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# Appendix one – Response from agency



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

Email: c/-

DGL23/386

Dear Ms Crawford

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 July 2023, seeking the Department of Education's response to the final performance audit report on regional, rural and remote education.

The department has carefully considered the audit report and I am pleased to accept six recommendations in full and one recommendation in part. Please find enclosed the department's detailed response to each recommendation.

I would like to thank the Audit Office of NSW for their professionalism during the conduct of this performance audit, and for their collaborative approach to working with officers from the department. The audit process has been beneficial, and the report provides constructive feedback on the department's practices.

The report will help us to better ensure that regional, rural and remote students have access to the same quality of education as their metropolitan peers. The department has already begun considering the opportunities presented, and is committed to making significant progress on each of the recommendations in the nominated timeframes.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mr Ben Ballard, Executive Director in the Regional, Rural and Remote Education Policy unit, by email at

Yours sincerely

  
Murat Dizdar  
**SECRETARY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
3 August 2023



## NSW Department of Education response to Audit recommendations

By February 2025, the Department of Education will:

Audit recommendation	Department response	Comment
<p><b>1. renew its commitment to meeting the principles of the Education Act (1990) that 'every child receives an education of the highest quality' through development of a long-term strategy that addresses regional, rural and remote education</b></p>	Accepted	The department remains committed to improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote learning communities. As part of this commitment, regional, rural and remote will form a key part of future long term strategies to deliver equity commitments. The Regional, Rural and Remote Education Policy team will also develop an implementation plan with a set of deliverables to support the implementation of the current strategy.
<p><b>2. commence preparations for a new strategy by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finalising an evaluation of the 2021-24 strategy</li> <li>• publicly reporting on actions and impact of the 2021-24 strategy</li> <li>• undertaking research to inform directions, including a literature review</li> <li>• embedding stakeholder engagement arrangements to inform the development and execution of a new strategy.</li> </ul>	Partially accepted	<p>The department will conduct an internal review of the Rural and Remote Education Strategy (2021-2024) to inform future strategic directions for regional, rural and remote education. The department will also publish updates on its website on progress made towards the current Strategy commitments. An internal review of the existing Strategy will ensure regional, rural and remote priorities are aligned and inform directions established by the department in its strategic plan.</p> <p>The future direction of regional, rural and remote education in the department will be informed by data, research, and through regular engagement with key stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>3. put in place quality key performance indicators for regional, rural and remote students aligned to the department's strategic plan success measures and routinely report publicly on the regional, rural and remote indicators</b></p>	Accepted	The department has prioritised equity within its new strategic plan to commence from 2024. The plan specifies outcomes for early childhood, school and post-school learners, with one or more performance targets currently under development for each outcome. Equity performance targets will mirror these headline performance targets for the majority outcomes across a range of equity groups, including rural, regional and remote students and staff. The

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		<p>department is consulting on the headline measures widely with external stakeholders.</p> <p>Following the development of mainstream targets, equity targets will also be set, with a focus on meaningful reduction the equity gap to the whole student or staff population group featured. Equity target performance will be available for public reporting via Budget Papers, and the department's annual reports.</p>
<p><b>4. routinely and consistently collect data in a manner that enables a standard remoteness classification to be applied across different functional areas of the department, which will support the department to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>monitor trends and issues with access across the state</i></li> <li>• <i>analyse factors driving differences in outcomes across the state</i></li> <li>• <i>enable public reporting on key performance indicators.</i></li> </ul>	Accepted	The department will enable the application of a standard remoteness classification after data collection.
<p><b>5. implement governance arrangements for regional, rural, and remote education that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>enable the central coordinating unit for regional, rural and remote education to effectively undertake its assigned functions</i></li> <li>• <i>enable ongoing quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify issues in program delivery to regional, rural and remote areas</i></li> <li>• <i>prioritise efforts based on identified opportunities and areas of the greatest need</i></li> <li>• <i>provide authority for the central coordinating unit to make decisions to direct the work of relevant business units accountable for delivering on those responsibilities</i></li> </ul>	Accepted	The department will implement the governance arrangements for regional, rural and remote education by aligning resources for the central coordination unit. The department will also undertake further quantitative and qualitative analysis on issues in program delivery to regional, rural and remote areas. An executive level governance body will make decisions on prioritisation efforts to consider areas of greatest opportunities and hold directorates to account for delivering on the assigned responsibilities.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>clearly allocate responsibilities and hold business units accountable for delivering on those responsibilities.</i></li> </ul>		
<p><b>6. review the financial resources provided for regional, rural and remote areas to recognise the additional costs for regional, rural and remote locations</b></p>	Accepted	<p>Funding support for the additional costs of delivery for regional, rural, and remote schools is currently provided via the Location loading. The department will review the Location loading and other resourcing to ensure that they meet the additional costs for regional, rural, and remote schools and is provided in a consistent, efficient and transparent manner.</p>
<p><b>7. review the different modes of hybrid learning across the department and use this to develop an approach that ensures all students can access best practice modes of delivery.</b></p>	Accepted	<p>The department will scope and develop a whole of system approach to hybrid learning. This will include reviewing global best practice approaches to hybrid/flexible learning in the context of NSW Department of Education schools. This approach will be collaboratively developed with stakeholders in order to establish a future state for hybrid/flexible learning in the context of curriculum reform and the new strategic plan.</p>



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