



Advice for Principals and Teachers

2. Getting ready for the return to school

Depending on the type of event, schools might be physically unaffected, might need to adhere to physical distancing rules or might be in need of repair, relocation or to be set up in temporary sites in tents or local community buildings.

- Communication is key. If your school has been using a range of channels to keep students and whānau informed, then this is where these important messages can be accessed and shared. Discuss and be clear as a school about what your approach will be.
- Make your communication clear, calm and concise. Check your messages align with appropriate advice and be aware that not all whanau might be able to access or receive communications in crisis event so you might need to find alternative ways to inform them of what is happening.
- If you have experienced a pandemic lockdown and you cannot invite parents in to look at your physical distancing arrangements, consider making a short video or take some photographs of the procedures and layout so parents can be reassured. This will also mean that students will not be surprised or upset when they arrive on their first day.
- Prepare staff for their return, what they might find, what is expected, how their roles might change, what they might need to bring or do.
- Discuss as a staff how you might manage any unexpected issues that might arise (for example, students you were not expecting, students you were but have not arrived, a unwell student or a staff member being unavailable).
- Discuss also how you will keep staff safe. Are there any new procedures or drills? How will you manage staffroom, office, classroom and playground interactions. How will staff be able to share the extra load and yet take small wellbeing breaks during the day? You might need to have a staff only preparation day.



- If it is not a pandemic situation, you might consider giving students and whānau a chance to visit the school on an informal “open’ day before school formally begins.
In my study, when students came back to school many found comfort in familiar things – their friends, their teachers, their classrooms, the school grounds. Give them time to reacquaint themselves with these aspects but plan to do it in a safe manner.
- Students will be confronted with many changes. They might need to learn new routines as well as try to remember the old ones. Try to find a balance. Students need to feel that amid the chaos there is some normality but they will be very aware that life at present is not yet back to normal. What expectations and rules can be relaxed a little to take stress of staff and students? How will you explain these? But what routines are important to retain?
- Be prepared for talking about the event and its impact on us all. Consider what information or answers to questions are appropriate at each age level. Consider how you will support children who seem to be deeply affected by the situation. However, not all children will want to talk so don’t push it; be guided by them.
- Each school will be different. Some will have complex family needs, some will have staffing issues, others will need to think outside the box to cope with whatever surprises present themselves. Each school needs to find a way to move forward that reflects the needs of their students and community. Again, it is not time to judge what others have chosen to do or not do. Focus on what you can do best for your community.