

1 November 2012

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

IMPACT OF THE RAISED SCHOOL LEAVING AGE

From 1 January 2010 the school leaving age in New South Wales was raised from 15 to 17 years of age. This means that all students in the State must complete Year 10 and continue education or training or be in paid work, or a combination of these activities, until they turn 17 years of age. Students who were in Year 10 in 2010 were the first group affected by the change.

Mr Achterstraat noted that the school leaving age was raised to 17 years of age because research shows that students who stay at school longer have better future prospects.

“Studies here and overseas have found that teenagers who leave school early are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed, earn lower wages, have poorer health and be involved in criminal activities,” said Mr Achterstraat.

Of the 54,607 students enrolled at government schools in Year 10 in 2010, only 47,695 enrolled at government schools in Year 11 the following year, even though the majority of them would not have turned 17 years of age.

“This leaves 6,912, or one in eight students unaccounted for. They may be on an approved alternative pathway. They may be enrolled in a non-government school. Or they may not be participating at all.

“I am concerned that the Department of Education and Communities does not know which students are not participating and therefore cannot take any action to support them,” said Mr Achterstraat.

For those students remaining at government schools, the Department and schools have supported these students by providing career advice, by expanding their curriculum beyond the traditional HSC subjects, and by introducing innovative programs.

“But some of those who choose school are disruptive or not turning up,” said Mr Achterstraat.

There is also evidence that more students who remain at school until 17 years of age are disengaged.

“Year 11 students now are absent more often and more likely to be suspended than those in previous years. The impact of managing these disengaged students can put a strain on other students,” Mr Achterstraat said.

“There is a risk that disengaged students not only disrupt others but also waste teachers’ time,” he added.

“So more could be done to support these students. Schools need to provide programs that better suit these students’ needs and ensure students have access to high quality career advice,” said Mr Achterstraat.

Mr Achterstraat called on the Department to find out where young people are and, for those at government schools, better support students at risk of disengagement.

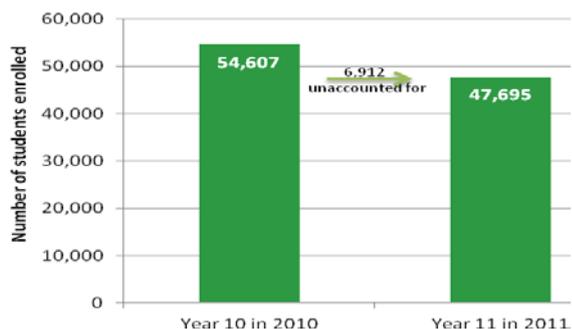
Mr Achterstraat concluded:

“Overall, the raised school leaving age is an important initiative that should have positive impacts. Opportunities to improve the success of this initiative lie in making sure students don’t fall through the gap and maximising the choice of options that engage and meet the needs of students until they turn 17 years of age.”

Further information

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Number of students enrolled in government schools



Source: NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012

Absentee rate for Year 11 students in 2010 (before the raised school leaving age) and 2011 (after the raised school leaving age)

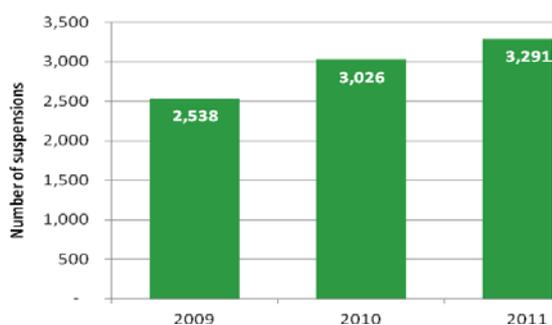
	2010	2011
Average absentee rate (%)	11.2	12.4
Days missed per student (no.)	22.4	24.8
Students absent on an average school day (no.)	5,226	5,914
Students enrolled (no.)	46,661	47,695

Source: Audit Office analysis of data from NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012

Key: Average absentee rate measures the percentage of students absent on an average school day.

Assumption: Average 200 school days per year

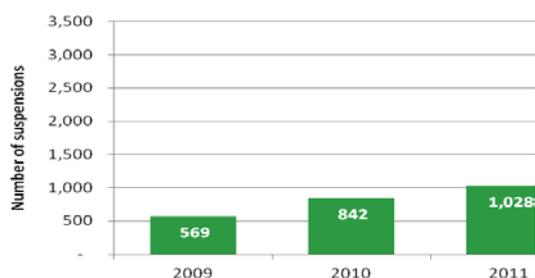
Number of short suspensions given to Year 11 students in government schools



Source: NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012

Note: Short suspensions are up to four school days in each occasion.

Number of long suspensions given Year 11 students in government schools



Source: NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2012

Note: Long suspensions are up to 20 school days in each occasion.