

SOUTH-EASTERN VICTORIA REGION



Department of Education and  
Early Childhood Development

**SEVMail**

**MEMORANDUM**

**SEV:** 2014-021

**TO:** All Principals, Morwell

**FROM:** John Allman

**DATE:** 27 February 2014

**SUBJECT:** Update on Schools in Morwell

**Summary**

Update on situation for schools in Morwell area.

Advice from the local incident controller is that there was progress overnight in fighting the fire, with crews doing a lot of good work on an area emergency services are most concerned about.

High levels of smoke however remain and the EPA has issued a high level smoke alert for today.

After discussion with the impacted schools, it's been agreed that Commercial Road PS students will remain at their host schools for another two weeks until Friday 14 March. This two week period aligns with advice from CFA that the fire is expected to take another two weeks to be brought under control. Of course, if conditions improve within this time, we will seek to return students back to Commercial Road PS as soon as feasible. We understand that the relocation is going well and thank you to all involved.

The Catholic Education Office is also continuing to relocate its students from Sacred Heart Catholic School to Lavalla Catholic College Year 9 campus in Newborough.

We appreciate your individual efforts to plan breaks for your students from the smoke by organising excursions or rostering cohorts to another school for a day at a time. You will have received advice from us on available spaces at other schools for respite visits and please let us know if there is any further assistance you may need.

A reminder that any costs you incur outside of your normal expenditure as a result of the Morwell mine fire will be reimbursed by the Department. The costs include bus travel to respite locations, CRT for absences specifically related to the Morwell mine fire and any items/services purchased specifically related to the Morwell mine fire. Requests for reimbursement should be sent to Wayne Carmody, Finance Manager, South Eastern Victoria Region, email [carmody.wayne.w@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:carmody.wayne.w@edumail.vic.gov.au). All costs should be coded to a sub-program code (e.g. 9180) with the title 'Morwell emergency'.

We've been advised that Community Officers visited childcare centres in Morwell yesterday, and today will be visiting those in Traralgon, along with schools and pre-schools in both

Morwell and Traralgon. This is a good opportunity to talk about any specific concerns you may have.

From today, three more early childhood services (Carinya Early Learning Centre, Elizabeth Wilmot Kindergarten and Parklands Kindergarten) are closed and working to temporarily relocate their services to other facilities from next week. Given the very young age and limited mobility of children at early childhood services, it is not possible to provide relief from the smoke in the same way as school students, for example, who can go on an excursion, and relocating services is one way of providing young children with a break from the smoke.

We have received a couple of queries about why DEECD is not providing face masks to children. This is based on advice from Department of Health that children, in particular, may find it difficult or impractical to wear a face mask correctly. The best way of providing relief to children is to stay indoors as much as possible. If parents want their children to wear a face mask, they should seek advice from Health Assessment Centre in Morwell or contact Nurse on Call or their local pharmacist/doctor. For more information on face masks visit: <http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Face-masks--questions-and-answers-about-the-smoke-and-ash-from-the-Hazelwood-open-cut-mine>

Air quality units are progressively being installed across schools and early learning spaces across Morwell and, if you haven't already, you will be trained in how to read the relevant data. Queries about the data should be directed to DTZ on 1300 133 468 (please note that this number is not for broad circulation). A hygienist contracted by DTZ will then contact you directly. The hygienist is available every day 8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

**JOHN ALLMAN**  
Regional Director  
South Eastern Victoria Region