



## Department of Education

Secretary

2 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne Victoria 3002  
Telephone +61 3 9637 2000

COR23123184

Ms Sarah Redden  
A/g Committee Secretary  
Senate Education and Employment References Committee  
eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Redden

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 June 2023 requesting additional information in relation to the impact of school refusal on the educational attainment of students as part of the inquiry into the national trend of school refusal and related matters.

I am pleased to be able to support the important work of the Committee by providing further information to supplement the Victorian Government's submission to the Inquiry, provided in December 2023.

The enclosed attachment provides further information in response to the Committee's questions. The Department of Education (the department) is not able to provide a response to all requests, either because the necessary data is not available, or because analysis of the available data would not yield meaningful results given the small student cohort identified as being absent due to school refusal (as outlined in the Victorian Government submission). This challenge is further complicated when analysis is requested for individual schools.

School attendance and engagement continue to be key priorities for the department and Victorian government schools. There is a significant body of national and international research that has considered the drivers of student attendance and its impact on learning and wellbeing, which reinforce the value of the work being undertaken by the Committee and no doubt will be an important contributor to the Committee's deliberations.

If you would like further information regarding the department's response, you may contact Claire Tobin, A/Executive Director, Wellbeing, Health and Engagement Division, Department of Education, on

I look forward to the outcomes of the Committee's inquiry into this important matter.

Yours sincerely

**Jenny Atta**  
Secretary  
02/08/2023

*Encl: Supplementary information from the Victorian Department of Education, July 2023*

# Supplementary information from the Victorian Department of Education

## July 2023

### Current attendance rates in Victoria

Victoria had the strongest attendance rates in the nation in 2022, with students across grades 1 to 6 attending 88.6 per cent of school days and students across grades 7 to 10 attending 86.6 per cent of school days. Victoria also had the highest attendance rate of all Australian states and territories for Koorie students across grades 1 to 6 (82.5 per cent) and grades 7 to 10 (75.5 per cent). I refer you to the [2023 Report on Government Services](#) School Education Data Table 4.A20 for a more detailed breakdown of attendance rates by year level across all school sectors.

Between 2016-17 and 2022-23, Victoria set targets for the average number of days of absence per full-time equivalent student per year for key year levels and Aboriginal students in government schools, which were reported annually in Budget Paper 3. An extract of public reporting for 2022-23 (2022 calendar year) is provided at **Figure 1** below. These measures have been revised for 2023-24 to align with nationally consistent approaches to measuring attendance levels as recommended by the Victorian Auditor General.

Further information on attendance rates of individual Victorian schools can also be found on the [MySchool](#) website.

**Figure 1: Current absence measures and targets for Victorian government schools.**

<i>Performance measures</i>	<i>Unit of measure</i>	<i>2023-24 target</i>	<i>2022-23 expected</i>	<i>2022-23 target</i>	<i>2021-22 actual</i>
Average days lost due to absence at Year 5	number	14.1	23.6	14.1	14.9
<i>The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza, particularly in Semester 1.</i> <i>This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.</i>					
Average days lost due to absence at Year 6	number	14.5	24.3	14.5	15.7
<i>The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza, particularly in Semester 1.</i> <i>This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.</i>					
Average days lost due to absence for Aboriginal students in Years Prep to 6	number	24.0	34.7	24.0	28.4
<i>The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza as well as the heightened level of vulnerability to COVID-19 for Koorie families which may have influenced attendance patterns. This cohort is small and data is subject to volatility.</i> <i>This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.</i>					

Average days lost due to absence in Years 11 and 12		number	16.1	23.4	16.1	16.8
The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza, particularly in Semester 1. This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.						
Average days lost due to absence in Years 7–10		number	19.0	29.2	19.0	22.7
The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza, particularly in Semester 1. This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.						
Average days lost due to absence for Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12		number	35.0	48.7	35.0	41.3
The 2022-23 expected outcome is higher than the 2022-23 target due to increases in absence due to illness from COVID-19 and influenza as well as the heightened level of vulnerability to COVID-19 for Koorie families which may have influenced attendance patterns. This cohort is small and data is subject to volatility. This performance measure relates to the calendar year. This performance measure refers to government schools only.						

Source: 2023-24 Victorian State Budget Paper 3: Service Delivery

### Reasons for absence

Victorian schools must record student attendance twice per day in primary schools and in every class in secondary schools and record, in writing, the reason for each absence. The data is then provided to the Department in half-day records. The Department has an in-depth way of recording different types of attendance and absences, which schools are assisted with via an Attendance and Absence Recording Guide. This:

- ensures the safety and wellbeing of all students by monitoring their attendance and
- assists in identifying and resolving barriers and access to education when a student is absent often and if the student needs additional support to attend school.

These codes are then grouped into different categories for data analysis purposes. The categories of the absence codes currently used by Victorian government schools are listed in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2**  
**Grouping of accountable absence codes used by Victorian government schools as at July 2023**

Absence Grouping	Absence Code	Absence Description
Medical Medical	200	Medical/illness
	205	Medical Appointment
Parent choice	806	Parent Choice Unauthorised
Parent choice	807	Parent Choice School Approved
Family Holiday	804	Family Holiday
Welfare Welfare Welfare Welfare	203	Counselling
	208	School Refusal
	210	Welfare/Other
	211	Bereavement

Welfare	212	Sorry Business
Welfare	805	Religious/Cultural Observance
Other	300	Truancy
Other	401	Suspension - External
Unknown	500	Unexplained

**Figure 3** below outlines the distributions of absences by categories for 2019 to 2022 for Victorian government schools. This highlights that there has been a notable increase in absences for medical reasons in 2022, reflecting the high rates of COVID and other illnesses that impacted families in 2022, alongside families returning to pre-pandemic levels of family holidays.

**Figure 3: Percentage of absences by category of absence type, by year**

Year	Percent of absences by category					
	Medical	Family Holidays	Parent choice	Welfare*	Other	Unknown
<b>2019</b>	40	16	17	3	2	22
<b>2020</b>	29	4	27	3	1	35
<b>2021</b>	35	5	23	3	1	32
<b>2022</b>	49	13	15	3	1	18

*This data is for Victorian government schools only and is drawn from reporting provided by individual schools to the Department of Education. This is internal department data. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.*

*\*School refusal falls within the 'Welfare' category of absences*

#### Alternative forms of education in Victoria

There are a number of alternative education offerings in Victoria to 'mainstream' schools.

##### *Home schooling*

Parents who wish to home school their child must register with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) if their child is of compulsory school age. In 2021-22, there were 11,332 children registered in 7,291 households ([VRQA Annual Report 2021-22](#), p.17).

##### *Virtual/distance education*

Virtual School Victoria is the leading virtual school for Victoria and provides blended learning opportunities for students from Foundation to Year 12. Students may enrol in VSV for a range of reasons, including:

- attending another school that does not offer the course they need
- professional sportspeople or performing artists

- experiencing physical or social-emotional health difficulties
- living in rural or remote areas
- travelling with family.

In 2022, the student population of VSV consisted of 6001 students who were enrolled in at least one subject. The full-time equivalent (FTE) number of students was 2647.

Of the students enrolled, 3354 were school-based students who enrolled in VCE subjects unavailable in their home schools.

Of the 2647 full-time students, 1431 students were enrolled under the Medical: Social Emotional category', including 895 students referred to the school by medical practitioners due to School Refusal (See [VSV 2022 Annual Report](#) for more information).

#### *Flexible learning options*

In Victoria, Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) are educational settings that support students at risk of disengaging or already disengaged from education. FLOs are not a separate education sector in Victoria and operate within the frameworks and policies of Victorian government schools. FLOs complement the work of schools to ensure that all students can access a high-quality education. They generally offer highly individualised learning plans and have a strong focus on providing holistic support for a student's engagement and wellbeing.

Victoria does not publish enrolment numbers for this sector separately from other government schools.

Further information about FLOs, including eligibility, referral approval process, monitoring, transitions and pathways, can be found on Victoria's Policy Advisory Library under [Flexible Learning Options](#).

#### Current policies and supports

As outlined in the Victorian Government submission to the inquiry, Victoria has a range of supports in place for students experiencing mental health, wellbeing concerns and issues with engagement and attendance.

The [Map of Key Mental Health and Wellbeing Support](#) shows these based on a framework of multi-tiered systems of support – universal interventions that provide a foundation for all students, early intervention and cohort-specific support for students with greater need and targeted support for individual students with the most intensive needs.

Attendance continues to be a priority for the Department of Education and Victorian government schools in 2023. The department continues to set strong expectations that all schools monitor and follow up on student absences, working closely with parents and carers to support students to attend and engage in school.