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IEU members welcome safe return to school plan

Five key measures critical in non-government sector

Members of the union representing over 17,000 teachers and staff in Queensland non-government schools have today welcomed the safe return to school plan announced by Education Minister Grace Grace.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) Branch Secretary Terry Burke said the state government plan will set the parameters and act as a reference point for non-government education employers.

“Today’s announcement will enable non-government schools to develop operational procedures consistent with the Queensland government’s plan,” Mr Burke said.

“However, employing authorities have a number of decisions to make which are peculiar to them.

“Our union believes there are five (5) critical steps needed in any non-government employer checklist when it comes to the safe return to school for all staff and students.

“Those five critical steps being:

- essential safety and COVID-19 testing equipment.
- remote work, especially for the medically vulnerable.
- wage security and access to paid pandemic leave.
- risk assessment and preventive measures for school activities.
- protocols for staff and student exposure.

Mr Burke said IEU members welcomed the state government’s move to make Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) freely available to staff and students.

“At the same time, schools are about education, they’re not de-facto testing facilities,” Mr Burke said.

“Staff should not be placed in the situation of conducting tests with students.

“It is essential non-government schools have protocols in place for the availability and provision of RATs.

“Beyond that, it is critical there are explicit procedures for the notification of a COVID-19 positive contact, how parents will be notified, and, how the impact of such a diagnosis of staff or student(s) will be managed,” he said.

Mr Burke said IEU members also commended the common-sense approach to mask wearing in classrooms announced today.

“That teachers can remove their mask while teaching, and that students can do so while seated, will help protect teachers from voice strain and ensure the continued capacity of students to learn,” Mr Burke said.

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The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) represents more than 17,000 teachers, school support staff, principals and early childhood education employees across Queensland and the Northern Territory. www.ieuqnt.org.au