers) are required to be fully vaccinated and wear a mask or face covering in and around vehicles at all times.
- It is mandatory for students aged 12 years and over to wear masks. However, wearing a mask may be unsuitable for some students or they may not be able to wear them for extended periods of time. The Public Health Order includes reasons why someone may be exempted from wearing a mask or face covering, such as intellectual disability, autism, trauma or skin conditions. These students will not be excluded from ASTP services for not wearing a mask or face covering.
- Vehicles will be adequately ventilated during runs and regularly sanitised.
- Parents and carers are also required to wear a mask around vehicles in order to minimise risk of transmission during student pick up and drop off. Parents and carers may access the same mask wearing exemptions as students.
- For more information, refer to Masks and face coverings advice issued previously.

Staff considerations

Staffrooms

- Staffrooms must be fully ventilated, with windows open wherever possible.
- Teachers and staff should avoid congregating in staffrooms.
- Physical distancing rules and strict personal hygiene protocols apply at all times.

Meetings, staff development days, professional learning

Staff should continue to use virtual platforms where applicable and follow health advice in regards to gatherings.

Compliance training (e.g. First aid/CPR) is to be conducted online until further notice.

Staff are able to meet face-to-face in faculty, stage, grade or executive teams. Non-school based staff should deliver online wherever possible.

Vulnerable staff

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that staff are adequately supported to ensure continuity of student learning and school operations.

Boarding schools

Boarding schools must comply with all school requirements set out in these guidelines, and also refer to the Boarding school guidelines.

Border communities

Where state-specific border restrictions allow students and staff to cross the border, students and staff should refer to the level settings for the local government area in which their school is located.

All students and staff who cannot attend school or work due to interstate border disruptions will be supported to learn and work from home.

Preschools managed by the Catholic sector

Preschools are to be managed consistent with the rest of the schools in accordance with these guidelines.

Families should follow normal sign-in/out procedures and COVID-safe guidelines when dropping off and picking up. Preschools should consider procedures to support pick up and drop off from the school gates. Where this is not possible or unsafe, families should pick up from the entrance of the preschool, following COVID-safe guidelines.

All staff are required to wear masks in all indoor settings. This includes adults in all early childhood education and care settings, including when caring for and educating children

Preschool children can be mixed with students from K-2 while there are low numbers throughout the school. The preschool environment is the preferable space. However, if preschool children are to be in the K-2 setting the following regulatory requirements apply:

- the safety, wellbeing and education of all children is prioritised
- the 1-10 educator to child ratio is maintained (to be included in the ratio an SLSO must hold an ACECQA approved Cert 111 qualification)
- a risk assessment for visiting the school is complete
- a procedure for staff supervising children in the main school is developed and adequate supervision is maintained.