

REMOTE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

State of play

- Students living in remote areas face unique challenges which contribute to significant disparities in their educational outcomes.
- Remote students are more likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start school, such as lower physical, language and cognitive skills, their NAPLAN results are generally lower and they go on to be under-represented in higher education.
- Improving educational outcomes for students in remote and very remote schools is critical. Data shows that rates for successful completion of a year 12 or equivalent qualification fall from 78 per cent in major cities to 43 per cent in very remote areas. Refer [Attachment C1](#) for school attainment results for Indigenous students and [Attachment C2](#) for progress against the COAG National Schooling Targets.
- Remote locations have the greatest challenges in providing equity of access to high quality education services for children and their families due to service delivery issues. Some issues include:
 - the impact of high teacher turnover on the quality of curriculum and learning programs delivered in remote schools;
 - low levels of teacher knowledge in teaching English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) learners; and
 - Examples of deficit thinking in some schools about the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to achieve learning outcomes, resulting in a dominant focus on basic skills instruction and remediation.
- The Gonski Report *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* ([Attachment C3](#)) recommends a focus on maximising the learning growth of every student every year. The Review Panel has identified a set of impactful and practical reforms to be put in place across Australia.
- Over the next 10 years, the Australian Government will provide a total investment of \$242.3 billion for schools in recurrent funding. This includes specific loadings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and for students going to school in remote areas.
- In addition under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government has committed over \$1.3 billion under the Children and Schooling programme since 2014 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their early childhood years, through primary and secondary education, to post-school qualifications and into the workforce.
- The Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Education and Training (DET) has provided \$22.0 million over five years (up until December 2018) to the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary School Programme to address the disparity in literacy outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote primary schools. The funding supports trialling of literacy approaches in a selection of schools across WA, QLD and NT, including Direct Instruction (DI) and Explicit Instruction (EI). The outcomes of an independent evaluation of the program is currently being considered by DET.

- Under the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) National Partnership, the Commonwealth has committed \$287.079 million (2015-22) through the IAS to increase education outcomes for Aboriginal children in remote and very remote schools. The Commonwealth has entered into funding arrangements with both the NT government and non-government schooling sectors.
- Under the IAS Children and Schooling Programme, the Commonwealth has provided \$3.65 million to the Stronger Smarter Institute to deliver the *Remote Principals Project* to remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. The project aims to build the quality of leadership in schools with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments.
- The Minister for Education and State and counterparts are negotiating National Reforms and Bilateral agreements which need to be in place by the end of 2018. National Reforms and Bilateral agreements will focus on actions to drive improved outcomes for students and are expected to include a focus on the teaching workforce and quality teaching, with a particular focus on accelerating educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students



Improving education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Synopsis

There is substantial activity in place, at both the federal and state level, to address issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' engagement with school. Programs designed to support students are particularly prolific at the state level, reflecting their constitutional responsibility for school education.

Additionally, research demonstrates that the most enduring responses, and those likely to have the greatest likelihood of success, are place-based initiatives where development is co-designed with the local communities, and which reflect those communities' specific needs.

Introduction

Access to quality schooling, supported by experienced school leaders and teachers delivering an engaging curriculum is integral to the achievement of improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to have opportunities to reach their full potential, with teachers and parents holding high expectations for their educational outcomes. However, data shows that the gap between outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains and targets under the Closing the Gap strategy relating to attendance and literacy and numeracy achievement are not being met (a snapshot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student data is at [Attachment A](#)).

The Australian Government has a national leadership and policy role in school education, including providing substantial funding (a separate paper outlining how the Australian Government funds schools, along with data on funds for remote schools has been provided). State and territory governments in collaboration with the education authorities in their jurisdictions maintain responsibility for the delivery of school education, including taking flexible approaches to implementation, which take into account differing local needs. Jurisdictions are, for example, responsible for decisions in relation to professional development of the education workforce, staffing supply issues and ensuring all children attend school.¹

In addressing challenges related to remote and very remote communities, solutions are often complex and context specific. Certain strategies/policies that work in one community will most likely be different to what works in another. Building strong relationships between communities, students, teachers, school leaders and education authorities is important. Gaining community and parental buy-in requires time and commitment to build trust and facilitate change.

This paper provides information, including work underway, for future actions on four key areas of focus identified by the Special Envoy as areas of interest in relation to improving the engagement and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- school attendance
- supporting teacher workforce capability
- curriculum (including explicit instruction)
- integrated services.

¹ The Australian Government prepared a paper for the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council in 2018 that highlighted three initial three initial parameters for Council's consideration – school workforce capability, shared accountability and English as a second/foreign language.

1) School Attendance

Issue

Research shows a student's level of school attendance has a major influence on their academic achievement. The current data in the 2018 *Closing the Gap* report highlights that school attendance continues to be an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly in regional and remote communities.

In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students. There has been no meaningful improvement in any of the states and territories. In the Northern Territory, the Indigenous attendance rate fell from 70.2 per cent in 2014 to 66.2 per cent in 2017.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance is also lower in remote areas than non-remote areas, and the attendance gap remains larger in remote areas. In 2017, Indigenous attendance rates ranged from 86.8 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 64.6 per cent in Very Remote areas.

The evidence and what works

In 2018, the Smith Family report *Attendance lifts achievement* found that attendance and achievement are early indicators of students who are likely to have poor longer-term outcomes, as they help predict school completion and engagement post-school in work or further study. It also found that improvements in attendance and achievement are possible, with important interventions comprising:

- tracking students' individual progress
- using educational data to identify, as early as possible, which students need additional support, and
- targeting support to meet the educational challenges and circumstances of individual students.

This data is held by government and non-government education authorities in the states and territories.

In 2013, the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned the report *Student Attendance and Education Outcomes: Every Day Counts*² from the University of Western Australia and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. The research found:

- in all analyses, average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased
- the nature of the relationship between absence from school and achievement strongly suggests that every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child's learning and there is no 'safe' threshold for non-attendance
- the effects of absence accumulate over time, and that absence from school was related to academic achievement not only in the current year but in future years as well, having an ongoing impact on a child's learning
- unauthorised absences (that is, absences that are unexplained or where the reason is not deemed acceptable by a school) are more strongly associated with lack of achievement than authorised absences, and
- some students are more adversely affected by absence than others, with distinct gaps in achievement depending on where students live, their socio-economic status, mobility and Aboriginal status. Even

² Hancock, K.J., Shepherd, C.C.J., Lawrence, D., & Zubirck, S.R.. *Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every day counts*. Report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 2016.

among students with perfect attendance records, students in high socio-economic index schools achieved at much higher levels than students in low socio-economic index schools, and more advantaged children had relatively high achievement levels irrespective of their level of attendance at school.

The 2016 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report *Indigenous School Attendance: Creating Expectations that are 'REALLY HIGH' and 'HIGHLY REAL'*³ found the overarching principle that emerges from the research is that schools and communities require resources and empowerment at the local level to devise strategies that are context sensitive, culturally appropriate, collaborative, and re-energise a love of lifelong learning. It highlighted 15 recommendations to improve school attendance:

1. Set expectations early and establish patterns early, through sustained investments in early childhood education.
2. Build bridges between homes and schools in Indigenous communities.
3. Foster high-performing school leadership which is culturally responsive and externally engaged.
4. Support joint school-community collaborative initiatives in high-risk communities over the long haul.
5. Emphasise fostering and stimulating community demand for high-quality and culturally responsive lifelong learning.
6. Think creatively and laterally about community-based solutions and then seed and fertilise innovation, by investing in community-based human and financial resources.
7. Embrace whole-child and place-based models.
8. Integrate children's academic development with their health, wellbeing and safety by supporting schools and the Indigenous non-government commitment sector simultaneously.
9. Improve data systems by making them transparent and regularly reported.
10. Refine and sharpen the data relating to why children and young people are missing school.
11. Innovate and open up choices for teenagers to retain their engagement in school education, through vocational education and training programs and also through project-based programs, creativity learning, work-studies and entrepreneurial education.
12. Create reward and recognition systems for regular school attendees.
13. Undertake more rigorous assessments and independent evaluations of intervention measures, commencing with the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy (see National Employment Services Association, 2014).
14. Recruit Indigenous students into Initial Teacher Education.
15. Foster the systematic professional development of teachers to ensure that there is continuous improvement in learner-centred teaching.

What is happening

States and territories

The primary responsibility for school attendance policies and responsibility for ensuring all children attend school lies with the individual states and territories. A summary of jurisdictional legislation and policies is at [Attachment B](#).

³ Dreise, T; Milgate, G; Perrett, B; and Meston, T, *Indigenous school attendance: Creating expectations that are 'really high' and 'highly real'* ACER, <https://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/4>, 2016

The Productivity Commission's (2016) analysis of what works in *Indigenous Primary School Achievement*⁴ concluded that the fundamentals for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are the same as for non-Indigenous children. Schools that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with these partnerships enabling a collective commitment to hold high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Schools and school systems across Australia are using planning processes to engage with their school community⁵ to set expectations. In many cases, the process to develop these plans is as important, if not more so, than the actual documents themselves. This process, when implemented effectively, builds positive relationships between the school and their school community, leading to greater engagement in students' educational outcomes.

For example, Cairns West State School has implemented the 'Academic Success Guarantee' program developed in response to the challenge of continual low attendance, low performance and low expectations for Indigenous students. Under the 'Academic Success Guarantee' policy students and families are encouraged to achieve 95 per cent (or higher) attendance rates. Once a student is attending at 95 per cent or more, the school works with them to develop a contract/compact, committing the school to help the student achieve the national minimum standard or above in literacy and numeracy. If this result is not achieved, the school then works with the student and their family on a case-by-case basis to improve outcomes.

These signed service commitments outline each school's aspiration and desire to achieve academic and post-school success for their students through an underlying simple two-way message:

- for parents/families—if you want your child to be successful send them to school and
- for schools—if students come to school every day then we must do whatever it takes to help them be successful.

Australian Government Department of Education and Training

The Smith Family's Learning for Life Program provides another example of a shared accountability written agreement where parent engagement is at the core of the program. The Learning for Life Program, supported by the Australian Government with \$48 million over 2016–17 to 2019–20, provides financial, practical and emotional support to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds with their education and post school transitions. 10.5 per cent of students on the Program identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander.

Through completion of a Family Partnership Agreement with a trained Family Partnership Coordinator, families are supported to hold high expectations of their children and to accept shared responsibility for student attendance and educational outcomes. The Family Partnership Coordinator's role is to build family capacity through strengths based conversation, linking the family to knowledge, services and networks that seek to address the educational barriers the family has identified.

⁴ Productivity Commission, *Indigenous Primary School Achievement Research Paper*, June 2016, retrieved 13 September 2017 <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/indigenous-primary-school-achievement>

⁵ School community includes students, student families and care givers and school staff

Behavioural drivers behind school attendance

To design policies that maximise the chances that students will attend school on any given day, it is important to have a detailed understanding of how students and their families make the decision about whether to attend or not attend school. Assumed factors of poor attendance are attributed to social indicators such as poverty, remoteness, health, housing, culture and language.

The department is currently managing the project *Behavioural Drivers behind school attendance* to identify and better understand the behavioural drivers behind school attendance and non-attendance amongst Indigenous students (albeit not focussed specifically on remote schools). The research project aims to address an evidence gap on specific behavioural drivers behind school attendance. While broader conclusions around observable characteristics for school attendance are well established, these characteristics explain some but not all of the drivers behind school attendance.

The research, being undertaken by Coolamon Advisors, is anticipated to be completed by November 2018. The findings will support jurisdictions in building their evidence-based approaches to improving school attendance and provide insights into how current initiatives could be tailored to achieve better outcomes.

Future actions

Following completion of the Behavioural Drivers project, the Department of Education and Training will provide the findings to the COAG Education Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group to inform the development of possible interventions to improve student attendance that can be considered in the context of developing a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy⁶.

⁶ The 2015 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy* can be found at http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/DECD_NATSI_EducationStrategy.pdf

2) Supporting teacher workforce capability

Issues

Teacher and school leader capability

Teacher effectiveness is widely recognised as a critical factor in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.⁷ Evidence shows teachers can accelerate student achievement through a consistent, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning practice, with a focus on performance in literacy, numeracy and attendance and setting higher expectations for students to reach.⁸

Factors that affect the capability of teachers to lift educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- teachers feeling poorly prepared to teach students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and often hold deficit views of students' ability to achieve academic success
- low numbers of teachers (particularly primary) participating in professional learning to support teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹⁰
- professional learning that can be highly variable, ad hoc and lack cohesiveness with formal professional learning rarely evaluated and the success of professional learning opportunities for staff dependent on the principal.

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) require all teachers to employ effective strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and maintain an understanding of the issues affecting Indigenous Australians. The Teacher Standards are complemented by the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (Principal Standard) which asks principals and aspiring school leaders to foster understanding and reconciliation with Indigenous cultures as part of their leadership, particularly when engaging with their school communities.

Attraction and retention difficulties

Attracting skilled teachers and school leaders into schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is problematic for many schools, as is retaining teachers for any significant length of time. This can be especially problematic in rural, regional and remote schools. While all states and territories have existing policies, practices and incentives to attract and retain teachers to remote and rural schools, the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* found that attracting and retaining the best teachers for regional, rural and remote schools continues to be one of the most persistent challenges on the 'education agenda'.

Research identifies that social factors, such as living away from family, friends and other support, is one of the areas that requires attention to ensure adequate staffing of rural schools. Teachers are more likely to move and stay in regional and remote areas if their family members are with them and engaged in the community.¹¹

⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *The power of education: From surviving to thriving Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* retrieved from www.aph.gov.au, 2017

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Hattie, J., *Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, 1st edn, Routledge, Oxon UK, 2009

¹⁰ Australian Council for Educational Research, *Staff in Australia's schools 2013: Main report on the survey*, Department of Education, Canberra, 2004

¹¹ Roberts, P., *Staffing an empty schoolhouse: Attracting and retaining teachers in rural, remote and isolated communities*. Sydney: New South Wales Teachers Federation, 2005

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher workforce

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and principals continue to be under-represented in the education workforce, making up approximately 1.2 per cent and 1.4 per cent, of their respective workforce.¹² By comparison, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up over 5 per cent of the student body.¹³ In order to move towards parity in representation, three key areas need to be considered:

- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commencing and completing initial teacher education programs.
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates entering and remaining in the education workforce.
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers undertaking school leadership roles.

Currently, only around 2 per cent of higher education students commencing initial teacher education are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds¹⁴ and these students have a markedly lower rate of successfully completing study.¹⁵ In 2017, Universities Australia released their *Indigenous Strategy 2017–2020*, which seeks to address this issue more broadly across the higher education sector, focusing on increasing enrolment, retention and completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students. The Strategy recognises that the primary power to implement change within higher education lies with universities.¹⁶

While the reasons for low retention rates are complex, studies have found that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers and teachers report experiences of marginalisation and disenfranchisement in schools and often have ill-defined job roles and insecure working conditions.¹⁷

The evidence and what works

Research recognises the fundamental importance of quality teaching in the achievement of student outcomes. This starts with well-trained, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who provide the foundation for a high quality education system. Evidence shows the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom is the biggest in-school influence on student achievement. Principals have been reported as having the second biggest in school impact on student outcomes after classroom teaching.¹⁸ Focus should therefore be on what can make the greatest difference in the classroom – teachers and principals.

Research shows that teacher attitudes and teaching approaches play an important role in how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel about school and so have a significant impact on student

¹² Willett, M., Segal D., & Walford, W, *National Teaching Workforce Dataset Data Analysis Report 2014*, Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Canberra, retrieved from <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/36283>, 2014

¹³ Johnson, P., Cherednichenko, B., & Rose, M., *Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Project: final report*, University of South Australia, Adelaide, retrieved from <http://matsiti.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MATSITI-2016-Project-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf>, 2016

¹⁴ Johnson, P., Cherednichenko, B., & Rose, M., *Evaluation of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative Project: final report*, University of South Australia, Adelaide, retrieved from <http://matsiti.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MATSITI-2016-Project-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf>, 2016

¹⁵ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Initial teacher education: data report 2016*, AITSL, retrieved from <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/aitsl-research/insights/2016-ite-data-report.pdf?sfvrsn=2>, 2016

¹⁶ Universities Australia, *The Universities Australia's Indigenous Strategy 2017-2020*, retrieved from <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/media-releases/Universities-unveil-indigenous-participation-targets#.WOXC03IMSUK>, 2017

¹⁷ Luke, A., Cazden, C., Coopes, R., et al., *A Summative Evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project: Vol 1 and Vol 2*. Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD, retrieved from https://eprints.qut.edu.au/59535/27/SSLC_Evaluation_2013_Abridged_Version.pdf, 2013

¹⁸ Centre for Education Statistics & Evaluation, "Effective Leadership", Learning Curve, Issue 10; Hattie, J., 2003. Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence?, 2015

attendance, learning and attainment.¹⁹ Research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and parental engagement with school tends to improve where schools adopt an organisational culture and teaching approach that affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity.²⁰ Principals' values and leadership strategies shape the school environment and classroom practices, which result in improved student learning outcomes.²¹ Ensuring teachers and school leaders have the skills, knowledge and competency to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is key.

The *Behrendt Review* in 2012 found that 'building a class of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals who can respond to the needs of their own communities will be vital to meeting Closing the Gap targets'.²² Similarly, the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report* in 2014 noted that increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers could help foster student engagement and improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Strengthening the cultural safety of schools to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the teaching workforce will contribute to making teaching a more attractive and sustainable career choice.

At the national level, the *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative* (MATSI) which ceased in 2016, examined the opportunities and challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher recruitment, attraction and retention, and also noted the importance of cultural safety in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and improving rates of self-identification in workforce data.²³

What is happening

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is a shared space. State and territory governments have constitutional responsibility for schooling, including:

- registration of schools
- teacher recruitment and employment conditions
- registration and certification of teachers
- teacher professional development.

States and territories

Progress to date in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has primarily focused on improving the cultural competency of initial teacher education students and existing teachers, targeted pedagogies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and strategies for increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and better data to support this.

There have been a number of initiatives, such as *Good to Great Schools* and the *Stronger Smarter Workforce Program*, which have focussed on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by building capacity in schools. These have supported teachers to adapt their pedagogies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and school leaders to build their cultural competency, and

¹⁹ *Our Children, Our Future- Achieving Improved Primary And Secondary Education Outcomes For Indigenous Students* n.d, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, n.p

²⁰ *Our Children, Our Future- Achieving Improved Primary And Secondary Education Outcomes For Indigenous Students* n.d, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, n.p

²¹ Day C., Sammons P., Hopkins D., Harris A., Leithwood K., Gu Q., Brown E., Ahtaridou E., & Kington A., *The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: final report*, Nottingham: The National College for School Leadership, 2009

²² Behrendt, Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Final Report, <https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/heaccessandoutcomesforaboriginalandtorresstraitislanderfinalreport.pdf>, 2012

²³ More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative, Final Report <http://matsiti.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/MATSITI-Final-Report-1.0.pdf> 2016

that of the school more broadly, through reflecting on cultural biases in the classroom, including challenging deficit discourse.

Most states and territories have developed cultural standards frameworks and also provide a range of resources to their schools to support teachers to provide culturally safe learning environments for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is also a range of high quality professional learning programs that seek to build teachers' cultural awareness, such as *Connecting to Country* in New South Wales.

As teacher employers, many state and territory government and education authorities have commitments in place to attract and recruit high quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff, some of which include employment targets. These commitments also include a range of strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators' career development, such as the *Aspiring Leaders* program in Queensland and scholarships in the Northern Territory to support assistant teachers gain teaching qualifications. All states and territories have existing policies, practices and incentives to attract and retain teachers to remote and rural schools. Examples of initiatives to attract and retain teachers in place in jurisdictions are at [Attachment C](#).

The certification of teachers at the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher career stages of the Teacher Standards is an important initiative that recognises and rewards teacher expertise in classroom practice. Some sectors and schools are utilising the expertise and experience of certified teachers through deploying them in hard-to-staff schools.

Australian Government

Pre-service (initial) teacher education (ITE)

The Government has led the establishment of a nationally consistent system of accreditation of ITE as a key part of improving teaching quality. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has led the implementation of ITE reforms to strengthen the accreditation system. Previously, assessment of pre-service teachers against standards 1.4²⁴ and 2.4 for accreditation has been inconsistent, if applied at all. Under the revised ITE program Accreditation Standards, providers must ensure that all ITE students demonstrate they meet all aspects of the Graduate Teacher Standards in order to graduate. Providers of ITE have responded to the new requirements, making changes to program design and delivery for pre-service teachers commencing their studies in 2018. Graduates from these programs will enter classrooms from 2020 (postgraduate students) and 2022 (undergraduate students).

In December 2017, the Education Council endorsed the Leading for impact: Australian guidelines for school leadership development (the Guidelines), for use by jurisdictions, to ensure opportunities for school leadership development for all teachers including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. The Guidelines focus on embedding strategies to find future leaders in under-represented groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, within systemic identification processes to achieve greater equality and improve diversity.

²⁴ The Graduate Teacher Standards describe the professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement at the first of the four career stages defined in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Standard 1.4 relates to strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Standard 2.4 relates to understanding and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

ACARA illustrations of practice

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has developed illustration of practice on ways to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority in and across the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum.

They demonstrate innovative content and delivery of the Australian Curriculum from school communities across Australia. These schools range from those with very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to those with 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment.

The illustrations recognise the unique and significant place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and show how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge are a part of every Australian student's identity.

Future actions

Cultural competency

The Government is supporting the embedding of cultural safety in schools through funding a cultural competency initiative. Targeted funding will soon be provided to AITSL to work in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts to develop a suite of professional learning resources to support the cultural competency of the teaching workforce and increase cultural safety in schools. This work is complemented by AITSL's ongoing projects and as part of the Government's response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education to improve access to high-quality professional learning particularly for teachers in rural, regional and remote schools.

Workforce data

To address the lack of consistent teacher workforce data, AITSL has been tasked to develop and deliver the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy. This Strategy aims to connect teacher workforce data from around Australia and will provide critical insights and support informed investment and decision-making. This Strategy will help provide a more reliable data set on how teachers are graduating, getting jobs, professional learning and retention, including in remote and regional areas.

3) Curriculum

Issue

For meaningful and effective learning, teachers must be able to draw on curriculum that reflects local context and culture, the lived experience of their students and a range of pedagogical approaches.

At a national level, the Australian Curriculum – Foundation to Year 10 supports teachers to deliver meaningful and culturally inclusive education, ensuring that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected across the curriculum, and
- all students are able to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living culture.

Despite positive developments in curriculum delivery and pedagogy to improve student outcomes, there continues to be a substantial gap in student literacy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students across all year levels.

In particular, the literacy results of children in remote primary schools across Australia continues to be well below those in other areas. In 2017, only 62.1 per cent of Year 3 student and 52.7 per cent of Year 5 students in very remote schools met the national minimum standard in NAPLAN reading assessments.

The evidence and what works

There is a body of evidence for the efficacy of Direct Instruction or Explicit Direct Instruction on student learning outcomes.

Direct Instruction (DI) is a teacher-directed and skills-oriented pedagogical approach developed by the National Institute for Direct Instruction in the USA. It emphasises the use of small-group instruction by teachers and aides, using carefully scripted lessons in which skills are broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly. Students are grouped according to ability rather than age.

Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) is a teaching practice based on educational theory, brain research, data analysis and DI. The education pedagogy combines a set of instructional practices with well-crafted lesson design. It includes continuous 'checking of understanding' until students master the skills being taught. It is based on the premise that all children can learn.

Both DI and EDI place emphasis on teacher direction, presentation of prompts, briskly paced lessons, constant practice, assessment and review. Unlike EDI, DI includes curriculum and outlines how complex strategies should be broken down and taught as smaller sub-skills. It is also supported by formal teacher training and scripted delivery.

Archer and Hughes for example, state that DI should be a consistent mainstay of working with students both with and without learning difficulties.²⁵ ACER's research director, Professor Steve Dinham states, "*Direct Instruction and explicit teaching is two to three times more effective than inquiry-based or problem based learning.*"²⁶

Research on beginning reading using DI strategies has reported that disadvantaged students, and those with diverse needs, benefit most from early and explicit teaching of word recognition skills, including phonics.

²⁵ Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes, *Explicit instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, 2011

²⁶ Stephen Dinham quoted in, Bridie Smith, *Results back principal's return to instruction* The Age, 10 May 2008.

What is happening

States and territories

Education authorities recognise the crucial role literacy skills play as a foundation for education. With responsibility for education delivery in schools, state and territory education authorities are implementing a variety of programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' skill development. Since literacy development occurs most intensively in the early years of life, the majority of literacy programs and interventions are concentrated in the primary years of schooling.

Examples of literacy strategies and initiatives supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is at [Attachment D](#).

Australian Government Department of Education and Training

The Australian Government supplements state and territory efforts with targeted investment in pilot programs that evaluate pedagogical approaches for various priority contexts. Currently this includes the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program and the English Language Learning for Indigenous Children.

Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program

The Australian Government is funding Good to Great Schools Australia to deliver the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program pilot across 16 schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. The program uses DI to improve literacy outcomes for students.

The Government has commissioned an evaluation of the program to provide robust evidence regarding the effectiveness of DI and EDI teaching approaches as illustrated in the 16 participating schools in WA, NT and QLD. The 2017 evaluation of the program showed mixed results for participating schools. Schools who implemented the program more stringently achieved better outcomes. The evaluation also found that the Flexible Literacy program teaching approaches, on average, achieved results comparable to other methods of instruction and fewer than half the teachers surveyed believed the program gave them better teaching skills or improved their ability to teach literacy. A final evaluation report is due in March 2019.

English Language Learning for Indigenous Children (ELLIC)

The Government has committed \$1.9 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to trial ELLIC initiative. ELLIC aims to improve English literacy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preschool children for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), supporting the Government's commitment to Closing the Gap in literacy achievement. The trial will be underpinned by a series of digital, play-based apps aligned to the Early Years Learning Framework and Australian Curriculum: Foundation, designed for use in preschool classrooms to support English literacy development. Resources for educators, parents and community members will also be developed to support use of the ELLIC apps with preschool children in the year before full-time school. These are anticipated to be ready for the start of the 2019 school year.

Future directions

The Australian Government is undertaking a meta-evaluation of literacy and numeracy initiatives examining the factors that support improved student learning in rural and remote schools, to identify literacy and numeracy strategies that have currency in these schools. Evaluation findings from both the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program and meta-evaluation will provide a robust evidence base to consider the efficacy of DI teaching approaches and other pedagogical approaches that may be piloted to further support improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes and skill development.

4) Integrated services

Issue

In his *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, Professor John Halsey found that *“The achievements and opportunities of children and students are greatly helped when there is a productive and complementary relationship between their out of school life and the time they spend at school.”*

As the discussion paper that preceded the Review report noted, *“For some children and students, there are home and community factors which impact negatively on their success. Included here are poor health and a lack of regular nutritious food. It is very hard, or perhaps impossible, for students to concentrate on learning if they always feel hungry and are frequently unwell or ‘out of sorts’. These factors are compounded if their home life is very stressful, there is a long history of unemployment and underemployment, and there is always a looming sense of another problem being just around the corner.”*

Integrated services – or wrap around services – provide a means by which organisations partner to ensure students are ready for school.

The evidence and what works

In 2004, the UK Civil Renewal Unit in the United report *Firm Foundations: The Government’s Framework for Community Capacity Building* introduced the concept of anchor organisations and the role they play in community capacity building. These organisations are located in the community and have sufficient presence, respect, and openness to work in partnership to grow and sustain communities.

This ‘Collective Impact’ approach is gaining momentum in Australia in the government, non-government and philanthropic sectors. Key to this approach are the formalised governance arrangements that look and feel different in each community with projects tailored to respond to community need. Schools and community health facilities are often seen as anchor organisations due to their centrality in families’ lives.

What is happening

States and territories

States and territories implement a range of place-based initiatives that provide wrap around services.

For example, in Birchip in north-west Victoria, the maternal and child health nurses work with families to provide services for children from birth to 3.5 years. With the relationships and information the nurses build up over time they link families into specialist services such as occupational therapists and speech therapists, and connect parents and children into other services such as playgroups and new parents’ groups where advice and support is available. The local school is supportive and is known for the care and attention it provides as well as its relentless focus on learning.

The Western Australian Government has announced its Early Years Initiative which will see four Western Australian communities partner with it, the Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute on a long-term strategy to link community leaders, government, researchers, business and philanthropic organisations to find better ways to design and deliver services. This is in response to evidence that suggests many children aged 0-4 years old in WA are not reaching developmental milestones before reaching school age. Factors including housing, employment, education, health and safety will be taken into consideration as part of the initiative.

Connected Beginnings

The Connected Beginnings Program is a component of the Community Child Care Fund, which is part of the new Child Care Package. The program responds to the early childhood recommendation of the 2014 Forrest Review of Indigenous Training and Employment (Creating Parity) Report. The program is jointly administered with the Department of Health.

Annually, around \$12 million (ongoing to forward estimates) is available to support selected communities to better prepare Indigenous children for school and contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous children and their non-Indigenous peers.

The program integrates early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services with schools in selected Indigenous communities and is currently supporting over 3,000 Indigenous 0-5 year old children experiencing disadvantage through a community led 'Collective Impact' approach.

This integration is more than simply co-locating services. The Collective Impact approach puts community squarely at the foundation of the project, and includes community co-design. Each project will formalise community governance arrangements that support a whole of community services approach to ensuring children are school ready.

There are currently 12 communities participating, and the program is continuing progressive implementation in a number of additional selected locations. The current program sites include:

- NT: Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Galiwin'ku and Angurugu
- QLD: Doomadgee
- VIC: Mildura
- SA: Ceduna and Port Augusta
- NSW: Doonside and Mt Druitt
- WA: Kalgoorlie
- TAS: Bridgewater/Gagebrook

Common across the governance arrangements is representation and engagement of key government agencies, organisations and services that support Indigenous children starting school ready. These governance arrangements provide a platform for sustainability of the approach, building in systemic good practice of integrated services to provide ongoing holistic support to children and families. An example of governance in action is the program's Alice Springs Project. This project's governance arrangements include a formal MOU between the Project Team and the local Aboriginal Health Service.

Additionally in Alice Springs, around 20 key agency, organisation and service representatives regularly meet to progress integration and wrap around support to children and families regarding transition. Discussions include data sharing across an estimated 40 child, family, health and housing projects.

Future actions

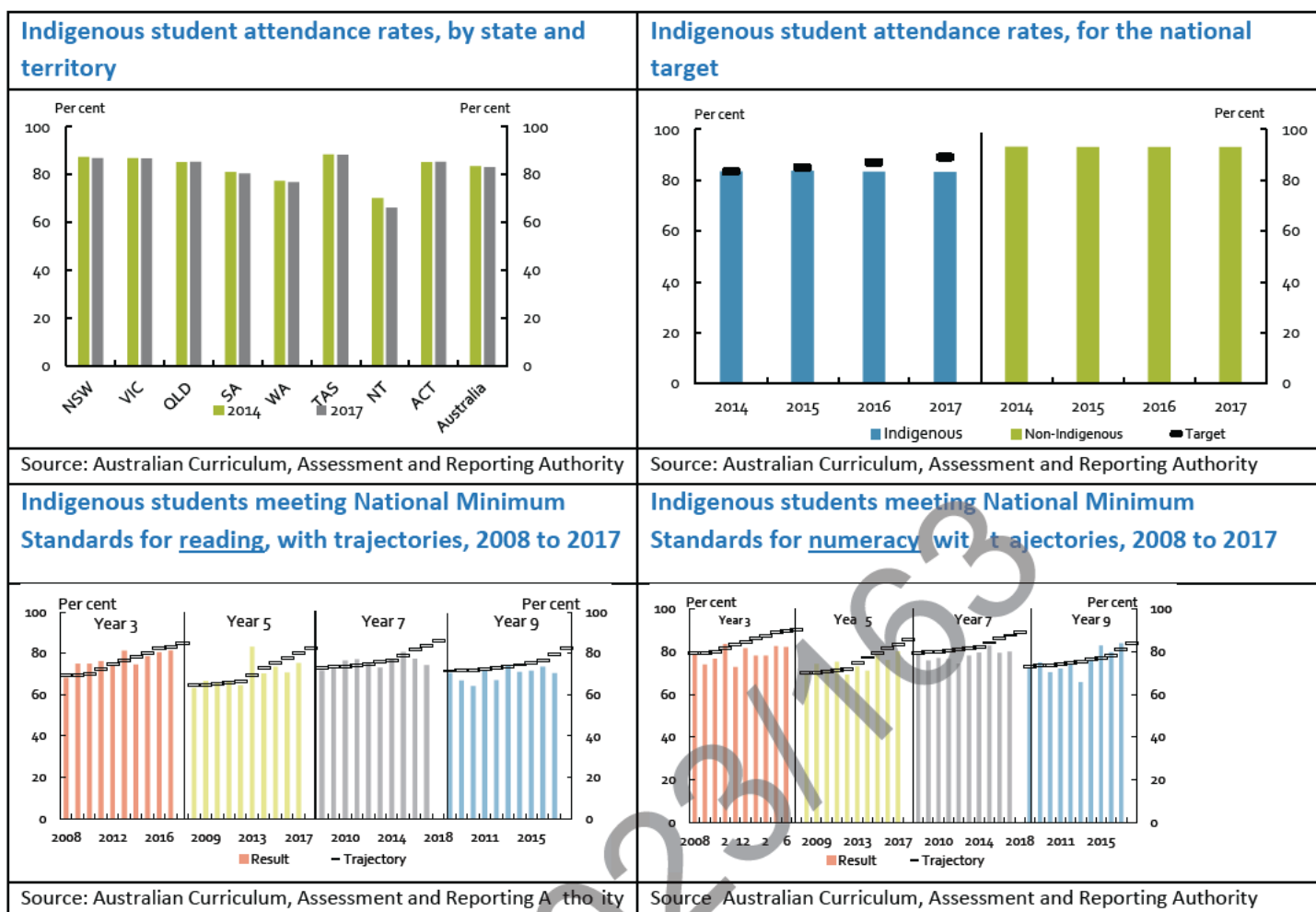
The department will continue to implement the Connected Beginnings program. An evaluation is underway by the Australian Healthcare Associates that encompasses both the health and education aspects of the Program. The evaluation report is due mid-2019.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education – Data Snapshot

- In 2017:
 - there were 215,453 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, accounting for 5.6 per cent of all school students; 7.2 per cent of total students in government schools; and 2.6 per cent of total students in non-government schools.
 - 83.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in government schools.
 - the average Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student goes to a government school in a metropolitan or provincial area, where the majority of peers are non-Indigenous students.
 - New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia had 75 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments.
 - the overall attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students
 - the Year 7/8 to Year 12 retention rate was 62.4 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, compared with 86 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- In 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20-24 year olds nationally who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent was 65.3 per cent, compared to 89.1 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

Closing the Gap targets – Early Childhood and Education

- The target to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018 **is on track**. Over the long term (1998 to 2016) the Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by 35 per cent, and there has been a narrowing of the gap by 32 per cent.
- The target to **have** 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 **is on track**. In 2016, around 14,700 Indigenous children (91 per cent) were enrolled in early childhood programs.
- The target to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 **is not on track**. In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- The target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018 **is not on track**. In 2017, the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN is on track in only one (Year 9 numeracy) of the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).
- The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 **is on track**. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20-24 year-olds who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent increased from 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 65.3 per cent in 2016.



Proportion of students meeting National Minimum Standard (per cent), by Indigenous status, 2008 and 2017

	2008			2017		
	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	Gap	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Reading						
Year 3	68	94	25	82	96	14
Year 5	63	93	29	76	95	20
Year 7	72	95	24	74	95	21
Year 9	71	94	24	71	93	22
Numeracy						
Year 3	79	96	17	82	96	14
Year 5	69	94	25	80	96	16
Year 7	79	96	18	80	96	16
Year 9	73	95	22	84	97	13

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

A summary of jurisdictional legislation and policies on school attendance



FOI/2023/163

Evidence snapshot

Unauthorised student absences in Australia

All Australian states and territories have legislation requiring attendance at school

All Australian states and territories have legislation in place that requires parents to ensure their children attend school. These laws apply to all students in government and non-government schools, and allow monetary fines to be imposed on parents for their child's unauthorised absences from school.

In addition to the legislative arrangements, states and territories undertake a range of activities to support school attendance and publish information about attendance at their schools.

States have a range of measures in place to encourage attendance

State and territory education departments generally have information packages and resource kits available to support schools and parents in maintaining and/or increasing student attendance.

In addition, there are a range of policies and programmes in place in each state and territory to encourage student attendance, particularly for those at risk of disengagement.

In most states and territories, there are clear partnerships between education departments and policing agencies in monitoring student attendance, including widespread use of leave passes to determine the validity of a student being outside school grounds during school hours.

Despite efforts in place, there are significant numbers of unauthorised absences

Unauthorised absences are those that remain unexplained, or where the school principal considers that the explanation provided is unreasonable or inadequate. There are a number of authorised absences including illness and disciplinary reasons (for example, suspension or exclusion).

Attendance rates for an agreed comparative period during the school year are reported by individual schools on *My School*. This figure does not distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absences, and is an average across the school for a 20 week period.

The occurrence of unauthorised absences is anecdotally a greater concern for the government sector, as disengaged students at non-government schools often find themselves moved to government schools.¹

Information on average attendance rates by state, territory and sector are at [Attachment A](#).

While there is legislation in place in each state, its enforcement varies

While all jurisdictions have the capacity to fine parents for their child's non-attendance at school, penalties have rarely been imposed. Table 1 summarises the arrangements in each state and territory.

¹ Dickson E, Hutchinson T, *Truancy and the Law in Australia: The Queensland Example*, Australian and New Unauthorised student absences in Australia

FOI/2023/163

Table 1 - Summary of state arrangements to ensure attendance at school

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	ACT
Legal requirement to attend school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fines issued	✓	Not publicly available	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prosecutions	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
School Attendance/ Support Officers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student attendance support programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X

Four states have identified their own measures may not be effective

Between 2011 and 2013, four jurisdictions publicly identified that the measures they have in place may not be effective in managing unauthorised student absences.

The jurisdictions were NSW², Queensland³, WA⁴ and Victoria⁵, noting that Victoria has subsequently reformed its provisions.

There is evidence that states and territories are becoming increasingly proactive in enforcing legislation related to unauthorised absences, as indicated below.

Recent reforms in Victoria have introduced on-the-spot fines

As part of a focus on unauthorised absences, the Victorian government introduced amendments to the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. These amendments took effect from 1 March 2014 and enable Student Attendance Officers to issue on-the-spot \$70 fines to parents where a student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months, without reasonable excuse or explanation.

Prior to these reforms, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Vic DEECD) had to take parents to court before a fine could be issued and consequently not one fine had been issued.⁶

In WA the first fines for unauthorised absence were issued in 2010

WA Today reported in June 2012 that the first prosecutions of parents for unauthorised student absences in WA took place in 2010, when the WA Department of Education (WA DoE) brought two cases against parents who received fines and orders to send their children to school.⁷

² NSW Ombudsman, *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently*, October 2011, pg. 33.

³ Auditor-General of Queensland, *Improving student attendance*, Report 1, May 2012, pg. 1.

⁴ WA Education Health Standing Committee, *A child who is healthy, attends school, and is able to read will have better educational outcomes*, Report No. 18, November 2012, pg.6.

⁵ Topsfield J, *Not one fine issued for truancy*, The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 January 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Trenwith C, *Minister defends truants as three more WA parents come under gun*, WA Today, 6 June 2012.

In cases of persistent non-attendance or where significant disruptive behaviour occurs at school, the WA DoE uses a contract style initiative, *Responsible Parenting Agreements*. The agreements outline support to be provided to the parent from the WA DoE and other agencies, as well as outlining the parent's commitment to improve their child's attendance. Parents may be fined up to \$1000 in cases of persistent non-attendance⁸.

In NSW, significant numbers of fines are issued and matters taken to court which is resulting in higher attendance numbers

In May 2013, NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) published on its website a factsheet with statistics on its enforcement of compulsory school attendance in 2012. The factsheet also provided an overview of the support provided to schools and families to promote attendance (see [Attachment C](#)).

In 2012 in NSW, 590 cases were referred for compulsory attendance action, up from 423 cases in 2011. 28 fines and two community service orders were issued to parents, along with the issuing of 35 compulsory schooling orders. 114 matters were withdrawn (209 matters were ongoing).⁹ There is evidence that this enforcement on compulsory school attendance is resulting in higher numbers of students attending school. The attendance rate for government school students in NSW increased from 92.0 per cent in 2012 to 92.6 per cent in 2013.¹⁰

SA has increased its efforts in holding parents to account under its legislation

Up until 2010, only six parents in SA had been prosecuted under the compulsory school attendance legislation since 1985.¹¹ By November 2011, *The Advertiser* reported that the Crown Solicitor was investigating three cases of unauthorised student absences. This was the highest number of active cases the SA Department for Education and Childhood Development (SA DECD) had handled.¹²

In Tasmania, the Department of Education brought charges against the parents of an 11 year old who had not attended school regularly for five years due to allergies.

In 2013, the Tasmania Education Department (TAS DoE) brought charges against parents of an 11 year old child who had not attended school regularly for more than five years. The parents argued their son did not attend school because he had life-threatening anaphylaxis and the education system was not equipped to manage the risk.¹³ A magistrate fined the parents \$4,000. However the Tasmanian Supreme Court overturned this decision in February 2014, and the child is now enrolled in online schooling.¹⁴ Prior to this, six parents were prosecuted between 2005-2009.¹⁵

⁸ WA DoE, *Responsible Parenting Agreements – a guide for parents*, n.d., http://det.wa.edu.au/studentsupport/behaviourandwellbeing/detcms/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=11671185.

⁹ NSW DEC, *Enforcement of compulsory school attendance 2012*, May 2013, www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-and-research/key-statistics-and-reports/enforcement-of-compulsory-school-attendance-2012.pdf, p.2.

¹⁰ NSW DEC, *Department of Education and Communities Annual Report 2013*, 2013, pg. 39.

¹¹ *Tougher truancy laws planned in SA*, ABC News, 17 November 2009.

¹² Holderhead S, *Crackdown on parents of repeat truants*, *The Advertiser*, 21 November 2011.

¹³ *Allergy fears lead to truancy charge, parents plead guilty*, ABC News, 2 July 2013.

¹⁴ *Court quashes parents' truancy conviction for keeping son with allergies from school*, ABC News, 6 February 2014.

¹⁵ Dean, I, Tasmanian Legislative Council, *Question and Answer, School Truancy*, 17 June 2009.

The NT Every Child, Every Day initiative issues infringement notices after a range of other support measures

ABC News reported in September 2009 that the NT Government conceded that no parent had ever been prosecuted for failing to send their child to school.¹⁶ However, since the 2010 introduction of the *Every Child, Every Day* initiative, infringement notices have been issued to parents of students with unauthorised absences. In 2012 there were 208 infringement notices issued, and a further 142 notices had been issued by June 2013. Infringement notices and prosecution are only administered in the last instance after a range of other support measures have been employed.

The NT Government also runs other attendance programs using student incentives to increase attendance rates. For example, under the *Frequent Attenders Program*, the NT Department of Education (NT DoE) partners with private sector companies to provide a reward program to motivate students from remote communities who maintain at least 80 per cent school attendance. Rewards include free music downloads, food cards, sporting activities, health and wellbeing programs, excursions and swags.

Queensland Government has advised of plans for the Cape York Reform Trial to become a permanent fixture in the state budget from 2015

The Queensland Government has advised of plans for the Cape York Reform Trial, which began in 2007, to become a permanent fixture in the state budget annually from 2015.¹⁷ Under the Trial, if students in Cape York are not enrolled or have three absences from school in a term, without reasonable excuse, the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (QLD DETE) submits a School Attendance Notice to the Families Responsibilities Commission (FRC), an independent statutory authority. The FRC has the power to impose income sanctions on parents or refer to the matter to student attendance case managers.

Western Cape College in Aurukun has seen the most significant improvement; school attendance was up from 44.5% in 2008 to 58.8% in 2011. Queensland Indigenous Affairs Minister Glen Elmes advised a senate estimates hearing in July 2014 that, in reclassifying the Cape York Reform Trial as a permanent budget feature, the Queensland Government is targeting “the parents who don’t give a toss if their kids don’t go to school, we are going to come after them.”¹⁸

Separate to the Cape York Reform Trial, in recent years QLD DETE initiated a handful of cases against parents for unauthorised absences. For example, in 2009 parents of a 15 year old who skipped school more than 300 times in two years were charged.¹⁹

ACT does not have high rates of unauthorised absences, but has prosecuted a parent on one occasion

In the ACT, one case prosecuting parents for their child’s unauthorised absences took place in 2009. The ACT Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Barr, did point out in 2010 that compared with the rest of Australia, levels of unauthorised student absences in the ACT were not particularly high.²⁰

¹⁶ Bolton K, *Truancy-linked welfare trial ineffective*, ABC News, 18 September 2009.

¹⁷ Madigan, M, *States to go after truants’ parents*, Courier Mail, 18 July 2014.

¹⁸ Madigan, M, *States to go after truants’ parents*, Courier Mail, 18 July 2014.

¹⁹ Michael, P, *Parents charged after kid skips school in Queensland*, The Australian, 15 July 2009.

²⁰ Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Debates: Weekly Hansard, Seventh Assembly*, 21 September 2010, p. 4197.

Parents can reduce the likelihood of their child missing school by having high expectations and being engaged in their children's lives

The UK issued 52,370 penalty notices to parents and guardians for a child's unauthorised absence in 2012-13

In the USA, it is common for states to enforce student attendance laws that place penalties on both students and parents for unauthorised absences

International Experience

PISA in Focus 35 (January 2014) looked at school truancy across countries. In analysing findings from PISA 2012, it was found that 18 per cent of students skipped classes at least once in the two weeks prior to the survey and 15 per cent of students skipped a day or more across OECD countries.

For Australian students, the study showed that:

- around 12 per cent of students from advantaged backgrounds and 15 per cent from disadvantaged backgrounds skipped classes at least once in the two weeks prior to testing; and
- skipping classes was associated with a 29-point lower score in mathematics, compared with the 32-point average of OECD countries.

The study also found that there was a negative relationship between skipping school and performance at the school level. While the analysis did not focus on the measures in place to combat unauthorised student absences in OECD countries, the role of parents was highlighted.

United Kingdom (UK)

Like Australian states and territories, unauthorised student absence measures in the UK focus primarily on parental responsibility, including the imposition of fines.

Education Welfare Officers in the UK, along with police officers, can issue fines to parents if their children regularly miss school. In the 2012-13 academic year, 52,370 penalty notices of £60 were issued to parents and guardians for unauthorised absences, up 27 per cent from 41,224 penalty notices issued in 2011-12. The UK is also taking action where parents fail to pay their fines. In 2012-13, there were 7,806 cases of parents prosecuted for non-payment of a fine.

The number of students who missed more than 15 per cent of school reduced from 333,850 in 2011-12, down to 300,895 in 2012-13. According to then UK Education Minister Michael Grove, the UK government strengthened its focus on unauthorised absences because there are no excuses for skipping school. Minister Grove said, "We have taken action to reduce absence by increasing fines and encourage schools to address the problem earlier."²¹

United States of America (USA)

California: The student attendance policy in California enables action to be immediately taken as soon as a student has an unauthorised absence from school. After the first unauthorised absence, the student may receive a written warning. Following the second unauthorised absence, the student may be required to attend an after school or weekend study program.

²¹ Sellgren K, *Thousands of parents fined, as persistent truancy falls*, BBC, 25 March 2014.

Then after fourth unauthorised absences, the student may be required to face an attendance review board and complete a truancy mediation program.

Once the student has four unauthorised absences in a school year, the student falls with the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. Here they may be ordered to perform community service, pay a fine of up to \$100, or have their driving privileges suspended. Parents of a student that is absent for more than 10 per cent of a single school year can be fined up to \$2,000, or sentenced to prison.²²

In March 2014, in response to chronic student absenteeism, the Californian Attorney General, Kamala Harris, introduced a package of student attendance bills. This legislation sought to enact recommendations from a 2013 report that found that the state, counties and schools were not adequately tracking unauthorised absences and the reasons behind students missing school. The bills included measures that require the Attorney General's office to annually report on elementary school truancy and to identify which school districts have programmes that are effective in reducing absences. The bills also enable the Department of Education to collect state data on chronic absenteeism.²³

Michigan: During the 2010-11 school year, the attendance rate at Detroit Public Schools dropped as low as 75 per cent.²⁴ This prompted the State of Michigan to introduce a new student attendance policy from 1 October 2012, requiring parents of school-aged children to provide proof that every school-aged child in the household attends school or face losing family assistance benefits. Parents are required to ask the school to fill in and return the appropriate form to the Michigan Department of Human Services.²⁵

Pennsylvania: Under the laws in Pennsylvania, judges can be required to imprison parents who fail to pay their truancy fines. One county in Pennsylvania has imprisoned 1,600 people over truancy fines since 2000. A judge, critical of the law that required him to sentence a 55 year old mother to jail for 48 hours to erase \$2,000 in truancy fines stated, "we don't do debtors prisons anymore. That went out 100 years ago."²⁶

Attachments

Attachment A contains average attendance rates by state and territory.

Attachment B provides a summary of state and territory positions.

Attachment C provides information on the NSW DEC's enforcement of compulsory school attendance in 2012.

Attachment D contains information on current Australian Government led initiatives aimed at reducing unauthorised student absences.

²² California Department of Education, *Truancy*, accessed online 30 June 2014, www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/tr/, 19 December 2013.

²³ McGreevy P, Atty. Gen. Kamala Harris proposes new anti-truancy laws for California, Los Angeles Times, 10 March 2014.

²⁴ Asher T, *Michigan families to lose welfare benefits for too much truancy*, Fox 2 News, 26 September 2012.

²⁵ Kefgen B, *New DHS Policy Links Cash Assistance to School Attendance*, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, 28 September 2012.

²⁶ Dale M, *Woman jailed over truancy fines find dead in cell*, Associated Press, 11 June 2014.

Attachment A: Average Attendance Rates by State and Territory

Government Schools								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Year 1	94	94	92	92	92	94	93	81
Year 2	94	94	92	93	92	94	93	83
Year 3	94	94	92	93	92	94	94	83
Year 4	94	94	92	93	92	94	93	83
Year 5	94	94	93	93	92	94	93	83
Year 6	94	94	92	93	92	94	93	84
Year 7	92	93	92	92	92	92	91	81
Year 8	90	91	91	90	89	90	89	79
Year 9	89	90	88	87	87	88	87	77
Year 10	87	90	87	86	85	88	86	76
Primary Ungraded	91	89	na	na	91	na	na	84
Secondary Ungraded	83	89	na	96	89	na	na	89
Catholic Schools								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Year 1	94	94	94	93	94	93	94	82
Year 2	94	94	94	93	94	94	93	79
Year 3	94	95	94	94	95	94	94	83
Year 4	94	94	94	94	95	94	94	86
Year 5	94	95	94	94	95	94	94	87
Year 6	94	94	94	94	95	94	94	83
Year 7	94	94	94	95	95	94	94	81
Year 8	92	93	94	94	94	93	91	84
Year 9	92	93	93	94	93	92	91	82
Year 10	91	92	92	94	93	92	90	74
Primary Ungraded	94	90	na	na	96	na	na	na
Secondary Ungraded	na	80	73	na	96	na	na	47
Independent Schools								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Year 1	94	95	94	93	95	94	94	91
Year 2	94	94	94	94	95	94	95	90
Year 3	95	95	95	94	95	94	94	91
Year 4	94	95	94	94	94	94	94	91
Year 5	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	90
Year 6	94	95	94	94	94	94	94	88
Year 7	95	95	95	95	94	93	95	91
Year 8	94	94	94	94	94	93	94	90
Year 9	94	94	93	93	94	92	94	91
Year 10	93	93	92	93	93	91	93	88
Primary Ungraded	94	85	90	92	90	90	na	na
Secondary Ungraded	93	82	84	35	81	100	na	54

Source: Report on Government Services 2013

Attachment B: Summary of state and territory positions

State	New South Wales
Law	<i>Education Act 1990 (NSW)</i>
Penalties	Compulsory schooling order through Children's Court. Fines through Local Court \$2,750 first offence; \$5,500 further offences; \$11,000 maximum (Section 23). Section 26A states that the offence applies to students in non-government schools.
Threshold to commence process	Where schools have unsuccessfully tried a range of strategies to help resolve a student's non-attendance, schools can request assistance from regional attendance officers of the NSW DEC for additional support.
Compulsory school age	5 turning 6 by end July - 17 years; or after Year 10 until 17 if there is a study/training/employment alternative.
Truancy processes	1. Parents asked to attend meeting with school and other agencies 2. If attendance does not improve, parents attend compulsory attendance conference run by a trained conference convenor to agree outcomes and make written undertakings. 3. If this fails – application to Children's Court for a Compulsory Schooling Order or prosecution in Local Court and fine.
Truancy officers	NSW Truancy Officers – no information on number
Police involvement	Police can be designated 'Authorised Person'. Can question and escort children to school or home. Police participate in Street Sweeps.
Other measures	Home School Liaison Program Home School Liaison Officers are teachers working with students and families when attendance is an issue. Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers work specifically with Aboriginal students to improve attendance. Street Sweeps involve Home School Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers and uniformed police targeting areas where truancy may be a concern. Keep them safe: A shared approach to child well-being. This approach operates where school staff suspect a child is at risk of harm. Remote School Attendance Strategy (see page 19) Operation Roll Call requires government secondary schools to issue leave passes when students are absent from school between 9am and 3pm.
Parent information website	www.schooltoz.nsw.edu.au/home provides parents with practical methods of engaging in their child's education and wellbeing.
Monitoring student attendance	The method of monitoring school attendance is developed by each school community and the school's principal and can be accessed at http://www.dec.nsw.gov.au/detresources/attendance_gqXfPykiK.pdf
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	NSW DEC publishes government school student attendance data at www.data.nsw.gov.au , including attendance rates by region, school type, gender, school size and location, Indigenous attendance rates. Attendance rates are available for each government school. This is the same annual attendance rate data provided on <i>My School</i> . There is no data provided on the numbers of absences by category (for example illness, unauthorised), however NSW DEC did publish in 2013 statistics on its enforcement of compulsory school attendance during 2012.

State	Victoria
Law	Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic); Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007; Education and Training Reform (School Attendance) Regulations 2013.
Penalties	Infringement notices that require attendance at school to be re-established and include a \$70 fine on the spot fine. (Section 2.1.21). Section 1.1.3 states that the offence applies to students in non-government schools.
Threshold to commence process	Missing school five days in a year with unexplained absences. Attendance Officer has followed up non-attendance, and a student continues to miss school, Vic DEECD can issue an Infringement Notice and fine.
Compulsory school age	Children and young people from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption granted
Truancy processes	1. Where absences are of concern due nature or frequency, school will involve parents and student in developing strategies to improve attendance. 2. If student has repeated absences without reasonable excuse or explanation, parents may be issued with School Attendance Notice from the School Attendance Officer. 3. Failure to comply with School Attendance Notice may result in issue of Infringement Notice. 4. Should School Attendance Officer form view that court proceedings are the most appropriate course of action, they refer matter to Student Inclusion and Engagement Division of Vic DEECD for decision.
Truancy officers	School Attendance Officers employed by Vic DEECD have legal powers including to bring proceedings in court.
Police involvement	No reference to police in fine procedures or attendance strategies
Other measures	Every Day Counts emphasises the importance of attending school every day and provides schools and parents with tools and resources they can use to promote fulltime attendance. It's not ok to be away designed to change attitudes towards school attendance. It includes a kit to guide implementing processes and procedures to improve student attendance. Attendance Data Collection The Computerised Administrative Systems Environment in Schools Program (CASES21) has been provided to all Victorian government schools to facilitate prompt identification of non-attendees. School Engagement Policy guidelines All government schools are required to develop a Student Engagement Policy articulating the school community's shared of student engagement, attendance and behaviour.
Parent information website	www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/Pages/default.aspx this website acts as a guide for parents on the how to engage with every stage of their child's education.
Monitoring student attendance	Schools are required to develop their own policies to support and maintain student attendance record attendance and absences in order to meet legislative requirements. School Attendance Officers: Yes.
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	Vic DEECD does not publish student attendance data on their website. It notes individual schools are responsible for maintaining their own data relating to student attendance. Vic DEECD does publish the average rate of student attendance for government school students in its Annual Report. In 2012, this was: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% for students at Year 5 93% for students at Year 6 90% for students at Years 7-10 92% for students at Years 11-12

State	Queensland
Law	<i>Education (General Provisions) Act 2006</i> (Qld)
Penalties	Prosecution of one or both parents may occur if parent(s) do not fulfill their legal obligations for enrolment and attendance of their child at school. The fine is \$660 for the first offence; \$1,320 for subsequent offences. Section 176 states that the offence applies to government and non-government schools
Threshold to commence process	Either when a student is absent for 3 or more consecutive school days; or where there is persistent pattern of unexplained absences or absences without reasonable excuse; or where a student's attendance is considered unsatisfactory by the principal.
Compulsory school age	6 years and 6 months to 16 years; after Year 10 until 16 if there is a study/training/employment alternative.
Truancy processes	1. An authorised officer (i.e., a person authorised by the Director-General of QLD DETE) gives a parent a notice about their obligations that a child attend school. 2. The parent may be required to attend a meeting to discuss the absences. 3. If a meeting is scheduled, reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the parent attends. 4. If the parent does not attend a meeting, a further notice (warning notice) may be given. 5. If the parent has failed to attend required meeting and has been warned, a prosecution may be commenced with the consent of the Director-General.
Truancy officers	No indication of numbers of authorised officers.
Police involvement	An authorised officer is a public official for the purposes of the <i>Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000</i> (Qld). There are 50 school based police officers in urban and regional schools.
Other measures	Every Day Counts emphasises the importance of children and young people attending school every day and provides schools and parents with tools and resources they can use to promote fulltime attendance. Remote School Attendance Strategy (see page 19).
Parent information website	www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/parent-community-engagement-framework/ has a breakdown of information for parents. It details the various aspects of Queensland's parent and community engagement framework, which includes information on parent participation in child learning and development.
Monitoring student attendance	OneSchool provides schools with access to comprehensive data on every student's attendance. It can be accessed at http://education.qld.gov.au/everydaycounts/schools/addressing-absenteeism/monitoring-student-attendance.html School Attendance Officers: Yes.
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	The QLD DETE publishes extensive student attendance information for government schools on its website, including attendance rates by school. Unauthorised absences are separated from unexplained absences in the data. The percentage of unauthorised absences has decreased between 2009 and 2013, from 2.1% to 1.4%. The percentage of unexplained absences has also decreased from 35.7% in 2009 to 33.1% in 2013. Source: www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/statistics/student-attendance.html Data is currently available from 2009 to 2013. The data is updated annually.

State	Western Australia
Law	<i>School Education Act 1999 (WA)</i> <i>Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008</i> (authority for Responsible Parenting Agreements designed to help families in cases of persistent non-attendance or disruptive behaviour).
Penalties	Fines up to \$1,000. Section 23 states that the offence applies to non-government schools
Threshold to commence process	Where repeated attempts to restore attendance have been made, and non-attendance persists, the Regional Executive Director of the WA DoE may arrange for an Attendance Panel to be formed.
Compulsory school age	6 years and 6 months to 17; or until 15 years and 6 months and are undertaking further study/training.
Truancy processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regional Executive Director writes to inform parents the Attendance Panel will be convened. 2. Attendance Panel convened, prepares report with recommendations. 3. Copy of report sent to parents. 4. If student attendance restored a second report prepared noting that student has complied with requirements. 5. If attendance does not improve, matter referred to the WA DoE's Legal Services Department for consideration of prosecution. 6. The WA DoE may make Responsible Parenting Agreements with parents of children under 15 years.
Truancy officers	At the end of 2012, 168 authorised WA school Attendance Officers. They have specific powers under the <i>School Education Act 1999</i> to support families to maintain full school attendance. For some schools or regions, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, school psychologists, youth workers and social workers may take on this role in addition to their main roles. For Year 11/12 students, attendance support is provided by Regional Participation Coordinators.
Police involvement	WA police support the Keeping Kids in School programme where children are discouraged from hanging around shopping centres in school hours.
Other measures	<p>Operation Redirect, Daytime Safe Place and Keeping Kids in School operate through the support of the WA Police, WA DoE, WA Department for Child Protection and Family Services and local business to report non-attending students to schools.</p> <p>Aboriginal Attendance Grants to schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students.</p> <p>Tri-Border database at June 2013 enrolment and attendance data for more than 120,000 students in 100 government and independent schools in WA, SA and NT.</p> <p>Better Attendance: Brighter Futures is based on schools, parents and communities' mutual obligation to develop strategies that link directly to the local causes of poor attendance.</p> <p>Walk Right In is a manual for Indigenous communities that aims to increase parent involvement in their child's education and the school.</p> <p>Responsible Parenting Agreements are designed to support parents in cases of persistent non-attendance or where significant disruptive behaviour is occurring at school.</p> <p>Leave passes are designed to assist WA DoE staff, police officers and local business people to identify students and verify their approved absence from school.</p> <p>Remote School Attendance Strategy (see page 19).</p>
Parent information website	www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsandyou/detcms/portal/ provides parents with information on how to increase their involvement in their child's education.
Monitoring student attendance	Schools in WA can access Schools Online (http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do) and 'Student Attendance Reporting' to monitor and log attendance rates. WA DoE uses data from the 'Student Achievement Information System' to determine student attendance levels. School Attendance Officers: Yes (through the Tri-border Project).
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	WA DoE does not publish any data on student attendance rates or absences on its website. WA DoE Annual Report includes state-wide attendance rates. In 2011, the overall attendance rate was 90.8%. The rate for Aboriginal students was 77.1% and 91.9% for non-Aboriginal students.

State	South Australia
Law	<i>Education Act 1972 (SA)</i>
Penalties	Fines up to \$500 (Section 76) Section 74 states that the offence applies to non-government schools.
Threshold to commence process	Unspecified – the <i>Education Act 1972</i> provides for prosecution of parents in certain circumstances where their children fail to attend school. Individual circumstances determine whether a prosecution will be considered. Two lengths of absence bring a student under review: Habitual non-attendance: Where a student has 5 or more absences per term. Chronic non-attendance: Where a student is absent for 10 days or more per term.
Compulsory school age	6 years to 16 years, or after year 10 until 17 if there is a study/training/ employment alternative.
Truancy processes	Student Attendance Counsellors and school personnel must use all possible interventions before prosecution of parent. These steps may include: case conferences; attendance improvement plan; attendance review.
Truancy officers	A range of education staff are involved in the steps leading to prosecution These include Student Attendance Counsellor, school staff, Regional Support Services. No information on numbers.
Police involvement	Memorandum of Understanding between SA DECD and SA Police formalises a partnership to addressing non-attendance issues at the local community level. School and the police work together with parents to re-engage truants with school. Police officers may take non-attending students into custody, to make inquiries and then return student home.
Other measures	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan attendance is a priority LearnLink is new roll marking technology used in schools. Interagency Processes for Chronic Non-Attendees is a process between SA DECD and the SA Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (SA DSCI). Mandatory Notification Responsibility under the <i>Child Protection Act 1993</i> for SA DECD staff to notify SA DSCI if non-attending student believed to be abused or neglected. Attendance Policy it is a compulsory requirement for children between the ages of 6-16 to attend school. The SA DECD and SA Police have an MOU (since 2003) which established a shared commitment to combating truancy. Attendance improvement package aims to engage schools and communities in promoting attendance and engagement for all students enrolled in government preschools and schools. Truancy Border database (see WA above). Remote School Attendance Strategy (see page 19).
Parent information website	www.decd.sa.gov.au/portal/community.asp provides information and support for parents that covers how to become involved at school (and in the school community), advises on curriculum, assessment and student services, and identifies methods of learning in the home.
Monitoring Student attendance	Schools must monitor education participation and record data relating to non-attendance. Schools are expected to use the 'EDSAS attendance module' or 'Dux Assistants' program to record student absence. School Attendance Officers: Yes.
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	SA DECD does not publish any student attendance data on its website. SA DECD's Annual Report contains attendance rates for government schools, by region.

State	Tasmania
Law	<i>Education Act 1994 (Tas)</i> <i>Youth Participation in Education and Training (Guaranteeing Futures) Act 2005</i>
Penalties	Daily fine of up to \$260. Maximum fine \$1,300 (Section 6). Section 3 states the offence applies to non-government schools.
Threshold to commence process	Any unauthorised absence can be investigated.
Compulsory school age	Turning 6 years old by 1 January – 17 years, or 16 with a year of further approved study/training/ employment.
Truancy processes	Principal refers irregular attendees to TAS DoE. Authorised person from TAS DoE can request that the student accompany them to school or home. Process allows for prosecution of parent for child's non-attendance.
Truancy officers	Social Workers assist TAS DoE with cases of non-attendance. School Attendance and Retention Support Counsellors are employed at schools – no reports on numbers.
Police involvement	No active involvement in school attendance programmes
Other measures	School Attendance Procedures outline requirements that apply to school-aged children in Tasmania. The procedures can be accessed at https://www.education.tas.gov.au/document/entry/Documents/School-Attendance-Procedures.pdf
Parent information website	www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/schools-colleges/Pages/Overview.aspx acts as a database for policies and programmes that impact on Tasmanian students. It provides links to general resources for students and parents.
Monitoring student attendance	School principals are responsible for recording and monitoring attendance. Principals are required to enter data using the 'student attendance code combinations chart' (established and overseen by the TAS DoE). School Attendance Officers: Yes (known as Home School Liaison officers).
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	TAS DoE does not publish any student attendance data on its website. TAS DoE publishes the overall state-wide average daily attendance rate for the past three years in its annual report. The rate slightly decreased from 91.3% in 2012 to 90.2% in 2013.

State	Northern Territory
Law	<i>Northern Territory Education Act 2013, Youth Justice Act, Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 (Cth)</i>
Penalties	\$2,115 for first offence, \$2,820 for further offences (Section 20C of the <i>Northern Territory Education Act 2013</i>). Section 4 states that the offence applies to non-government schools. Suspension of income support payments under School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM).
Threshold to commence process	Not specified in the legislation.
Compulsory school age	5 turning 6 years by end June. 17 years or after Year 10 until 17 if there is an approved study/training/enrolment alternative.
Truancy processes	Every Child Every Day sets out a five-stage process that can lead to prosecution: 1. Local support is provided to families if student has three consecutive unexplained absences. 2. Face-to-face meeting with families if significant pattern of non-attendance. 3. Further face-to-face meetings if non-attendance persists, followed by NT DoE delivery of formal notice to take action. Individual attendance plan may be required at this stage. 4. Failure to comply will lead to NT DoE seeking a family responsibility agreement. 5. When these and any other avenues fail, NT DoE may seek to prosecute parents.
Truancy officers	Senior Attendance and Truancy Officers (30 of which around 19 are engaged under SEAM). Officers operate in regional teams and work closely with schools to form school attendance plans.
Police involvement	Police and night patrols involved in supporting school attendance.
Other measures	The School Attendance campaign is part of a larger strategy intended to improve school attendance. SEAM has similar stages as Every Child Every Day but ends in a process of welfare management rather than fines (see page 20). Don't Miss Out or Something Great is a campaign that emphasises how children can benefit from going to school and encourages families to get involved in their child's education. Value of Schooling a communication and media campaign informing parents about their responsibilities regarding school enrolment, attendance and participation. Clontarf Academies and Girls' Academies use sport to engage Indigenous secondary students in school to improve their attendance and their educational and life outcomes. Frequent Attenders Program NT DoE has partnered with private sector companies to provide a reward program to motivate students from remote communities who maintain at least 80% school attendance. Tri-Border database (see WA above). Remote School Attendance Strategy (see page 19).
Parent information website	www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community provides information to parents regarding curriculum, schooling, student assessment and resources on how to support students and learning outside of school.
Monitoring student attendance	Enrolment and attendance data are collected eight times per year (at the beginning and end of each term) by the NT DoE. School Attendance Officers: Yes.
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	The NT DoE publishes government school student enrolment and attendance rates by school, region and Indigenous status on its website. This information is available for 2010-2013. Enrolment and attendance data are collected and published four times a year (once per term).

State	Australian Capital Territory
Law	<i>Australian Capital Territory Education Act 2004</i>
Penalties	\$550 for failure to comply with information notice; \$1,100 for compliance notice. Section 10A (2) states that the offence applies to non-government schools.
Threshold to commence process	When unexplained absences reach seven days in a school year, school principal commences procedures to ensure students meet the attendance requirements.
Compulsory school age	5 turning 6 by 30 April – 17 years; or after Year 10 until 17 if there is a study/training/employment alternative.
Truancy processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School principals required to follow-up unexplained absences. 2. When unexplained absences reach seven days in a year, principals commence procedures to ensure attendance requirements met. 3. Failure to comply with attendance requirement, may lead to Director-General of Department of Education and Training (ACT DET) issuing a compliance notice. 4. Failure to comply with Compliance Notice is an offence and parents may be prosecuted.
Truancy officers	Authorised persons appointed by the Director-General of ACT DET to exercise inspection powers at ACT schools.
Police involvement	No active involvement in truancy programs.
Other measures	<p>Education Participation (enrolment and attendance) 2011, Policy identifier: EP201111. This policy describes the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in promoting compulsory education by ensuring that children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete year 10; and • Participate in education until they are 17 years old or complete Year 12.
Parent information website	www.det.act.gov.au/information_for/parents_and_school_community contains links to policies and programmes, including attendance measures, curriculum, child wellbeing, general student services and school parent associations.
Monitoring student attendance	<p>A central register of enrolment and attendance at public schools is recorded in ACT DET's record-keeping system. More information at www.det.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/311436/Attendance_at_ACT_Public_Schools.pdf</p> <p>School Attendance Officer: No (not evident in research).</p>
Reporting of student attendance performance measurement	<p>ACT DET publishes the overall student attendance rate for government school students in Year 1 to Year 11 in its annual report. There is no student attendance data available on the website.</p> <p>The <i>2012-2013 Annual Report</i> states that the attendance rate was 91.4% in 2012 compared to 91.3% in 2011.</p>

	National
Law	<i>Australian Education Act 2013</i>
Attendance policies	<p><i>Federally led or funded:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 • Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory • Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) (see page 20) • School Nutrition Program • Cape York Welfare Reform - Student Attendance Case Management Framework • Sporting Chance Program • Stronger, Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) • Dare To Lead Program (DTL) • What Works • Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement • Parental and Community Engagement program • Focus Schools Next Steps Initiative • Investing in Focus Schools Initiative • The Early Childhood Building Block to Close the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage • Remedial activities to promote attendance • Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership <p><i>Intergovernmental:</i></p> <p>Tri-borders project is a collaborate initiative undertaken by the SA, NT and WA governments to collect data on remote students related to their enrolment and attendance records.</p>
Parent information website	<p>www.myschool.edu.au and www.education.gov.au/indigenous-schooling</p> <p><i>My School</i> provides statistical, contextual and comparative information about schools across Australia.</p>

Attachment C: NSW Government: Enforcement of compulsory school attendance 2012



The law in NSW places the responsibility on parents to ensure their child is enrolled at a government or non-government school and attends the school whenever teaching is provided (or is registered for home schooling).

Under Section 22 of the Education Act 1990 parents have a legal duty to ensure their school-aged children attend school. The NSW Department of Education and Communities has developed strategies to support all students' regular attendance at school.

School support

Each school has a discipline policy which sets out clear expectations for regular student attendance and consequences of truancy.

A key responsibility of the school is identifying students who are at risk of developing poor school attendance patterns. Once attendance issues are identified a range of strategies are used at school including:

- prompt follow up of any absences
- implementing programs and practices to address attendance issues, including the phone intervention program where a phone contact is made on a particular day with parents of all students who are absent

- communicating with parents and seeking an explanation for any unexplained absences
- putting in place student welfare support within the school, including referral to the school counsellor if appropriate

liaising with other government and non-government agencies

Home School Liaison Program

Where schools have used a range of strategies to resolve a non-attendance issue without success, a referral may be made to the regional Home School Liaison Program for support.

The Home School Liaison Program provides a supportive service to students, parents and schools to encourage the attendance of students at school.

There are 110 home school liaison officers and 26 Aboriginal student liaison officers working across the state. This includes an additional 25 home school liaison officer and 15 Aboriginal student liaison officer positions established at the beginning

of 2010 as part of the Keep Them Safe initiative.

The home school liaison officer develops an attendance improvement plan with the school, student and parents, which identifies strategies and responsibilities to improve the student's attendance.

Legal measures

Where an attendance improvement plan has been unsuccessful in resolving the matter, and the parents have not meaningfully engaged with the plan, the matter is referred for consideration of legal action.

Before 2010, the only legal option available if all other measures had failed to resolve the matter was prosecution in the Local Court. With the introduction of new legislation in 2010, other options are now available including seeking a compulsory schooling order in the Children's Court.



Enforcement of compulsory school attendance 2012

Enforcing compulsory attendance

In 2012, 590 cases were referred for compulsory attendance enforcement action. This represents a significant increase from the 423 cases referred in 2011. No formal evaluation has taken place to establish the reason for the increase. Enquiries with field staff indicate that the increase is likely due to ongoing efforts to streamline enforcement processes. Field staff confirm that the increase does not reflect any increase in the number of referrals of poor school attendance from schools into the home school liaison program.

Dismissed	2
Ongoing	173
TOTAL	521

All Court matters

Fined	28
Withdrawn	14
Final Compulsory Schooling Order	235
Dismissed	2
S10* GBB	2
Ongoing	209
TOTAL	590

Local Court matters

Fined	28
Withdrawn	3
S10 *GBB	2
Ongoing	36
Dismissed	0
TOTAL	69

Children's Court matters

Final Compulsory Schooling Order	235
Withdrawn	111

Explanatory notes

Proceedings were typically withdrawn when attendance had improved sufficiently to justify withdrawal, or because it appeared likely that a defence could be established (e.g. illness or disobedience).

Matters not commenced occurred for a range of reasons including not being able to serve court papers.

improvement in attendance, and the student moving out of the jurisdiction.

*GBB = go on a break

Quality of information

The 2012 figures were prepared from administrative systems that were developed to internally track the progress of cases rather than to report externally.

There are no statistical quality assurance measures applied to these figures, and there may be anomalies or errors due to the significant number of users who access the system.

The 2012 figures represent a snapshot of the data as at 25 February, 2013. The date may be subject to revision and correction, but the figures are correct to the best of the department's knowledge and understanding.

Attachment D: Australian Government Initiatives to Reduce Unauthorised Student Absences

Secretaries Committee on Indigenous Reform

The Secretaries Committee on Indigenous Reform has been considering what the Commonwealth can do to improve school attendance and education outcomes for Indigenous children. At its meeting on 4 December 2013, departments brought forward suggestions from each of their portfolios on ways to improve Indigenous student attendance. Some of the suggestions included:

- **Changes to Family Tax Benefit (FTB):** Align payment arrangements and attendance conditions for ABSTUDY Living Allowance and FTB. ABSTUDY payment is conditional on attendance and enrolment at school. Whereas FTB is not conditional and is paid at a higher rate. Most families choose to receive FTB payments. It was suggested that FTB could either be made conditional on school enrolment and attendance or the rate of the ABSTUDY Living Allowance be increased.

The Howard Government in 2007 had considered quarantining families FTB payments where students failed to attend school. The Hon Mal Brough MP, former Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, spoke to *The Daily Telegraph* about the plan on 5 July 2007. When asked how many school absences would prompt bureaucrats to intervene to take control of FTB payments, Minister Brough suggested three unexplained absences. Under the plan, state education departments and private schools were also to be required to provide the Australian Government with data on unauthorised student absences.²⁷

On 16 July 2007, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that Minister Brough advised that the Government would not proceed with the plan as it was not practical to cut payments to working families. Minister Brough said that the state laws on unauthorised absences apply and these laws should be enacted.²⁸

- **Welfare Reform Review:** Consider options for school attendance to be an activity requirement for parents receiving income support. For example, dropping off and collecting children from school could be a participation requirement in an Employment Pathway Plan, where appropriate.

Remote School Attendance Strategy

Under the Remote School Attendance Strategy, the Australian Government has committed \$46.5 million for 400 school attendance officers in 73 schools in the NT, Queensland, SA, NSW and WA. The school attendance officers encourage school attendance through measures including walking or driving children to school, helping with school lunch preparation, organising school uniforms and working with communities to promote the benefits of regular school attendance. The Australian Government has committed to working with state and territory governments to identify schools with poor student attendance which will benefit most from this investment.”²⁹

Senator Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, in announcing the strategy would be rolled out to additional schools in April 2014, advised “early data from schools involved in the scheme’s first stage

²⁷ Dunlevy S, *Family tax benefit invasion*, The Daily Telegraph, 5 July 2007.

²⁸ *Government softens stance on welfare plan*, The Sydney Morning Herald, 16 July 2007.

²⁹ The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister of Australia, Senator The Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, *Government Expands Remote School Attendance Strategy*, 22 March 2014

show encouraging signs of increased school attendance – with more than 600 more children in school this year compared to last year.”³⁰

Student Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM)

SEAM was introduced in 2008 and has been rolled out in regional and remote schools in NT and Queensland. Parents are required to enrol school-aged children in school and make sure they attend every day or face suspension of social security (Centrelink or Department of Veterans Affairs) payments. Social security payments are resumed if a parent complies with student attendance requirements within a 13 week period. SEAM students in both QLD and NT have increased their attendance, from 74.9 per cent to 79.9 per cent in Queensland and 84.7 per cent to 88.7 per cent in the Northern Territory.

The Principal of Xavier College on the Tiwi Islands queried the effectiveness of SEAM in 2009 in an interview with *ABC News*. She noted only six or seven of their 76 students have parents who receive social security payments. In the Principal’s opinion the NT Government would be better off enforcing existing truancy laws rather than suspending welfare payments.³¹

The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister of Australia, told the Sydney Institute during the 2013 election that quarantining welfare under SEAM “was always a federal substitute for the state and territories neglect to enforce truancy laws. On-the-spot fines, administered by truancy officers, would be a much more straightforward way to proceed.”³² In October 2013, Senator Scullion stated the Government had not talked to any states and territories about the fines. He said that the Government would strengthen SEAM and that truancy fines are part of a suite of measures that will be considered.³³

³⁰ Senator The Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, *Remote School Attendance Strategy rolled out to additional 30 schools*, 4 April 2014.

³¹ Bolton K, *Truancy-linked welfare trial ineffective*, ABC News, 18 September 2009.

³² McQuire A, *On the spot fines still on table to tack truancy*, Tracker, 20 October 2013.

³³ McQuire A, *On the spot fines still on table to tack truancy*, Tracker, 20 October 2013.

State and territory workforce initiatives

New South Wales

The NSW **Rural and Remote Human Resources Strategy** aims to attract pre-service and experienced teachers to teach in rural and remote schools. Under the strategy, the NSW Government offers a number of initiatives including incentives, scholarships and experience programs. An example of the scholarships and experiences offered include the Teach Rural Scholarship.

Year 12 students and current university students can apply for a **Teach Rural Scholarship**. The scholarships are a recruitment initiative aimed at assisting schools who have had difficulty in attracting high quality graduate teachers. The scholarships include \$7500 annual stipend to assist initial teacher education (ITE) students with their studies and a \$6000 appointment allowance. To be eligible participants must remain in a rural or remote location for a minimum period of three years.

NSW offers incentives to attract and retain existing teachers to regional or remote schools, including bonuses of up to \$30,000 per annum on top of base salary, depending on the school and level of seniority. They also offer flexible incentives and benefits including:

- \$10,000 "sign-on bonus" for eligible positions
- \$5000 annual retention bonus, paid in cash available for up to 10 years
- additional personal leave
- additional professional development days
- transfer points.

Source: www.teach.nsw.edu.au/find-teaching-jobs/choose-rural, <https://cms.det.nsw.edu.au/teach/find-teaching-jobs/choose-rural/benefits-and-incentives> and https://teach.nsw.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/550062/Rural-and-Remote-HR-Strategy_v5.pdf

Queensland

The **Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS)** provides a range of allowances and incentives for teachers appointed to state schools located in rural and remote Queensland. Depending on location, incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools include:

- permanent employment
- locality allowance paid fortnightly
- financial benefits, including compensation benefit (up to \$6000); incentive benefit (up to \$6000); dependant benefit (up to \$6000 for an adult and \$4500 for a child); and Identified Location Payments of \$1000 a year for up to five years when appointed to a school in an Identified Indigenous community
- extended and additional leave entitlements
- specialised induction programs
- subsidised housing
- flight allowances
- transfer and relocation expense assistance
- accrual of accelerated transfer points for permanent teachers.

Source: <https://teach.qld.gov.au/teachingwithus/Documents/PDF/remote-teaching-booklet.pdf> and <https://teach.qld.gov.au/teaching-with-us/pay-and-benefits/rural-remote-incentives>

Western Australia

The **Remote Teaching Service** recruits graduate and experienced teachers to work in remote communities in Western Australia. A range of allowances and benefits are offered, including:

- permanency on completion of two years satisfactory service
- rent-free housing and fully subsidised relocation costs
- locality and financial allowances up to \$25,782 per year
- two return trips to Perth and a return trip to a main regional centre each year for eligible staff and their dependants
- an additional 10 weeks paid leave on completion of three years, or an additional 22 weeks paid leave on completion of four years.

Source: <http://det.wa.edu.au/careers/detcms/workforce/careers/news-items/teach-remote.en>

Victoria

The **Rural Scholarship Program** provides cash scholarships to individuals studying to be a teacher and living in rural Victoria.

Recipients are paid:

- \$3000 when the scholarship agreement is signed
- \$2000 with evidence of enrolment in an identified undergraduate ITE course
- for postgraduate study, it is a single payment of \$4000.

Incentives are also offered for schools having difficulty attracting high quality graduate teachers. The incentives are designed to be given to graduates as part of an ongoing employment offer. Three incentive types are available:

- Category 1: Priority and rural schools – incentive valued at up to \$11,000
- Category 2: Provincial and outer metro growth schools – incentive valued at up to \$7000
- Category 3: All other schools with a hard-to-staff teaching vacancy – incentive valued at up to \$4000.

Graduates who receive an incentive must enter into an agreement to work for a minimum amount of time.

Source: www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/profdev/careers/Pages/incentives.aspx?Redirect=1

Tasmania

The **Professional Experience in Isolated and Rural Schools Program** encourages pre-service teachers to undertake school experience in participating rural and isolated schools by providing support for accommodation (up to \$150 per week) and travel (where applicable, up to three return flights).

Source: [https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Professional-Experience-in-Isolated-and-Rural-Schools-\(PEIRS-Program\).pdf](https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Professional-Experience-in-Isolated-and-Rural-Schools-(PEIRS-Program).pdf)

Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in Tasmania include:

- dependants allowance
- leave expenses, fares out of isolated locations (Bass Strait Islands) up to three times per year
- special allowances up to \$4679 per annum

Source: www.tic.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/81628/T12871_order_1_2007_con.pdf

Northern Territory

Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in the Northern Territory include:

- Remote Incentive Allowances of between \$1153 and \$8794
- Remote Retention Payment of between \$500 - \$1000 on completion of full year
- increased access to study leave
- fares out of isolated locations (2-3 per annum)
- subsidised housing (up to 100 per cent) in regional and remote localities
- access to up to four business days per year to access services not available in the remote location
- guaranteed transfer to Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs following completion of three years.

Source: <http://teachintheterritory.nt.gov.au/salary-employment-conditions/>

South Australia

Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in South Australia include:

- cash incentive payments during years one to five of services at a school within a relevant Country Zone (up to \$9133 per annum)
- one off incidental payments upon recruitment to permanency (up to \$946)

Band A (Principals/Preschool Directors) school leaders and Band B (Deputy Principals/Senior leaders /Coordinators) in Aboriginal and Anangu Schools are eligible to receive:

- a four-week induction program
- one term study leave with pay after two years of service in these schools.

Source:

www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/school_and_preschool_education_staff_enterprise_agreement_2016.pdf?v=1464229086

Literacy strategies and initiatives supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Literacy and Numeracy Essentials (LANE)

The LANE program is being introduced across remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory. It uses the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy through the use of developmental learning progressions with support of specific resources.

<https://education.nt.gov.au/education/statistics-research-and-strategies/indigenous-education-strategy/indigenous-education-strategy-issue-14#HEADING7>

Language, Learning and Literacy in the Early Years (L3)

L3 is a research-based intervention program for kindergarten students, targeting reading and writing used in New South Wales. Students receive explicit instruction in reading and writing strategies in small groups in a daily literacy lesson, and then rotate to independent or group tasks.

http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/viewing/S7070/pdf/tls56_language_learning_and_literacy.pdf

Making up Lost Time in Literacy - Reading Tutor Program (MULTILIT)

The MULTILIT research Initiative, directed by Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall from Macquarie University Special Education Centre, comprises research and development into effective ways of teaching low-progress students experiencing difficulties in learning literacy skills, carried out in the MULTILIT Tutorial Centre and Clinic, and in outreach programs and resources. The MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program caters for students who have not acquired the basic skills needed to become functional readers and is available for use across Australia.

<https://multilit.com/programs/reading-tutor-program/> and <https://multilit.com/programs/>

Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy (MiniLit)

Under MULTILIT, the MiniLit program targets the bottom 25 per cent of students and is specifically aimed at struggling Year 1 readers, 'at risk' Kindergarten and some struggling Year 2 students. It is an evidence-based, explicit model of 80 structured lessons for teaching reading skills to small groups and is available to all jurisdictions.

<http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/viewing/S7094/index.html>

Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)

The THRASS Institute (Australasia & Canada) is an Australian-based company that has developed a Specific Pedagogical Practice for the teaching of literacy. The THRASS program provides professional learning and tools for teachers to teach phonetics (and spelling choices) explicitly and systematically. <https://www.thrass.com.au/>

The Spalding Method

The Spalding Method is the methodology and educational philosophy of The Writing Road to Reading program. The Spalding philosophy identifies the physical and mental well-being of students as the primary concern of Spalding teachers. High expectations for all children are central to the philosophy. These principles of learning and instruction are applied throughout the spelling, writing, and reading curricula.

<https://www.spaldingaustralia.com.au/>

Reading to Learn (R2L)

R2L is designed to enable all learners at all levels of education to read and write successfully, at levels appropriate to their age, grade and area of study. The strategies have been independently evaluated to

consistently accelerate the learning of all students at twice to more than four times expected rates, across all schools and classes, and among students from all backgrounds and ability ranges.

<https://www.readingtolearn.com.au/>

Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI)

EDI was developed by DataWORKS founders, Dr. Silvia Ybarra and John Hollingsworth. EDI focuses on improving education at the lesson level by incorporating a strategic collection of instructional practices informed by educational and cognitive research.

<https://dataworks-ed.com/trainings/edi/>; https://goodtogreatschools.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SP002_Fact-Sheet-About-EDI_v2.0_20141013_e.pdf

New Focus on Reading 3-6

New Focus on Reading 3-6 is a school-based professional learning initiative. It applies learning directly to the classroom to address and improve teacher practice and student outcomes in reading. The initiative consists of two years of professional learning for teachers and school leaders. It encompasses reading comprehension, reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge. The initiative is available to all schools in NSW to inform and improve pedagogy.

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/literacy/new-focus-on-reading>

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is a school-based, short-term intervention designed for children aged five or six, who are the lowest achieving in literacy after their first year of school. The intervention involves intensive one-to-one lessons for 30 minutes a day with a trained literacy teacher for between 12 and 20 weeks (from 2018, the NSW Education Department no longer provides system support for this program).

<https://readingrecovery.org/>

QuickSmart Literacy

QuickSmart is a literacy and numeracy strategy for students at or below the National Minimum Standard in literacy and numeracy in years 4–6. It focuses on developing fast and accurate basic academic skills through 30-minute lessons, three times a week for 30 weeks. QuickSmart was developed with the support of the National Centre for Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR National Centre) at the University of New England.

<http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/viewing/S7079/index.html>

Raising the Bar

Raising the Bar is a Tasmanian Government strategy designed to increase the number of students completing primary school with functional literacy skills. The approach targets school leadership and teacher professional learning, implementing a whole-school approach to literacy, tracking and monitoring students, and sharing best practice across the state.

<http://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/viewing/S7080/index.html>