

'Kiss and go': Back to school for New Zealand kids

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Hundreds of thousands of New Zealand children returned to school Monday after two months of home education as part of a COVID-19 lockdown.

Excited youngsters greeted classmates for the first time in eight weeks, while teachers reinforced messages about social distancing and hand-washing to combat the coronavirus.

Education Minister Chris Hipkins said the return to a noisy, bustling environment would be a "culture shock" after a challenging period for both children and parents.

"Our message is it's safe to send kids back to [school](#), we want kids back at school and catching up with any learning that they've lost during the lockdown," he told reporters.

New Zealand, with a population of five million, has recorded 1,149 coronavirus cases and just 21 deaths, with its success largely attributed to a strict lockdown imposed in late March.

Most domestic [lockdown](#) restrictions ended last

Thursday but schools were given extra time because of the difficulty in implementing health protocols among the very young.

Instead of escorting their children to class, parents dropped them at "kiss and go" zones, while early childhood centres recorded [personal details](#) needed for contact tracing.

There were mixed feelings about the return to lessons among some, with Wellington sisters Charlotte and Lucy McKenzie saying the lengthy time at home had been "boring" and "annoying".

On the other hand, they appreciated not having to wake up early and said they had more free time than usual.

Their mother Tanya said she had some [health concerns](#) but did not believe the government would have reopened schools if there was any risk to [children](#).

"I'm a little nervous about COVID making a resurgence," she said.

"But having said that, I do trust the information we're getting from the government and from the health department that seems to show we're beating it."

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