

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Truancy

Senator: Senator the Hon Jan McLucas

Question reference number: 157

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 11 April 2014

Number of pages: 7

Question:

1. During Senate Estimates hearing on 28 February 2014 the Minister indicated that State Truancy Officers in QLD were working alongside federally funded School Attendance Officers. What are the formal arrangements in place for how these positions interact?
2. How many School Attendance Officers were already employed before taking up their position?
3. Could you please provide the details of the application or selection process used by the department to engage School Attendance Officers?
4. School Attendance Officers will be dealing with a range of issues experienced by children and their families and may often deal with children in what is potentially a non-compliant situation.
 - a. Can you advise what specific training has been provided to School Attendance Officers?
 - b. What linkages are in place between School Attendance Officers and wraparound community and family services?
5. Can you detail the roles, responsibilities and powers of School Attendance Officers, particularly when confronted with a child or family who is not compliant with the direction to attend school?
6. Please provide the figures and locations of School Attendance Officers who are currently employed in communities.
7. What consultation took place between the Minister and / or the Department before the school attendance policy was decided upon and implemented?

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

8. Please outline the timeline of the development and implementation of the policy to date.
9. How much is a School Attendance Officer paid?
10. Do School Attendance Officers receive superannuation contributions?
11. Could you please provide the conditions of their employment?
12. Please provide a breakdown of the program costs, including wages for School Attendance officers, money provided for children and families and the communities.

Answer:

1. The Remote School Attendance Strategy, through which School Attendance Officers are engaged, complements other school attendance strategies. School Attendance Officers do not have legislated powers. Close links are being established with schools and school principals and School Attendance Supervisors and Officers so that School Attendance Officers can play a positive and supportive role in getting children back to school before there is a need to engage in formal truancy procedures.
2. School Attendance Officers are recruited by Remote Jobs and Communities Service Providers or other providers. Most are receiving income support payments before being engaged by the provider.
3. The selection process was conducted by the Remote Jobs and Communities Service Providers or other providers. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) does not select the School Attendance Officers.
4. (a) Providers are expected to provide training to School Attendance Officers. Initial training delivered by providers has included induction training, first aid, and work health and safety training. A range of training options is available to providers and School Attendance Officers and Supervisors, supported by the Remote Jobs and Communities Program and other training funds to undertake work-related training on an individual needs basis including to develop abilities in handling more challenging attendance issues.
(b) School Attendance Officers complement and are an additional resource in supporting families, communities and schools in each community. They will be assisted by School Attendance Supervisors to work with family and community services, including assisting to refer families to other services if a need is identified.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

5. The attached job descriptions were provided to providers. They are broad and allow for local adaption. School Attendance Supervisors and Officers do not have any legal powers. Where a family or child needed to be referred for truancy, the processes under the truancy laws in each jurisdiction would apply.
6. see PM113.
7. PM&C implements the policies of the Government of the day.
8. The Remote School Attendance Strategy was announced on 22 December 2013 by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion. Implementation commenced at Gunbalunya School in the Northern Territory on 7 January 2014 and was rolled out progressively to other schools as they commenced term 1, 2014.
9. School Attendance Officers are paid according to the relevant award.
10. Yes.
11. School Attendance Officers are subject to the relevant awards and employment conditions.
12. The Government has provided \$28.4 million over two calendar years from 1 January 2014 for a remote school attendance strategy to improve attendance of children in 40 remote Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales.

There are four categories of funding under the model:

- School Attendance Supervisors - based on a \$60,000 to \$80,000 salary range with some on-costing;
- School Attendance Officers – based on \$11,000 per part time position average of 15 hours per week;
- incidental funding – based on \$180 assistance per child to provide funding to address barriers to attending school, including access to transport, uniforms and breakfasts/lunches (i.e. shoes, schoolbag etc.) or for reward for high levels of attendance (i.e. attending school excursion/camp); and
- resources – based on approximately \$72,000 per community for community needs such as buses and office accommodation.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Attachment

Job descriptions for Student Attendance Supervisors/Mentors and Student Attendance Officers

Strategy Details

The Remote Student Attendance Strategy (the Strategy) is designed to lift school attendance levels in 40 remote communities. The Strategy aims to support parents, carers and interested community members to work with schools and families to ensure children go to school every possible day.

The Strategy will fund the set-up of a team to increase school attendance rates in the targeted communities. The team will comprise of Student Attendance Supervisors (SASs) and Student Attendance Officers (SAOs) who will be supported by Remote Jobs and Communities Program Provider (RJCP providers), and their staff on the ground. The roles and responsibilities of SASs and SAOs will vary, depending on the particular needs of the targeted communities, and successful aspects of the strategy over time in getting kids to school. Part of their duties will include the collection and on-forwarding of data related to weekly school attendance information to the Department which is to be determined specifically with each community and school. NB The following are typical duties with the actual duties to be decided at community level between the relevant school, Remote Jobs and Community Programme providers and the community.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Position Description: Student Attendance Supervisor/Mentor

Job purpose: To support families, parents, carers and children so that school aged children attend school regularly and on time.

Report to: [will depend on local arrangement]/Provider

Hours of work: Term time (x weeks per year), X hours per week, over school days, lunch break(?)

Responsibilities: Supervise and mentor attendance officer team.

Key tasks:

- (1) Supervise, guide and mentor a team of attendance officers.
- (2) Organise resources to assist attendance officers to do their jobs.
- (3) Assist schools and communities in the implementation of attendance policies and priorities.
- (4) Participate in teams, networks and committees to achieve improvements in school enrolment, attendance and being on time, and work collaboratively with school staff and families to improve attendance.
- (5) Support school communities with attendance issues and procedures.
- (6) Complete and collect relevant information and reports, for example, number of attendance officers employed and working during the term, hours worked by attendance officers, activities performed by attendance officers, response of communities to attendance officers.
- (7) Other duties commensurate with level of the position.

Special requirements:

Standing and respect in community.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

People selected for these positions will need to undertake child safe environment training and be required to undertake a Working with Children Check.*

Be willing to undertake work-related learning activities.

*The names of this training and check differs in each state and territory.

Position Description: Student Attendance Officer

Job purpose: To support families, parents, carers and children so that school aged children attend school regularly and on time.

Report to: [will depend on local arrangement]/School Attendance Supervisor/Mentor

Hours of work: Term time (x weeks per year), X hours per week, over school days, lunch break(?)

Responsibilities:

Key tasks:

Under guidance and direction of the School Attendance Supervisor/Mentor:

- (1) Make a daily check on children not attending school.
- (2) Visit the homes of children not attending school and places where children “hang out”.
- (3) Talk to parents and carers about the help that is needed to get children to school.
- (4) Walk or drive children to school if this help is requested by a parent or carer.
- (5) Talk with parents, carers and the school to make sure children who need help with food, uniforms, homework or afterschool care get the support they need.
- (6) Help with promoting and informing people in the community about the importance of regular school attendance.
- (7) Providing information and reports to the School Attendance Supervisor/Mentor.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Special requirements:

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