

# Light hearts for level 2 school

## SHARNAE HOPE

Deans dressed in suits of school photos were welcoming students back to a Hamilton high school on Thursday.

Thousands of students across the Waikato – and other regions outside Auckland – returned to the classroom after three weeks at home under level 3 and 4 lockdown. Under alert level 2 restrictions, parents can't go in the gates and masks are recommended for students aged 12 and older.

The creator of the unique first-day-back attire at Hillcrest High School was year 13 assistant dean Ashleigh Teahan.

"It is just a bit of fun," the fabrics technology teacher and assistant dean told *Stuff*.

Teahan designed a dress, jacket and mask bearing students' faces for herself, and pants, blazer, a tie and mask for year 13 dean Brett Chibnall. She wanted to bring light-heartedness to what – for some – was an anxious day, she said. She and Chibnall had rummaged through past year 9 school photos to find their current year 13 students' fresh faces.

Each photo was then printed on to fabric at the textile and design lab at Auckland University of Technology. The outfits made their debut at the school ball in August and the pair decided to wear them again as students returned after lockdown.

"It took me three weeks to make," Teahan said.

"We thought we would bring



Chassidy Poki, 14, said she was excited to be back at school, after trying to learn at home with eight siblings.

them out again to brighten the mood." While Teahan and Chibnall won best dressed, many students made the most of a new fashion accessory.

Some students entered the school grounds with face coverings decorated in polka dots or zebra stripes.

Others did not have a mask on at all. Chassidy Poki, 14, said it was not something the school had enforced but she was wearing one because her mum wanted her to.

"I am happy to be back at school," Chassidy said.

With eight siblings, staying focused at home was hard, she said. She and her older siblings had to share the digital devices, while her two younger brothers used paper and pen.



Year 13 dean Brett Chibnall and year 13 assistant dean Ashleigh Teahan brought smiles to students' faces as they arrived back to school.

MARK TAYLOR/STUFF

"Online learning just is not the same," Chassidy said.

The transition into level 2 was exciting for some students but just as many were likely to feel overwhelmed, deputy principal Christine Williams said.

During lockdown, staff had regular online catchups with their students, she said.

They had not noticed increased anxiety compared with last year but there was some concern that a handful of students were not going to turn up to school.

"We have asked our hauora

teachers to give us a list by the end of Monday of students who have not come back, so that we can chase up whether that is because of anxiety or financial issues.

"Last year some of our senior students said to our deans that they were juggling work as well and the dean is a little bit concerned we might not get some students returning because they need to work." For that reason the focus will be on nurturing students for the next few days.

"I remember last year we were so much more concerned about

how we keep students separated but then the students were all over each other in interval and lunchtime and we know it is going to be the same here."

Teachers are also encouraged to wear masks but the school has not made it mandatory.

"I feel for the students, particularly the seniors who have practice exams coming up. It is already a stressful time for them.

"All schools are experiencing more and more anxious students, and Covid has had a big part to play in that."