
Appendix one – Response from agency



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

DGL22/445

mail@audit.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Crawford

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 August 2022, regarding the final report of the Performance Audit on Student Attendance.

The Department is strongly committed to supporting students in every aspect of their learning in order to achieve their full potential. The Department is responsible for ensuring students attend school and continues to work with all our public schools to improve performance on student attendance throughout the system.

I am particularly pleased the audit acknowledges the improvements achieved in attendance data capacity and the potential for these improvements to significantly improve student outcomes. The Department has carefully considered the audit report and I am pleased to accept or support in principle all recommendations. The Department is committed to making significant progress on each of the recommendations in the nominated timeframes. Effective implementation for some of the recommendations may require additional time. Please find enclosed the Department's detailed response to each recommendation.

The Department has already started considering the opportunities the audit has presented to evaluate, renew and re-focus the Department's programs and strategies to support improved student attendance into the future.

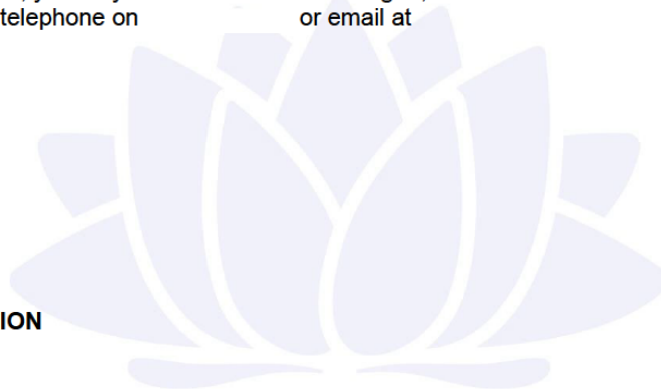
I would like to thank the Audit Office of NSW for their professionalism during the conduct of this performance audit, and for their collaborative approach to working with officers from the Department. The audit process has been beneficial and the report provides constructive feedback on the Department's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

Should you have any questions, you may contact Ms Trisha Ladogna, Director Behaviour and Student Participation, by telephone on _____ or email at _____

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'G Harrisson'.

Georgina Harrisson
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
20 September 2022



NSW Department of Education response to recommendations

Audit Recommendation	Department response	Comment
The Department of Education should:		
<p>1. Publicly renew its commitment to improving student attendance beyond the end of Strategic Plan 2018–22 with new state-wide and school-level attendance targets</p>	Accepted	<p>The Department is currently reviewing system and school performance targets. Updated targets are anticipated to be implemented from 2024.</p> <p>As part of this work, the key learnings from current targets will be reviewed to ensure that the targets which are set drive the right support programs and behaviours in schools and lead to improved student outcomes.</p>
<p>2. Expand the use of supplementary targets for schools with complex student cohorts (e.g. reducing the proportion of students with attendance rates below 80%)</p>	Accepted	<p>The review of system and school targets (recommendation 1) and the gap analysis of attendance programs (recommendation 3) will investigate options for supplementary targets and the implications of this approach to meet student needs and deliver support programs.</p>
<p>3. Evaluate the Universal, Guided and Strategic attendance support resources and programs to assess impact, identify potential gaps and improve on existing resources</p>	Accepted	<p>Program evaluation is a key stage in programs which are delivered under the School Success Model.</p> <p>Universal resources to support attendance will be evaluated through a gap analysis on school needs, beyond procedures and systems, in understanding and responding to the reasons for non-attendance.</p> <p>Guided and Strategic Support programs will be reviewed and re-focussed as required to ensure services are available to and fit for purpose for the full range of schools most in need of attendance support.</p>
<p>4. Improve transparency by publicly reporting the attendance level measure for individual schools on the department's website and in school annual reports</p>	Supported in principle	<p>Attendance data at State and school scale is available on the Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA) MySchool website and at student level on some third party applications used by schools to communicate with parents.</p> <p>The Department will investigate the feasibility, including technical feasibility, of reporting on this measure in school annual reports.</p> <p>Section 18A of the Education Act places limitations on publishing comparative lists of school outcomes. Legal advice will be sought on the type of data which can be reported on the Department's website.</p>

Audit Recommendation	Department response	Comment
<p>5. Improve the analysis and reporting of attendance data to support targeted strategies and programs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving the quality and timeliness of attendance data from third-party vendors • reviewing trends in attendance for priority equity cohorts • collecting better quality information on the reasons for absence 	Accepted	<p>The Department undertakes continuous improvement data and analysis projects, and maintains ongoing dialogue with third party providers regarding the ability of their systems to adapt to change.</p> <p>In responding to this recommendation, the Department will investigate solutions to improve the quality and timeliness of attendance data including any system constraints. This work will also support evaluation and delivery of other recommendations of the performance audit.</p> <p>The ability to analyse data by priority equity cohorts may be constrained by privacy and process limitations on the equity cohort status of some equity groups.</p>
<p>6. Finalise the attendance policy, procedure and codes review and develop resources to support schools in implementing the new settings</p>	Accepted	<p>Attendance policy, procedure and exemptions are in the process of being updated. While the performance audit did not make specific policy recommendations, this update will consider the overall findings of the audit for policy or procedural implications.</p> <p>The timing of delivery to schools of the updated attendance policy, procedure and any proposed modification to attendance codes will be scheduled in mid-2023, taking into account the schedule for delivery of other programs requiring school uptake and communications required to inform schools of updated content.</p>
<p>7. Review the approach to enforcing compulsory school attendance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the adequacy and distribution of Home School Liaison Program resources • the appropriateness of reporting lines and links with other central support positions • program costs and long-term outcomes • the relative effectiveness compared to early intervention approaches 	Accepted	<p>The Department will undertake a review of the statutory and legal measures (pre-court and court) and related programs designed to achieve improved attendance in 2023 for anticipated implementation in 2024. This includes the distribution and adequacy of resources, systemic issues identified by the audit and effectiveness of each element in achieving improved attendance.</p> <p>The Department has commenced processes to address known system limitations that would allow objective comparative appraisal of the application and impacts of the full suite of attendance enforcement measures.</p>

NSW Department of Education

Darug Country 105 Phillip Street Parramatta NSW 2150 GPO Box 33 Sydney NSW 2001 1300 679 332 education.nsw.gov.au

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By June 2023 the Department of Education should:		
8. Update its attendance strategies and programs based on the results of trial programs and provide commensurate resourcing to meet the revised student attendance targets	Accepted	Delivery of this recommendation will build on the first tranche of recommendations, in particular recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 7.
9. Review the current range of strategies and programs supporting attendance for Aboriginal students and address any gaps (e.g. strategies and programs for younger students) in consultation with relevant stakeholder groups.	Accepted	<p>This recommendation presents an important opportunity for a comprehensive review of strategies and programs supporting attendance of Aboriginal students. The Department anticipates that additional time until the end of 2023 will be required to finalise this review.</p> <p>The review will be delivered with meaningful engagement and consultation with Aboriginal communities, other stakeholders including schools and staff as well as the Department's key partner, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. It will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of current strategies and programs and research. • existing policies and agreements with external organisations and NSW government processes • programs/strategies for expansion, or potential new areas strategy/program development to address the gap in attendance rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. • existing and potential new providers and programs



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