

Maitland Grossmann High School

Community Update | 22 July 2024

Dear staff, parents and carers,

Thank you for your continued support and patience regarding changes to the school site and learning arrangements at Maitland Grossmann High School, following the closure of Building E in April 2024.

Representatives from School Infrastructure attended the June P&C meeting to provide further information on the status of the building assessment and to answer questions raised by the school community. Answers to those questions are based on advice from the independent hygienist and are provided within this Community Update.

Building assessment and review

Independent hygienists have conducted thorough investigations of Building E, and a review process is continuing to accurately assess its future. Building E remains closed with the safety measures in place as outlined in the [Community Update on 27 May](#), being encapsulation, fencing and environmental cleaning.

A Remediation Action Plan (RAP) is being developed by the independent hygienist in consultation with a structural engineer. All options for the future of Building E and the school site are being carefully considered by the NSW Department of Education (the department).

The review process is lengthy as time is being taken to fully assess the potential scope of work, with careful consideration given to the various impacts to the school community. We appreciate the patience, understanding and resilience shown by the school community.

School site access and additional classrooms

Additional classrooms and facilities have been installed at the school to provide general learning spaces, science labs, staff spaces, toilet facilities for boys, girls and staff, and storage areas. The 21 demountable buildings have been operational since 3 June.

Access around the school site is being regularly reviewed to improve movement for students and staff where possible. The fencing installed around Building E has been reduced for easier movement around buildings B and C. The adjustments to the fencing around Building E has been done with advice from the independent hygienist to ensure important control measures are maintained, which are in place to support the wellbeing of students and staff.



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We are still looking at the options for an alternative commercial kitchen learning space for hospitality students. We will update the school community when more information is available.

Questions and answers

Are covered walkways in planning to support students to move around the school in wet weather?

We understand the importance of ensuring ease of movement around the school, especially during wet weather. A thorough assessment of building reports is underway to help us fully understand the required work. A RAP is being developed by the independent hygienist in consultation with a structural engineer. The RAP will guide any interim or long-term infrastructure investment decisions, such as covered walkways, to ensure we are considering the future needs of students, staff and the school community.

What is the potential for exposure?

With the current control measures in place and the results of the air monitoring performed to date, the potential for exposure is low. It is understood that the presence of loose fill asbestos (also known as friable asbestos) was only identified once the ceiling lining was damaged, allowing for positive identification during the school asbestos resurvey.

Based on the air-monitoring results, visual assessment and limited-demolition investigations of the adjacent buildings, no additional evidence of friable asbestos or cross contamination has been identified. Friable asbestos can be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to a powder by hand pressure.

In addition, all air monitoring to date performed within representative rooms of Building E at the time of the investigation has returned results below the minimum detectable limit. This means it is consistent with acceptable levels in ambient air (i.e. <0.01 fibres/mL) as per SafeWork NSW guidelines.

If the risk is low, why have you encapsulated an entire building?

The health, safety and wellbeing of all students and staff is the department's highest priority. This includes all people using the school environment in the future. All actions that remove even the smallest of risks, and are reasonable and practical to implement, are being undertaken. The encapsulation of the building is deemed to be reasonable, practical and further reduces the low risk of exposure.

Why is an entire wing of the school cordoned off when only a broomstick-sized hole in an outdoor area was identified as the asbestos of concern?

The health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff is the department's highest priority; therefore, an abundance of caution is being taken.

Friable asbestos has been identified within the Building E roof void, external awnings and a wall void on the third floor. A conservative approach was taken, and Building E was encapsulated.

Further investigation of Building E was performed in May and confirmed further instances of friable asbestos in certain areas. This investigation involved minor demolition of smaller areas of the building under controlled conditions.

Why is the whole school full of asbestos and is fine, but now we're closing the school's largest building?

Asbestos-containing materials, or asbestos products, are materials that contain asbestos fibres. These products continue to remain in many buildings throughout Australia, particularly builds and renovations before 31 December 2003. When managed correctly, asbestos-containing materials pose a low risk to health.

The remaining accessible asbestos-containing materials within the school buildings are deemed low risk, as the asbestos identified was reported as non-friable, or bonded. This means it is attached to other materials, such as tiles or cement, and cannot be crumbled by light pressure. NSW Health explains that if asbestos is mixed with cement or other hard bonding materials and in good condition, it is likely to be low-risk.

How long could the potential danger have been present and have our children been at risk?

The friable asbestos was only identified once damage to the ceiling lining occurred suggesting the material had been encapsulated within the ceiling void prior to this.

All air monitoring to date performed within representative rooms of Building E at the time of the investigation has returned results below the minimum detectable limit. This means it is consistent with acceptable levels in ambient air (i.e. <0.01 fibres/mL) as per SafeWork NSW guidelines.

Personal belongings, including teaching and learning resources and equipment inside the building will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Due to contamination precautions, items such as books, computers, fabrics and anything of a porous nature cannot be recovered.

Why is this the case when the air monitoring results have consistently returned results below the minimum detectable limit?

The air monitoring results have consistently returned results below the minimum detectable limit. The health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff is the department's highest priority; therefore, an abundance of caution is being taken.

Any items such as books, computers, fabrics, and anything of a porous nature will be disposed of in accordance with legislative requirements and cannot be recovered.

More information

For more information about asbestos please refer to NSW Health's Asbestos and health risks fact sheet, www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/asbestos-and-health-risks.aspx.

If you have concerns, further advice about the health risks of asbestos can be obtained by speaking with your GP or from your local public health unit by phoning 1300 066 055.

Individuals concerned about exposure can also record their details on the National Asbestos Exposure Register. The register is managed by the Australian Government's Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, which was created so that members of the community who think that they may have been exposed to asbestos can record the details of their exposure for their future reference. If you have any questions regarding the register or would like to speak to someone at the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, please call 1300 326 148.

The health, safety, and wellbeing of the school and the local community is our highest priority.

We appreciate the support of school staff, students and families. Thank you for your patience and understanding.