




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Schools

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (10.04 am): The Palaszczuk government's strong COVID health response has paved the way for Queensland's economic recovery and resurgence. It has also meant our schools have remained open throughout virtually the entire pandemic in stark contrast to other parts of the country and indeed the world. For large parts of last year, Queensland was the only jurisdiction on the eastern seaboard with our schools fully open. We are delighted now to have our students back again face-to-face for the 2022 school year—more than 870,000 young Queenslanders, including around 580,000 students in Queensland's 1,258 state schools. We welcome four new school communities, with new schools at Greenbank, Nirimba and Coomera, and we are delighted to now have Norfolk Island Central School on board.

With widespread circulation of COVID in the community, there will inevitably also be COVID cases in schools. We are fully prepared for this with our comprehensive back-to-school plan. First, we had the commonsense two-week delay to ensure that we got past the peak of the Omicron wave and provided more time for students to get vaccinated. Of course, our school staff are already vaccinated at a rate of more than 98 per cent. We have supplied rapid antigen tests to every school in the state—a massive logistical exercise with deliveries by road, air and water—across the length and breadth of Queensland.

A special shout-out to Tommo, the local pub landlord in Urandangi, who did a 370-kilometre round trip to pick up the delivery of RATs from our Centre for Learning and Well Being in Mount Isa and drove his truck along unsealed roads to get the delivery to the eight students at Urandangi State School. Thank you very much!

If students get symptoms at school, they are sent home with a RAT. All school students and staff also have priority access to testing at Queensland Health clinics. Schools are notifying their school communities if there is a positive case at school and relaying all the necessary advice, including the key message—if you are unwell, please stay home.

Among other measures, we are limiting visitors onsite for the first four weeks. We have masks available for anyone who needs and requires them. We have adopted all the best practice on ventilation, with schools having access to CO₂ monitors and air purifiers where necessary. The plan is working. Our attendance rates have been over 90 per cent, and staff absences at around 3.5 per cent—both of which are similar to previous years. Thanks to the hard work of our teachers, principals, staff and school communities, there have been no class or school closures to date. Thank you also to our regional and central office staff who have worked tirelessly to ensure our children can safely return to school and have those wonderful childhood experiences that last a lifetime. I wish—and I know everyone on this side of the House and indeed the entire House wishes—all our schools the very best for 2022.