

Thursday, 30 July 2020

Queensland employing authority

Via email: [email address]

Dear [Given name]

COVID-19 arrangements – school closure protocols and protections for casual employees

We write in relation to the ongoing COVID-19 health and safety considerations in schools.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the operation of all schools with respect to new safety measures, altered school operations and teaching and learning arrangements. These challenges are acknowledged and highlight the need for the continual review of procedures to ensure best practice measures are in place within the context of an evolving and uncertain health emergency.

1. Casual and relief employees

While the majority of school employers have variously committed to some form of paid pandemic leave for their staff, any specific provision for casual employees has generally not been adopted by employers. Given the insecure nature of casual employment, these employees require additional consideration and wage protection.

Recent experience interstate has demonstrated the very real dilemma facing casual employees in situations where they may feel unwell. It has been documented that in the absence of any paid leave entitlements, such employees have felt compelled to continue to attend work in many cases due to their economic vulnerability and lack of paid leave entitlements. Such a scenario clearly has the potential to exacerbate potential exposure both within and outside the school community.

We seek your confirmation that special paid leave will be extended to casual employees in cases where they are required to self-quarantine, directed to quarantine or school closure. Such leave should be paid at a rate consistent with the employee's typical period of engagement.

2. Clearly established protocols for suspected infections

Schools must be prepared to enact an emergency response plan should there be a suspected or confirmed infection in a school community. These should include protocols for when a school is required to close for thorough decontamination and the provision of paid leave for employees (including casuals) during any such period.

We request confirmation that a response plan is in place and confirmation that such protocols have been communicated to employees. A copy of that response plan would be welcomed to assist us in advising our members in the event of an incident.

Our union appreciates the many challenges you face in managing the threat of the virus within a school environment and thank you in advance for your clarification of these two matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. A. Burke', written in a cursive style.

TERRY BURKE
BRANCH SECRETARY