



Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**


**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2020

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Coronavirus, Schools**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.00 am): Queensland's education sector is well practised in implementing protocols to manage emergency responses. Dealing with the coronavirus, although unprecedented, is no different. In accordance with advice from chief medical officers around the country, Queensland state schools will remain open until further notice. The Department of Education is working closely with Queensland Health in preparing for potential scenarios that involve schools and early childhood centres. If there is a need to close individual schools, these decisions will be made quickly based on further advice from health experts. In the event of a confirmed case at a school, it is likely the school will need to close for a period of time to allow Queensland Health to assess the situation and to perform contact tracing as required to identify people and students who may have come in contact with a COVID-19 case. The department will conduct specialised cleaning of our facilities as required to ensure schools are safe for students and staff to return when clearance is given. Plans for continuity of learning and teaching are essential and principals will continue preparation in this regard.

Yesterday I met with my senior departmental officers and the Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority to be briefed on how lessons and examinations could continue if students needed to isolate. As in other disaster and emergency management events, the department has online learning materials and virtual classroom capability that can be used by schools where appropriate to support sustained curriculum delivery. Teaching staff have been made familiar with these materials and online platforms so they can continue to deliver teaching, learning and assessment activities online. Further, the state, Catholic and independent schooling sectors are collaborating on their planning and response to the COVID-19 situation and a meeting of all stakeholders was held last Thursday morning.

While the advice that there is no current need for school closures, non-essential activities such as fetes, fairs and concerts et cetera, where they involve more than 500 people, are to be postponed or cancelled. In schools with more than 500 students, principals have also been advised to cease full school assemblies, arrange staggered lunch breaks and reschedule other large in-school student gatherings and events. I am pleased to say that principals are taking this very well and are organising very cooperatively.

Schools should also pay attention to health and hygiene measures, including increasing the frequency of the cleaning of toilet facilities and providing additional soap and sanitiser. The department has worked with suppliers to ensure schools have access to adequate supplies.

Principals are ready to answer any questions parents or carers may have about individual school responses. We will continue to take the expert medical advice and we are well prepared to act quickly when required.