

Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education and Training  
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing  
Minister for Disability Services and Community Development  
Minister for Trade  
Minister for Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries



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26 May 2020

Ms Nicole Millis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Rare Voices Australia  
[nicole.millis@rarevoices.com.au](mailto:nicole.millis@rarevoices.com.au)

Dear Ms Millis

Thank you for your letter of 4 May 2020 regarding flexible school attendance for students who experience rare disease.

Developing a more inclusive education system with more support for students with diverse needs is a priority of the Tasmanian Department of Education, and we are committed to ensuring every student can thrive through their access and participation in appropriate teaching and learning programs.

The health and safety of all Tasmanian students has always been our top priority as we face the many challenges of COVID-19. While keeping children at home for their learning, where possible, has helped to limit the spread of COVID-19 within our community, we must now look to return students to classrooms in a considered way.

Our approach to returning to learning at school is a staged approach to ensure that we are continuing to manage the movement of people across our community, as we gradually lift restrictions in line with advice from Public Health, and the Tasmanian Government's *Roadmap to Recovery*. We now have a staged timeline in place to re-open Tasmanian Government Schools by early June 2020.

In response to the current COVID-19 situation, our School Health Nurse team has provided specific advice for families and schools in relation to students with complex medical needs. A flexible approach has been adopted, which allows for students to return to learning at school or continue to learn at home, depending on their needs.

We have advised parents and carers of children and young people with complex medical needs, who may be adversely impacted by COVID-19, to seek medical advice from their health practitioner to support informed risk assessment and decision-making regarding their child's suitability of on-site education.

To support medically vulnerable students to return to school, staff will implement existing Department of Education processes, which includes preparing and/or updating the student's medical action plan and discussing how the school can best support or modify the learning environment to meet the needs of the child/young person. In addition, schools will continue to provide appropriate preventative cleaning and hand hygiene actions as part of a strategy to support the student return to school.

For students who wish to continue learning at home, schools will ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to support this. However, there is no expectation for schools to provide additional support to students learning at home. Staff will maintain contact and connection with students to support their eventual return to school-based learning.

In addition to the School Health Nurse team, the Department of Education in Tasmania also employs an extensive range of specialists across the disciplines of psychology, speech and language pathology, social work, and early childhood intervention who specialise in supporting students and families with a range of diverse medical, health and wellbeing, and social needs. This support will continue to be provided to students who are medically vulnerable across our system.

Further information about the Department's approach and resources to support our school community navigate COVID-19 is available at: <https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>.

Once again, thank you for writing to me on this matter. I wish you and all the members of the rare disease community all the very best in terms of their health and wellbeing during this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Rockliff', written in a cursive style.

Jeremy Rockliff MP  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education and Training