



Office of the
Director-General

Department of
Education

21 JUL 2023

Ms Sarah Redden
Acting Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment References Committee
Email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Redden

Thank you for your letter dated 27 June 2023 regarding the Inquiry into the national trend of school refusal and related matters.

I note that on 14 December 2022, the Honourable Grace Grace MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing, responded to an earlier request from the Committee.

The Queensland Department of Education has considered your questions on notice and I have enclosed a table with the department's responses to each question.

School refusal data is not part of Queensland state school data collections. For this reason, some of the questions were difficult to answer. Queensland state school absenteeism data is categorised into 10 groupings: Family reasons; Holiday; Illness and medical appointments; Long suspension; Short suspension; Sorry business; Suspension – pending exclusion; Unauthorised; Unexplained; and Other.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, I invite you to contact Ms Hayley Stevenson, Assistant Director-General, Disability, Inclusion and Student Services, on _____ or by email at _____

I look forward to the outcomes of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL DE'ATH
Director-General

Ref: 23/512785

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Senate Education and Employment References Committee: school refusal inquiry – Queensland Department of Education response

REQUEST/QUESTION	RESPONSE	AREA
<p>Please provide attendance data by year level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you collect data on reasons for absenteeism? If so, please provide the categories you collect data against. Please provide the absenteeism data by year level and by category you collect this data under. 	<p>Queensland state schools record student absences in line with the Department of Education's Roll marking in state schools procedure.</p> <p>Queensland data collections absenteeism categories are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Reasons; Holiday; Illness and medical appointments; Long Suspension; Short Suspension; Sorry Business; Suspension – pending exclusion; Unauthorised; Unexplained; and Other <p>Attendance rates by year level are published on the department's website: https://ged.qld.gov.au/our-publications/reports/statistics/Documents/attendance-rate-year-level-region.pdf. Absenteeism data by category is not published.</p>	<p>SSS</p> <p>PMR</p>
<p>What is your attendance target level for students? Is this consistent across all year groups?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If this varies by year level, please provide the target for each year level. 	<p>While the department maintains that the attendance target for every student should be 100%, with recognition of absences for which there is a reasonable excuse, individual schools may set their own attendance targets for students.</p> <p>The <i>Education (General Provisions) Act 2006</i> provides that each parent of a child who is of compulsory school age has the legal obligation to ensure their child is enrolled and attends a school, on every school day for the educational program in which the child is enrolled, unless the parent has a reasonable excuse.</p> <p>Attendance is a priority support measure for all students from Prep to Year 9 (with a focus on retention of students in Years 10 to 12) in the department's <i>Equity and Excellence: realising the potential of every student</i> strategy.</p>	<p>SSS</p>
<p>Have you done any analysis work on the linkage between student attendance and student academic performance?</p>	<p>Yes. Attendance analysis is available on the department's website at https://education.qld.gov.au/initiatives-and-strategies/initiatives/every-day-counts/for-schools/school-attendance-research</p>	<p>PMR</p>

How much of a gap are we seeing between the academic outcomes of children engaged in school refusal, and other students?	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR
<p>How many children are enrolled in a form of education, other than mainstream school, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home School; • Virtual School; • Distance Education; and • Other (please define categories). <p>Please provide student data against each category.</p>	<p>Home education data is published on the department's website at: https://qed.qld.gov.au/our-publications/reports/statistics/Documents/home-education-registrations.pdf. At the 2022 August enrolment census, 8461 students were registered for home education in Queensland.</p> <p>School level enrolment data is available via the department's Schools Directory.</p> <p>As at February 2023, enrolment counts for non-mainstream school settings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for Continuing Secondary Education – 876 student enrolments; and • Queensland Pathways State College – 175 student enrolments. <p>School of Distance Education – 14,412 student enrolments.</p>	PMR
<p>Is data collected on the reason a student is not attending mainstream school and why an exemption has been provided?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please provide data by category of exemption for how many students are enrolled in alternative methods of schooling. 	<p>In Queensland, an exemption from compulsory schooling may be considered when a child cannot attend school for a period of more than 10 consecutive school days, or it would be unreasonable in all the circumstances to require them to do so.</p> <p>An exemption excuses parents from their legal obligation to ensure that their child of compulsory school age is enrolled at or attends a school.</p> <p>If a student is enrolled in a school, the principal makes decisions about exemptions. However, if the child is not enrolled in any Queensland school, exemption decisions are made by delegated departmental officers in the region in which the child resides.</p> <p>A child who has been granted an exemption is not required to engage in an educational program during that period of time and therefore they are not enrolled in alternative methods of schooling.</p>	SSS PMR
Is data collected on student academic performance for students enrolled in alternative forms of schooling (as above).	Academic performance data is available for all students enrolled in any state school setting.	PMR
How much of a gap are we seeing between the academic outcomes of children engaged in school refusal, and other students?	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR

Do schools with higher rates of school refusal also have poorer academic performance among the rest of the student body?	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR
What is the academic performance like of schools that are specifically geared towards reaching students who engage in school refusal? (e.g. Virtual Schools Victoria is one such school the committee is aware of).	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR
What academic outcomes do we see among students who have previously engaged in school refusal, but have since returned to school?	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR
What data is there on the effect of school refusal on students' employment opportunities later in life?	As noted in Q1, school refusal is not captured as an absence reason.	PMR
What work has been done to understand the complex factors that influence student absenteeism?	The department regularly reviews and incorporates findings from Australian and international research to help inform contemporary policy position and strategies.	SSS
What policies do you have that support students and their families re-engage in school when experiencing school refusal?	<p>The department is aware that a range of factors contribute to school refusal for children and young people, including anxiety and other mental health concerns. A number of strategies are in place that clearly articulate the department's approach to supporting students' wellbeing and mental health. The department's <i>Equity and Excellence: realising the potential of every student</i> strategy, includes the <i>Wellbeing and engagement</i> focus area, which prioritises supporting student and staff wellbeing to build confidence and resilience, and establish a strong foundation for learning outcomes.</p> <p>Aligned with this strategy, the department's <i>Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework</i> supports schools to implement a whole-school approach to supporting students' wellbeing and mental health. The Framework highlights the importance of creating safe, supportive and inclusive school environments where schools recognise the early signs that a student's wellbeing is at risk and respond appropriately.</p> <p>For students whose wellbeing concerns are contributing to school refusal, support provided in response to these wellbeing concerns will include strategies to assist in</p>	SSS

	re-engaging the student at school. The Framework also emphasises the importance of strengthening connections with parents to support early intervention for students whose wellbeing is at risk.	
<p>Has any work been done to identify students who may be at risk of school refusal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What intervention strategies are in place to support these students and families? 	<p>The department is aware that students with wellbeing and mental health concerns may be at risk of school refusal. In recognition of the increased demand for wellbeing and mental health support at school, the department is delivering on the Queensland Government's \$106.7 million commitment over three years for a Student Wellbeing Package.</p> <p>Through the Package, an additional 464 psychologists or similar wellbeing professionals are being employed to provide direct support for students' mild to moderate mental health concerns at school. The support provided by these additional wellbeing professionals complements the support already available to students at school from a range of support staff, including over 800 guidance officers. All of these wellbeing professionals are well placed to provide early intervention and support for a range of mental health concerns, including those related to, or which could lead to school refusal.</p> <p>Where appropriate, wellbeing professionals work with school staff to implement strategies in the classroom and the broader school community that support students' engagement with school and learning.</p>	SSS