

QUESTION ON NOTICE

The CHAIR: There has been some difficulty obtaining referrals to the Youth on Track program, particularly from schools. How could this be addressed?

Ms BALE: Firstly, I am not aware of referrals from schools to Youth on Track as an issue.

The CHAIR: They have raised it with us.

Ms BALE: Youth on Track?

The CHAIR: Yes. We can provide you with some details.

Ms BALE: We would welcome those details. We can certainly follow them up on a case-by-case basis

ANSWER:

Youth on Track is a voluntary early intervention scheme for 10 – 17 year olds who are at risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system.

The Department of Education has been advised that there are two referral pathways to Youth on Track which include:

1. Discretionary referrals by NSW Police Youth Liaison Officers and local schools.
2. Automatic referrals using the police database.

Young people are eligible for Youth on Track if they:

- Have at least one formal contact with police and a number of offending risk factors (discretionary).
- Have at least two formal contacts with police and are at 60% or greater chance of reoffending (automatic).
- Are 10 – 17 years old.
- Have never received a supervised court order.
- Offend or go to school in one of the Youth on Track sites.

Advice from Juvenile Justice indicates that since 2014 schools provide 3-5% of all referrals to Youth on Track. The number of referrals from schools would naturally be smaller than other agencies such as police, as police Youth Liaison Officers (YLOs) can refer young people at the time of their first caution, conference or charge. The police also have in place an automatic referral process which identifies young people with 2 or more formal contacts who are at a higher likelihood of reoffending.

Schools work closely with Youth on Track providers in their area. The Youth on Track case workers often work with Youth on Track clients in schools, but they may not have been referred by police and the school.

Inquiry into the adequacy of youth diversionary programs in NSW

A representative from the Department of Education Learning and Teaching directorate will be meeting with Youth on Track providers at part of a Youth on Track Forum being convened by Juvenile Justice in June 2018. This will provide the department with an opportunity for providers to directly identify specific local issues relating to school referrals.

How could this be addressed?

Schools can make a discretionary referral to the Youth on Track initiative in their local area. Schools would take into consideration the range of support mechanisms within the school and other departmental support before referring a student to Youth on Track or any other externally managed program.

The resolution of concerns regarding school referrals are best managed locally through contact with the department's school services team.

The department has provided Juvenile Justice with the names of key senior contacts Education Leadership across NSW and the schools that they support.

Youth on Track has been promoted through the department's internal communication publication (Schoolbiz) which is available to all government schools across NSW.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms BALE: It will be finished by the middle of the year, and we will be finalising our adjusted or reviewed policy for the start of next year.

The CHAIR: It would be good to get a copy of your review policy.

Ms BALE: Certainly, I am happy to provide that.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: As of today, how many students are suspended from school?

Ms BALE: I cannot give you that information off the top of my head, but I am very happy to provide it.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Do you have a feel for the number of young people who have been suspended in the last 12 months?

ANSWER:

The review of the Student Discipline Policy commenced in Term 1, 2018. It is anticipated this work will be finalised for implementation by schools at the commencement of the 2019 school year.

The total number of students short suspended in 2017 was 31,813 and the total number of students long suspended in 2017 was 12,627. The total student enrolment in 2017 was 791,763, so these numbers are relatively small in the context of a large education system

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms JENNY LEONG: Do you have a demographic breakdown of that number? What proportion of those young people are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

Ms BALE: You can actually find that information on our website. We publish it every year.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Are you able to provide it to the Committee?

Ms BALE: We certainly can provide the information that is published. It is broken up by demographics and it does include Aboriginal children and young people and the rate of suspension.

ANSWER:

Of the total 31,813 students given a short suspension in 2017, there were 8,561 students in Kindergarten to Year 6, 20,478 students in Years 7 to 10 and 2,774 students in Years 11 to 12.

Of the total 12,627 students given a long suspension in 2017, there were 2,682 students in Kindergarten to Year 6, 8,733 students in Years 7 to 10 and 1,212 students in Years 11 to 12.

In 2017, a total of 7,714 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were given a short suspension.

In 2017, a total of 3,620 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were given a long suspension.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms BALE: suspension can be up to 20 days. We know that the average number of days for a long suspension is not 20 days; I will give you that information accurately when we provide the detail, but I know that it is much shorter than 20 days.

ANSWER:

In 2017, the average long suspension was 12 days.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Where are suspension centres located?

Ms BALE: We can send you a list of where they are.

ANSWER:

The 22 suspension centres are at:

- 1 Bidwill
- 2 Blacktown
- 3 Ryde
- 4 Wadalba
- 5 Glenfield
- 6 Arncliffe
- 7 Green Square
- 8 Campbelltown
- 9 Cessnock
- 10 Armidale
- 11 Raymond Terrace
- 12 Lismore
- 13 Macleay Valley
- 14 Tamworth
- 15 Albion Park
- 16 Orange
- 17 Bomaderry
- 18 Dubbo
- 19 Griffith
- 20 Wagga Wagga
- 21 Goulburn
- 22 Nowra

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: Is there no capacity to measure the number of young people who have been referred to Youth on Track by the Department of Education?

Ms BALE: I cannot answer that but we can certainly take that as a question on notice.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: When the program was being developed one indicator of potential trouble was truancy. What is the current truancy rate for young people at schools in New South Wales?

Ms BALE: That is information we can provide as well, out of session. I am happy to provide that as a question on notice

ANSWER:

Students may be absent from school for a range of reasons including sickness, family holidays, suspensions, approved and unapproved leave. Most of these absences are known to the students' parents. Some students have unexplained absences, and some of these may be due to truancy. However, some may be due to a parent not advising the school of the reason for the student's absence. For example, in circumstances of a family emergency or when a parent overlooks telling the school.

The Department of Education does not collect data on unexplained absences centrally. Staff from the Department of Education's school attendance program and local police officers conduct regular anti-truancy operations in areas such as shopping malls, parks, railway stations, internet cafes and amusement arcades. Students of compulsory school age detected during these operations without a leave pass are directed to return to school and their names are provided to the schools for follow-up action.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms JENNY LEONG: In respect of the connection between the Department of Education and Youth on Track, is there someone within the Department of Education who is responsible for ongoing awareness of what is happening with Youth on Track and the intersection of Youth on Track with the Education department?

Ms BALE: We have a policy area that has the closest connection with Youth on Track and we are happy to provide that as a question on notice as well.

ANSWER:

The Learning and Teaching directorate of the Department of Education liaises with the policy area of the Department of Justice, Juvenile Justice in relation to the Youth on Track initiative. Learning and Teaching is also represented on the Youth on Track Implementation Committee.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Ms BALE: What you are raising goes beyond Youth on Track. We can certainly provide information. I will make one other comment on that front. We have already met with the President of the Children's Court about issues of non-attendance and suspension and we are doing some work with the Children's Court specifically on this issue. We are connecting the dots around the areas where we feel there are some potential gaps or some further work that needs to be done.

Ms JENNY LEONG: That would be great to hear. If there is more material to be provided to the Committee about those discussions or a time line of thoughts, that would be helpful.

ANSWER:

The NSW Department of Education hosted an interagency forum on 1 August 2017 to discuss issues around non-attendance and suspension for secondary school students in NSW. The forum was attended by interagency representatives from the Children's Court, Juvenile Justice, Family and Community Services, Legal Aid, Aboriginal Legal Services, Department of Justice, the Office of the Children's Advocate, and NSW Police.

There was agreement at the forum to undertake work to address identified issues for students who have disengaged from school and appear before the crime jurisdiction of the Children's Court.

This work is progressing and now overlaps with whole of government work being undertaken in relation to the Their Futures Matter reform. Their Futures Matter is a NSW Government reform delivering whole-of-system changes to better support vulnerable children and families. The reform is introducing tailored cohort support packages for vulnerable children and their parents. The reform will provide wrap-around interagency solutions designed for specific cohorts of children and young people based on sound evidence, including data linkages across agencies.

The cohorts of children and young people identified to receive support packages under the Their Futures Matter reform include many of the children and young people who have been identified by the Children's Court and other government agencies as requiring additional supports and differentiated responses. This work will be regularly monitored and evaluated for effectiveness as part of the reform.

QUESTION ON NOTICE

Mr EDMOND ATALLA: Further to the member for Newtown's question, I am aware of one successful private provider in my electorate who would normally collect a child from school for two hours twice a week I think and provide that service. I understand that the department has now changed the rules and that that provider is no longer able to collect the child from school. The child must now be accompanied by a school teacher to attend the provider but the school is now saying, "We do not have the resources to send a teacher." That child is now missing out on that service because the department has changed the rules, namely, a school teacher must accompany the child to the provider's premises. Can you comment on that?

Ms BEST: I am not aware of any change to the department's rules but I am happy to follow up and get back to the Committee regarding the guidelines through which students attend the Links to Learning program.

Mr EDMOND ATALLA: That would be great. I can provide you with the information that I have.

Ms BEST: I am happy to do that.

ANSWER:

There has been no change to Department policy in relation to this matter. Public schools have not been informed that students can only attend private service providers if they are accompanied by a teacher.

The department is committed to providing quality education and to working with the local community to ensure that students have the greatest opportunity to achieve educational success. If an individual provider would like to discuss this matter further, the Department's local Director, Educational Leadership, for that particular school is the best point of contact for a provider.