

Alternative school settings and home schooling

About this report

This audit assessed the performance of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and the NSW Department of Education in regulating home schooling and in providing alternative school settings, specifically: distance education schools, hospital schools, intensive learning support schools and youth justice centre schools. NESA regulated home schooling until 5 May 2025, when the function moved to the Department.

Findings

The Department and NESA have not effectively supported eligible students to receive a quality education in alternative school settings and home schooling. They have not:

- defined the learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in these particular settings, or evaluated whether these settings are effective in achieving those outcomes
- monitored or responded to demand for these settings, to make sure they are available and accessible in a timely way
- supported student transitions into and out of these settings, so that continuity of education is maintained
- proactively sought feedback from students and families to understand whether their needs are being met.

Recommendations

The audit makes three recommendations to the Department of Education, now responsible for regulating home schooling as well as for providing alternative school settings:

- develop and implement a strategy for alternative school settings that recognises their specialised nature and
 - addresses demand
 - enables timely access
 - enhances departmental support for student transitions
 - establishes data and accountability mechanisms.
- work with the home schooling community on reforms to regulation, including consideration of:
 - expedited registration processing
 - support for students' transitioning into and out of home schooling
 - quality assurance mechanisms that recognise the unique features of home schooling.
- identify the child safety monitoring risks in the alternative school settings and in home schooling regulation, and ensure fit-for-purpose mechanisms are in place to address these.

Fast facts

5,906

Number of home schooling registrations in 2019

12,762

Number of home schooling registrations in 2024

33,579

Number of students enrolled in alternative school settings between 2019 and 2024

54%

Proportion of home schooled children in 2024 who had previously attended a NSW public school

~50%

Proportion of students in alternative settings from low or mid-low socio-educational advantage backgrounds

\$246m

Total funding allocated across the alternative school settings in 2024