

---

# Appendix one – Response from agency



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

MT21/2175

[Mail@audit.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Mail@audit.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Ms Crawford

I write in response to your correspondence of 10 November 2021, to the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning, regarding the Performance Audit – COVID Intensive Learning Support Program (the Program) and seeking the Department of Education response to the performance audit report recommendations.

I welcome the report on the performance audit of the Program. I am pleased that the performance audit concluded that the Program was effectively designed and delivered by the Department of Education. I accept the report's recommendations in full and agree with the findings. The report will help us achieve our goal of ensuring that every student is engaged and challenged to continue to learn, and every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year.

We have already undertaken significant work to progress each of the seven recommendations, which are due by January or March 2022. Please find enclosed the Department's detailed response to each recommendation.

The Department is proud to have supported students in New South Wales with targeted small-group tuition to catch up on any learning loss following the learning disruptions of 2020. On 18 October 2021, the NSW Government announced an additional \$383 million commitment to renew the Program for the 2022 school year. This funding boost is a necessary response to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on student learning and a measure of the tuition program's success in schools during this year.

The Department is refining the Program to ensure that schools are well equipped to understand and support student learning needs. These refinements build on the success of the 2021 program and are being developed in consultation with key stakeholders. The Department had the benefit of the NSW Audit Office's preliminary findings, draft report and expert insights during the proposal for the 2022 program.

I have also reviewed the six lessons for future programs, which draws on the experience of rapid planning and implementation of the Program. The Department will consider these lessons for future programs.

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](http://education.nsw.gov.au)

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

If you have any questions in relation to the Department's response to the performance audit, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Paul Wood by telephone on [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED].

I look forward to the report being tabled on 15 December 2021 and working with you and the NSW Audit Office on future performance audits.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Harrison', written in a cursive style.

Georgina Harrison  
**SECRETARY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
7 December 2021

Recommendation	Response	Comment
Timeframe – By January 2022, to inform the next stage of the program the Department of Education should:		
1. Review and revise the program funding allocation model to improve the equity of distribution and transparently communicate the method in advice to schools.	Accepted	<p>This recommendation has been fully implemented for NSW government schools. On 19 November 2021, NSW government schools received advice on their COVID intensive learning support program funding allocation for 2022. The funding allocation model for 2022 was based on a comprehensive review and revision of the 2021 funding model overseen by the Department's School Improvement Executive, and included consideration of the NSW Audit Office draft and final findings and recommendations. The Department transparently communicated the funding model to schools through a range of channels, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a principal webinar with the Deputy Secretary, School Performance South on 18 November 2021</li> <li>• emails to school principals and Directors, Educational Leadership</li> <li>• updates to the online guidelines for the COVID intensive learning support program, with a dedicated page for 2022 funding allocations, and</li> <li>• a breakdown of the funding model for Executive Directors and Directors, Educational Leadership for their schools.</li> </ul> <p>The Department also invited school leaders to contact the COVID intensive learning support taskforce for more detail about their funding allocations.</p> <p>To improve the equity of distribution, funding for 2022 has been allocated to schools in a way that means the program is targeted to support students whose learning has been most affected by COVID disruptions. Under the updated model, a school's funding allocation is based on two factors: the period of time spent learning from home as a result of COVID-19 (which varied from around 20 to 70 days in 2021) and the level of disadvantage within a school community as indicated by the Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI). These are the two most likely drivers of learning loss, and they are given equal weight in the calculation. More funding is therefore being directed to disadvantaged schools that experienced the longest lockdown periods.</p> <p>The Department's review and revision of the 2021 funding model also led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• every school being allocated funding that is within a 20% range of the amount they received in 2021 to ensure that all schools can offer students a renewed program and build on the successes of this year.</li> <li>• the maximum amount for schools being capped at the equivalent of 7 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers,</li> </ul>

		<p>slightly higher than the 6 FTE cap applied in 2021. This change may support program coordination at larger schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the minimum funding amount being increased to \$8,619, which is approximately the cost of a full-time educator one day-per-week for 15 weeks. The increased minimum amount is outside the 20% range and recognises the longer average learning from home period this year.</li> <li>removal of steps in the methodology to ensure the smoothing of funding thresholds for larger schools with more than 900 students enrolled.</li> </ul> <p>A small portion of the total program budget has been held in reserve to enable targeted 'top up' funding to be delivered to schools mid-next 2022, based on student need.</p> <p>Funding agreements with the non-government schools peak sector bodies are being finalised.</p>
2. Review and revise guidance to clearly communicate the intended target group of students and the level of flexibility schools have to target other groups of students.	Accepted	<p>This recommendation has been partially implemented and work on updated guidelines is currently underway. The Department has undertaken a significant review of the level of flexibility for schools and the student cohorts that should receive small group tuition under the COVID intensive learning support program. This review was overseen by the Department's School Improvement Executive and was informed by insights from this performance audit and other stakeholder feedback.</p> <p>The COVID Intensive Learning Support Program aims to support students who have been disadvantaged by the move to remote and/or flexible learning during COVID-19 and identified by their school as most likely to benefit from the additional support.</p> <p>The 2022 program expectations are being strengthened with advice to be provided to schools to inform their program next year, including how schools should identify students.</p>

<p>3. Review and revise guidance on the time schools should allocate to administering the program (e.g. co-ordination, lesson preparation, assessment, teacher collaboration) based on feedback from schools and key stakeholder groups.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Department appreciates that effective school-level program administration requires that schools allocate adequate time to these tasks, and that improved guidance and support for administration would be beneficial. Quality program administration is likely to lead to improved outcomes for staff and students through better planning and preparation, collaboration with classroom teachers, and data collection and analysis. In the updated guidelines for 2022 COVID intensive learning support program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• schools are able to employ additional teachers to enable the release of permanent staff to coordinate the program (up to 10% of funding allocation), and</li> <li>• the funding ceiling for large schools was increased by one full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher compared to 2021, with the aim of supporting program coordination at larger schools.</li> </ul> <p>The Department is reviewing the recommended administrative allowance of 10% from a school's allocation of COVID intensive learning support program funding. The Department is also considering enhancing advice on the benefits of allocating adequate time and staffing resources to program administration, with the potential for additional school case studies and professional learning to promote best practice. Further advice and information about program administration will be provided to schools through updates to the online guidelines by January 2022, prior to the school year commencing.</p>
<p>4. Review the experience of schools that used initial teacher education students, retired teachers, school learning support officers, educational paraprofessionals, or allied health professionals to deliver the program. Use these findings to update program guidelines, example models of successful delivery and professional learning offerings.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Department has reviewed the categories of staff that are eligible for employment in the COVID intensive learning support program as part of the program's renewal in 2022. This review led to School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs) and Allied Health Providers being made available from the start of the 2022 school year, and access to Allied Health providers being extended to all schools supporting students with disabilities.</p> <p>The Department will also develop detailed models of successful and innovative delivery of small group tuition in schools that employed initial teacher education students, retired teachers, school learning support officers, educational paraprofessionals, or allied health professionals. The Department is enhancing and expanding professional learning offerings and scaling-up Communities of Practice for educators employed to deliver small group tuition. This is in response to continuous feedback and requests from schools and educators about any additional guidance and professional learning that would be beneficial for different types of educators.</p>

		<p>The evaluation of the COVID intensive learning support program is being informed by data collected from surveys distributed to school staff in Term 4 of 2021. The surveys include questions for principals and program coordinators about their satisfaction with the small group tuition delivered by each of the employment categories and/or staffing models. The Department also undertook qualitative data collection about school experiences of using different staffing models:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• through the development of six school case studies</li> <li>• during field visits to 18 schools in Term 2, 2021, which included school staff, parents and students</li> <li>• from focus groups with 9 schools in Term 4, 2021.</li> </ul> <p>This data is being progressively analysed to inform the 2022 program. Schools will continue to have access to a wide range of professionals that they can employ for this program to suit their context. This includes current and retired teachers, educational paraprofessionals, university students, SLSOs, and select third-party providers. The 2022 program guidelines will be expanding and simplifying arrangements for the engagement of many of these educator categories.</p>
5. Review the model and outcomes of the online tuition program based on feedback from participating schools, with a view to increasing its scale.	Accepted	<p>The Department is strengthening the provision of the online tuition program, which is delivered by accredited teachers, to ensure greater accessibility to meet student need. This includes significantly expanding the availability of the online tuition programs to select public schools, particularly high priority staffing areas, and schools in regional and remote New South Wales. Feedback from participating schools, including principals and students, has been collected and analysed progressively since the program commenced in Term 2, 2021. Early insights indicate that online delivery of the program has been well received by schools and students, and successful in increasing school attendance, engagement and academic performance. Feedback from participating schools informed each phase of the online tuition program rolled out in 2021. During Term 4 of 2021, the Department met with school principals and program coordinators of schools participating in the online tuition program to gather detailed feedback and plan for 2022. This feedback complements ongoing student assessment and engagement data, and student survey data collected during Term 4. The Department is collating and reviewing a range of qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the program for 2022.</p>

Timeframe – By March 2022, the Department of Education should:		
6. Analyse and report on the effects of learning from home during 2021 for students across different equity groups and geographic areas.	Accepted	<p>The Department will analyse a range of data sources to understand and report on the effects of learning from home during 2021. In particular, data from the recent Term 4 2021 Check-in assessments will provide valuable insights. Check-in assessments are online assessments for students in Years 3 to 9. They are mapped to the NSW Syllabuses and National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions. Other data sources, including NAPLAN results, will be considered.</p> <p>The evaluation of the 2021 COVID intensive learning support program will be finalised by March 2022 and will include analysis on the effects of learning from home on the delivery of small group tuition. The evaluation report will include system-level analysis from Check-in assessments and other data, as well as specific data collection related to small group tuition. The COVID intensive learning support Taskforce conducted additional surveys of school staff in Term 3 and 4 of 2021, which contributed to real-time data on the impact of learning from home on the COVID intensive learning support program. This information will complement the qualitative data Term 2 fieldwork with 18 schools and Term 4 focus groups with nine schools, including interviews with school leaders, educators, parents and carers, and students.</p>
7. Work with university stakeholders to identify ways to increase use of initial teacher education students in the program and promote examples of successful models of delivery.	Accepted	<p>The Department is developing an approach to enhancing existing university partnerships in the delivery of the COVID intensive learning support program. The COVID intensive learning support taskforce is working closely with the School Workforce and Higher Education teams to ensure alignment of the Department's engagement with universities and to maximise benefits for universities, schools, and their students.</p> <p>To promote the employment of initial teacher education students within schools, the Department is developing detailed models of successful and innovative delivery of small group tuition in schools that employed initial teacher education students in 2021. New models will be included in updated guidelines on the Department's website by March 2022.</p> <p>The guidelines on recruitment and engaging staff are being redesigned to highlight the wider recruitment options for schools and will be published early in 2022. The Department is also enhancing and expanding professional learning offerings for initial teacher education students and scaling-up Communities of Practice for educators employed to deliver small group tuition.</p>