



Appendix one – Response from agency



Ms Margaret Crawford
Auditor-General of NSW
Audit Office of New South Wales
GPO Box 12
SYDNEY NSW 2001

DGL19/292

Dear Ms Crawford

Thank you for your letter of 18 April 2019, providing me with a copy of the final report on the Performance Audit – Wellbeing of Secondary School Students, and seeking a formal response from the Department of Education to be incorporated into the published report.

The department has reviewed the final report of the performance audit and our response is attached.

Our Strategic Plan (<https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/our-strategic-plan/strategic-plan>) includes a goal that every student is known, valued and cared for. This is a key area of work for all of our schools. Our commitment to improving student outcomes covers not only their academic achievements but also their wellbeing. We will be monitoring this through our Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey.

Wellbeing contributes significantly to the learning and other life outcomes of children and young people in our schools. It builds resilience, facilitates self-determination and participation. Wellbeing enhances our sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity.

The NSW Government has invested more than \$290 million since 2015/2016 to support the wellbeing and mental health of students.

In 2019, an additional \$88 million has been allocated over four years to provide every public high school with two dedicated mental health professionals so that students have access to vital mental health and wellbeing support. This funding will enable employment of up to 100 additional school counselling staff so that every public high school will have full-time psychology support on site. The department is looking at ways to provide regular and timely access through a dedicated fly-in fly-out telepsychology service in rural and remote NSW schools.

In addition, 350 new student support officers will be employed enabling every high school to have a full-time student support officer, providing an access point for students who might be experiencing issues such as bullying, stress, peer or family conflict.

The department is committed to the ongoing collection of student voice data through student surveys. We would like to add some contextual data to the observation made in the report's key findings about the department's student engagement and wellbeing TTFM survey.

NSW Department of Education

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While it is true some schools achieve low participation rates among their students, we believe the surveys on the whole have been extremely successful. The average participation rate within schools is around 70 per cent; fewer than 10 per cent of schools have a participation rate of 40 per cent or less. On average, students take around 15 minutes to complete the surveys, which we believe is an appropriate commitment given the importance of the data collected.

The increasing take up of TTFM indicates broad and strong support of the survey, with close to 90 per cent of public high schools expected to complete the survey during 2019. The department will continue to provide support and work with schools to help them get the most out of the surveys and the valuable information it provides to each school.

The department will also continue to work with other government agencies and leading mental health organisations to support schools in delivering best practice prevention and early intervention mental health support.

Yours sincerely



Mark Scott AO
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
16 May 2019



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AUDIT OFFICE - PERFORMANCE AUDIT - WELLBEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS - FINAL REPORT

	Recommendation	Department of Education's response	Comments
1	<p>By December 2019</p> <p>Integrate the Wellbeing Framework with the School Excellence Framework, and align other related wellbeing policies, such as behaviour and discipline policies, to achieve consistency.</p>	Supported	<p>The School Excellence Framework supports all schools in their pursuit of excellence. Wellbeing has been integrated into the updated School Excellence Framework and, from the beginning of 2019, all schools have been able to use the updated version. The department is working to simplify and align the Wellbeing Framework for Schools with the School Excellence Framework to support schools in understanding the systems requirements for wellbeing.</p> <p>In addition, the department will scope and review a range of policies and frameworks related to wellbeing, behaviour and discipline so they are better aligned, and schools can use them to inform wellbeing practices. This work has commenced and we are reviewing the school attendance and discipline policies in consultation with school principals, staff and a range of stakeholders. The updated policies will provide consistent requirements and approaches for schools.</p>
2	<p>By December 2019</p> <p>Define a service model, and commensurate resourcing models, so that schools can better deliver wellbeing activities in a coordinated way.</p>	Supported	<p>The department is working to improve its approach to supporting schools. We are doing this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving our systems so that we can track and monitor our engagement with schools and the impact this has. Working in partnership with schools to provide tailored support on the areas that are of most importance to them. In 2019 we will provide support to 471 schools and 43 will be working on wellbeing related initiatives.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will be reviewing the program funding and positions in place to support elements of the Wellbeing Framework to determine whether this funding should be provided more flexibly to schools to support their local wellbeing priorities.
3	<p>By March 2020</p> <p>Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> addressing allocation cut-offs in the formula to allocate school counsellors and psychologists to schools with growing enrolments and/or high needs 	Supported	<p>The department is implementing measures that will provide significant enhancements in wellbeing resources for high schools. We are doing this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employing up to 100 additional school counselling staff over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) so that every high school will have full time school counselling support on site. an additional 350 student support officers will be employed over four years (2019-2020 to 2021-2022) so that every high school will have a student support officer. Addressing allocation cut-offs in the formula to allocate school counsellors and psychologists.
3	<p>By March 2020</p> <p>Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> redesigning the workforce demand and supply forecasting to specifically identify counsellor/psychologists separately from general teaching positions. 	Supported	<p>Demand forecasting will initially focus on attrition rates as well as forecasted attrition rates based on the workforce demographics and geographic need.</p> <p>In addition, data generated from the department's School Services strategic initiatives project will be used to inform key areas of need in schools, and shape future resources and training requirements.</p> <p>More broadly the department is undertaking work on its staffing methodology and how it can best support student outcomes.</p>
4	<p>From 2019 onwards</p> <p>Consolidate any new funded policy initiatives into established evidence-based programs, such as</p>	Supported	<p>The department is committed to providing evidenced based programs and services for our schools and has work underway to address this recommendation through new funded initiatives. An example is the NSW</p>

	Recommendation	Department of Education's response	Comments
	whole school approaches, school counsellors and flexible funding for wellbeing.		<p>state budget investment of an additional \$88 million over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) to provide every public high school with both a school counsellor/school psychologist and a student support officer so that students have access to vital mental health and wellbeing support. These staff will be trained to deliver evidenced based interventions in high schools.</p> <p>As part of this investment, the Department of Education will also partner with other government agencies and leading mental health organisations to support schools and specialist staff in delivering evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs.</p>
5	From 2019 onwards Integrate requirements to monitor wellbeing activities and outcomes into current systems and platforms.	Supported	School planning and reporting processes will be reviewed to explore inclusion of explicit student wellbeing targets and related monitoring and reporting as an element in current systems and platforms.
6	By December 2019 Increase the use of quantifiable wellbeing improvement measures in school planning and reporting by assisting schools to design and use targets and benchmarks.	Supported	School planning and reporting is a priority for the department. The department's 50 Principal School Leadership (PSL) positions as part of their role will support schools to set appropriate targets and benchmarks, and include wellbeing improvement measures as an area of focus for support.
7	By December 2019 Include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> trends in suspension numbers and rates against normative benchmarks, either NSW averages or like school comparators 	Supported in principle	<p>Directors Educational Leadership have access to suspension data to inform school planning and improvement through a dashboard.</p> <p>The department is currently working to improve the visibility of data, including suspension data, to better inform planning in schools and across schools in local networks.</p> <p>The work is complex with a number of factors impacting on the capacity to identify normative benchmarks for all schools:</p>

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> privacy legislation requires the department to ensure that any presentation of suspension data on dashboards protects the privacy of individual students developing reliable trends and normative benchmarks is difficult due to the volatility of suspension data in many schools from year to year. This is a particular issue for small schools that have few suspensions. While suspension data will continue to be included in dashboards for directors for these schools, performance reporting and normative benchmarks would not be appropriate for small schools or schools with very few suspensions.
7	By December 2019 Include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> student attendance, contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit 	Supported	<p>The department has been working on ways to provide important data to Directors to guide their planning and support for schools.</p> <p>The department's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has developed a Directors Portal which shows attendance rates and the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time for each school, using data harvested from the department's IT platform (known as ebs: central).</p> <p>For high schools the data is presented for each term, by years 7-10 and 11-12. The portal was released to directors at the beginning of Term 2 2019 and includes comparison of 2019 attendance rates with 2018 rates.</p> <p>The department's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation is developing school level targets for the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time.</p>

	Recommendation	Department of Education's response	Comments
			The department's Child Wellbeing Unit currently provides Executive Directors and Directors, Educational Leadership a range of data around contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit.
7	By December 2019 Include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> activity measures for counsellors/psychologists and for identified student wellbeing positions, such as the Student Support Officer. 	Supported	Planning for the introduction of a new online system for the school counselling service is underway. A 'user group' has identified detailed business requirements for the system which includes reporting functions that capture key activity measures for school counsellors/psychologists. We are employing an additional 350 Student Support Officers over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) so that every public high school will have a student support officer. The student support officers will be provided high level training, resources and tools to identify and deliver evidence-based wellbeing initiatives and activity measures.
8	By December 2019 Publicly report on the wellbeing key performance indicator 'Increase the proportion of students reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school' including its design and 2018 performance as a baseline for measuring progress in wellbeing.	Supported with comment	The department will report on the wellbeing indicator in its 2019 Annual Report which will be published in May 2020. This will align with the department's annual reporting cycle and ensure the wellbeing indicator is reported along with other performance measures.