

CLASS CONFLICT

# 'RECKLESS' HEAD DEFENDS DECISION

'Evidence tells me to stay open'

## EDUCATION

SUSIE O'BRIEN

A PRIVATE primary school in Melbourne's north has been branded "reckless" by the State Government because it expects to have half of its 120 students on campus by next week.

Tim Berryman, principal of Fitzroy Community School, said he was not breaking ranks, just following medical advice that says schools are safe.

Ignoring pleas from Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews to keep children home where possible, Mr Berryman said he "went through the data and made an evidence-based decision" to keep classes going.

Education Minister James Merlino said the school's action "flies in the face of the Chief Health Officer's clear advice".

"If every school in Victoria took such a reckless decision we would have a million students congregating at school sites, meaning we don't slow the spread of the virus — putting lives at risk," he said.

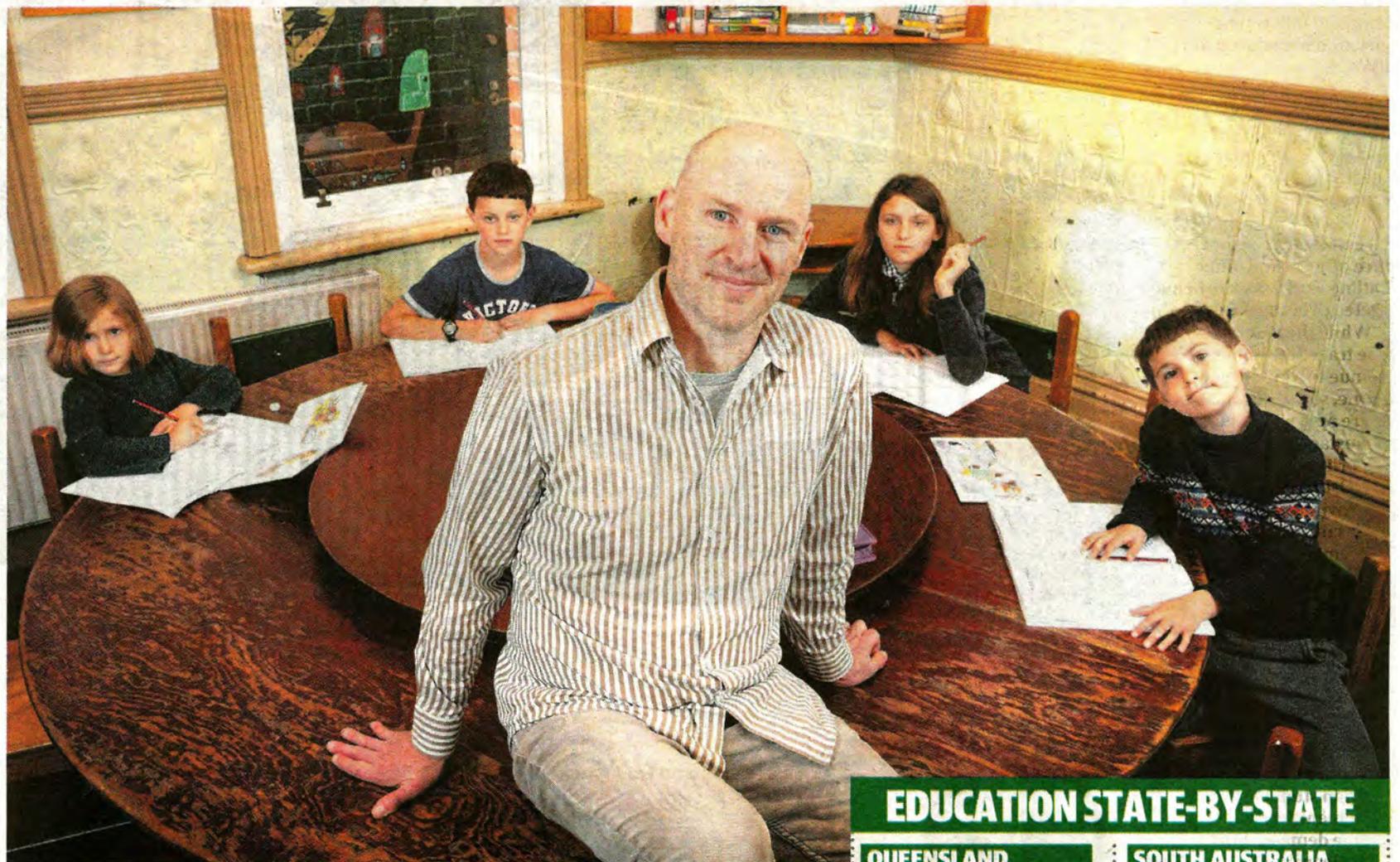
Mr Merlino's comments came as South Australian Premier Steven Marshall said he was keen to see students return to school next week.

South Australian parents are being urged to take their children to school for the beginning of term 2 in an open letter by the state's chief public health officer.

In Melbourne, Mr Berryman said his \$13,000-a-year school was "adopting measures to make sure we are not part of the problem".

Students have their temperature taken when they arrive, and drop-off and pick-up times have been staggered.

Parents cannot go on to the Fitzroy North and Thornbury campuses of the school.



Fitzroy Community School principal Tim Berryman with his children Abigaelle, 6, Christian, 10, Charlotte, 12, and Xavier, 8. Picture: MARK STEWART

"The biggest risk is not the children but the large groups of parents, so we are addressing that," Mr Berryman said.

The school has also doubled its cleaning allocation, has strict handwashing protocols and sanitises door handles and light switches during the day.

Last week, 20 per cent of students attended and this week it was 25 per cent. The numbers are expected to double next week.

In comparison, since the beginning of term two last week, only about 3 per cent of Victorian students have been supervised at school.

Mr Berryman said some parents from the school who are having cancer treatment or had grandparents living

with them wanted their children at home. "I didn't pressure anyone to come, but I also didn't want to exclude anybody. I was careful walking that line and there was no judgment for anyone," he said.

Mr Berryman posted a summary of research on COVID-19 that informed his decision on the school's website. It quotes Prime Minister Scott Morrison's April 16 statement, which says that "on current evidence, schools can be fully open".

His dossier also draws on research from Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Brendan Murphy, and his deputy Nick Coatsworth. It dismisses statements from Mr Andrews and Victorian Chief Medical Officer Brett Sutton as

contradictory and lacking in evidence.

"Eventually the evidence wins out," Mr Berryman told the *Herald Sun*.

State Opposition Education spokeswoman Cindy McLeish said the "clear advice of the Australian government and Australia's Chief Medical Officer is that children should attend school for term two".

"With the Victorian government at odds with the Australian government, there are too many cases of Victorian students being turned away from state schools and parents having to quit their jobs to teach their kids," she said. "Working parents should not have to choose between keeping their job safe or their children safe."

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## EDUCATION STATE-BY-STATE

### QUEENSLAND

Remote learning for first five weeks of Term 2. To be reviewed by the middle of May.

### NEW SOUTH WALES

Students to gradually come back to schools, likely on a revolving roster, after the first fortnight of Term 2.

### VICTORIA

Remote learning across Term 2, with no plans to have students return before the end of the semester.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Year 11 and 12 students strongly encouraged to attend in person and schools to remain open for any parent wishing to send their child.

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Schools, preschools and early childhood services to remain open and parents can choose to keep their child at home.

### NORTHERN TERRITORY

Students expected to attend from April 20 unless parents are directly contacted.

### TASMANIA

Schools to remain open to children and young people who cannot be supervised.

### AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Online classes for public school students with the potential to open more campuses if restrictions are eased. To be reviewed after four weeks.