



**Hon Sue Ellery MLC  
Minister for Education and Training  
Leader of the Legislative Council**

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Our Ref: 61-22628

Ms Nicole Millis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Rare Voices Australia

Email: [nicole.millis@rarevoices.com.au](mailto:nicole.millis@rarevoices.com.au)

Dear Ms Millis

Thank you for your letter dated 4 May 2020 regarding flexible learning arrangements for students with rare diseases, or students living with family members at high risk from COVID-19.

I would like to reassure you that the Western Australian Government is committed to the health and wellbeing of all students and staff, and the continuity of student learning. The Department of Education acts on the advice of Dr Andrew Robertson, the Western Australian Chief Health Officer, and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) to take the necessary precautions for students and staff.

The AHPPC advises of a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. Additional measures, such as the \$43 million investment in extra cleaning at public schools, will continue to reduce the risk further. Ahead of Term 2, the WA Chief Health Officer provided advice that schools were safe for face-to-face learning. He reiterated this advice in May 2020.

As you may be aware, for the first three weeks of Term 2, there was a cautious approach to school attendance, with public schools being open for all parents and carers who chose to send their children to school. On 14 May 2020, the Premier and I announced that from 18 May 2020, school attendance would be mandatory for all students, public and non-government, in accordance with the *School Education Act 1999*, except for those students who are medically vulnerable or who have medically vulnerable family members.

Students at public schools who are medically vulnerable will be assessed and can continue to learn at home, and will be supported by their schools and the Department of Education. Up to 20 additional teachers will be employed to support students who have been medically referred to learn at home.

Parents of students who are medically vulnerable, or of students who share their home with a family member or carer who is medically vulnerable, who have not already notified their school that their child cannot return, should seek medical advice about their return to school. As is the case at any time, students and staff who are unwell should stay at home. For those who genuinely need to learn at home, the premise continues to be that no student will be disadvantaged. Support for public school students in this situation to continue their learning might include distance learning, priority access to the School of Isolated and Distance Education or direct support from the teachers at the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health.

Where a student is medically referred to learn at home, a case-management approach guarantees that a suitable learning program will be provided. The School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health will work with the relevant school to support these students. This gives families the flexibility to make the right decisions based on their circumstances.

Parents of public school students who need to learn at home can contact their school for advice and guidance. Alternatively, they can contact the Department's helpline on 1800 882 345 for further assistance.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me and for your advocacy on behalf of Western Australians living with a rare disease.

Yours sincerely



SUE ELLERY MLC  
**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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