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Chair, Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee  
Parliament of New South Wales  
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DGL20/686

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Dear Mr Piper,

Thank you for your letter of 23 October 2020, (your ref: LAC20/184.03) requesting additional information relating to the Auditor-General's performance audit report – Wellbeing of secondary school students. Responses to your questions have been prepared and are provided in the attached table.

The NSW Government has significantly increased investment in mental health and wellbeing in our public schools. Since 2015, more than \$290 million has been allocated for a range of wellbeing supports.

The Department of Education continues to strengthen its approach to supporting wellbeing in secondary schools. Through a number of targeted initiatives, the Department is working in partnership with schools to provide tailored support on wellbeing related issues. These are designed to meet the explicit needs of schools at specific points as they strive for continuous improvement.

The Department has developed professional learning resources to build staff capacity in both using the Wellbeing Framework and developing wellbeing approaches and programs. These will support schools meet the needs of all students. The development of trauma informed practice professional learning is just one example. The Department is also employing an additional 350 student support officers over four years so that every high school will have one.

In addition, the Department has established new partnerships with leading mental health organisations to support schools deliver best practice in prevention and early intervention. In partnership with Monash University and the Sax Institute, the Department has also developed a list of evidence based mental health and wellbeing programs. A planning template to help schools in identifying, planning and implementing wellbeing programs has also been developed.

The Department remains committed to its strategic goal that every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools. We will continue to support our schools achieve this goal.

Yours sincerely



Mark Scott AO  
**SECRETARY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
19 November 2020

## IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Wellbeing of secondary school students

RECOMMENDATION	Question/s from Audit Office	Response
<p>1a Integrate the Wellbeing Framework with the School Excellence Framework, and align other related wellbeing policies, such as behaviour and discipline policies, to achieve consistency</p>	<p>The Audit report found that some school leaders were unclear of the status and purpose of the Wellbeing Framework and that some schools had chosen not to complete the self-assessment tool.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you please provide an update on the proportion of schools explicitly using the Wellbeing Framework for Schools?</li> </ul>	<p>The Wellbeing Framework for Schools is an overarching framework that describes to schools what is valued as excellence in student wellbeing in NSW public schools. Schools assess their wellbeing approaches through the School Excellence Framework (SEF) self-assessment process.</p> <p>All schools are expected to have a planned approach to wellbeing. Schools draw on the Wellbeing Framework for Schools and the associated literature review and research to map the wellbeing needs of their school community.</p> <p>To support the introduction of the Wellbeing Framework for Schools, the Wellbeing Self-Assessment Tool was made available. Schools could choose to use this tool to assess their school's wellbeing approaches. The use of this tool was not mandated. As a part of the Department's response to the Audit recommendation to integrate the SEF and the Wellbeing Framework, the Wellbeing for School Excellence resource has been developed and made available to schools. This resource has replaced the original wellbeing self-assessment tool.</p> <p>Schools must complete a self-assessment each year against the SEF. Schools are required to provide evidence of their wellbeing approaches as part of the SEF self-assessment process.</p>

1b	Align other related wellbeing policies, such as behaviour and discipline policies, to achieve consistency	In regard to the alignment of related wellbeing policies, it is noted that the Department has reported the recommendation is delayed. Can you please provide an update on findings from the Department's 'Suspension Data Review'?	<p>The Department commissioned an analysis of suspension data from 2014-2018. The analysis showed that although the overall suspension rate in NSW public schools increased only marginally over the five years, vulnerable student cohorts are disproportionately likely to be suspended compared to their peers. This includes Aboriginal students, students with disability, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students in regional and remote areas.</p> <p>This analysis has informed the development of the draft Student Behaviour Strategy.</p>
2	Define a service model, and commensurate resourcing models, so that schools can better deliver wellbeing activities in a coordinated way	<p>The Audit Office commented that Recommendation 2 was made to address the <b>absence of a service model</b> describing how schools approach wellbeing, and suggested that the Department should develop a <b>clearer statement of a best practice</b> service model.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the Department addressed this core issue?</li> </ul>	<p>The Department has developed a service model of strategic support to meet school communities' specific needs in areas such as Wellbeing, Attendance, Literacy and Numeracy, and Curriculum.</p> <p>This model reflects best practice by enhancing the capacity of schools in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tailoring support to the individual school context,</li> <li>• building the capacity of staff through connecting them with knowledge, skills, and expertise of a state-wide team, and</li> <li>• applying a collaborative approach where school staff, Directors Educational Leadership, and Delivery Support personnel work together to implement strategies to assist schools on their improvement journey.</li> </ul>
3a	Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by: •addressing allocation cut offs in the formula to	<p>The Department noted that Recommendation 3a, regarding implementing measures to support the targeting of wellbeing, was partially completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has the reviewed allocation methodology specifically addressed the cut-</li> </ul>	<p>School counselling allocations are calculated on a three-year cycle to all schools. The 2019-2021 allocations for all schools have been determined using the methodology finalised by a Stakeholder Advisory Group and is based on student enrolment data and on indicators of student need.</p> <p>The Department is reviewing the methodology for allocating school counselling resources, including allocation cut offs. This review has commenced. The reviewed allocation methodology will be implemented for the commencement of the new triennial allocation cycle in 2022.</p>

	allocate school counsellors and psychologists to schools with growing enrolments and/or high needs	off formula to allocate school counsellors and psychologists effectively across schools of different sizes and capacity?	
3b	<p>Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•redesigning the workforce demand and supply forecasting to specifically identify counsellor/psychologists separately from general teaching positions.</li> </ul>	<p>In regard to Recommendation 3b, can the Department please provide updated supply and demand projections for school psychologists and counsellors? Specifically, whether there are expected to be sufficient numbers of qualified staff to meet the NSW Government's commitments made to 2022-23?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do forecasts identify needs for counsellors/psychologists in regional and rural areas?</li> </ul>	<p><u>Government commitments:</u></p> <p>The NSW Government's commitment to increase the school counselling service by an additional 100 positions is on track for delivery by July 2023. The first 25 positions for 2020/21 have been filled. The remaining 75 positions will be phased in with 50 positions in 2021/22 and 25 positions in 2022/23.</p> <p>In addition to external recruitment, scholarships provide a vital pipeline into the school counselling service.</p> <p>The Department has significantly expanded the school counsellor sponsorship program to retrain teachers as school counsellors. In addition, a tailored school psychologist training pathway has been developed in partnership with the University of Wollongong through a Master of Professional psychology program. A further training pathway will commence in 2021, through Charles Sturt University, targeting psychology graduates to work in rural and remote schools.</p> <p>There are currently 1,108.4 FTE school counselling service positions. As at 12 October 2020, 1,053.9 (95.1%) positions were filled and 54.5 FTE (4.9%) were vacant.</p> <p>It is projected that 204 counsellors and 7 psychologists will or have reached the average retirement age (63) in the next 2 years.</p> <p><u>Forecasting by area:</u></p>

			<p>The supply and demand data includes detail on all currently vacant, held, absent on leave/other duties and filled roles for each of the Operational Directorates. This data is aggregated from a school level and can therefore be identified at an operational area level.</p> <p>Need is identified from vacant positions plus a proportion of people likely to retire.</p>
4	<p>Consolidate any new funded policy initiatives into established evidence based programs, such as whole-school approaches, school counsellors and flexible funding for wellbeing</p>	<p>The Audit Office noted that the Department listed this Recommendation as completed and that it was positive to see that the Department had been developing evidence-based programs to present to schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the Department helping schools in navigating the wide variety of available programs and providers?</li> </ul>	<p>The Department partnered with the Sax Institute and Monash University to examine the international evidence base associated with mental health and wellbeing programs for schools.</p> <p>Using the results of this evidence review, two resources have been developed by the Department to help schools in identifying, planning and implementing wellbeing programs.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wellbeing Program Planning Template</b> The template helps wellbeing teams when they are considering implementing a wellbeing program by providing a process to review the content, evidence base and school practicalities of a program.</li> <li>• <b>Evidence Based Mental Health and Wellbeing Programs for Schools Table</b> The table includes a list of evidence-based programs that have been identified in the review by Monash University.</li> </ul> <p>The comprehensive evidence review by Monash University is also available for schools.</p> <p>These resources are available on the Department's website.</p>
5	<p>Integrate requirements to monitor wellbeing activities and</p>	<p>The Department's response indicates that SCOUT reports show data on indicators used to set school level wellbeing</p>	<p>Schools and Directors Educational Leadership have access to various wellbeing data dashboards through SCOUT including attendance and child wellbeing unit contact data referenced in 7b. As outlined in 7c (below) data relating to activity measures for the School Counselling Service can only be shared outside the School Counselling</p>

	<p>outcomes into current systems and platforms.</p>	<p>targets. This helps schools to monitor wellbeing outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What work has the Department done to <b>integrate requirements to monitor wellbeing activities</b>, including the operational indicators referenced in recommendations 7b and 7c.</li> </ul>	<p>Service in a highly aggregated form due to obligations relating to student privacy. The detailed data will be taken into consideration by leadership roles within the School Counselling Service as part of decision making to ensure adequate support for areas with high caseloads and emerging challenges</p> <p>The School Excellence Framework Self-assessment Survey (SEF S-aS) is an evidence-based tool that captures the impact of wellbeing programs on schools.</p> <p>The SEF S-aS is integrated within the School Planning and Reporting Online (SPaRO) software.</p> <p>SPaRO is available to schools through the Department of Education staff portal.</p> <p>Each year, schools complete the SEF S-aS tool to report the impact of wellbeing programs in their school.</p>
6	<p>Increase the use of quantifiable wellbeing improvement measures in school planning and reporting by assisting schools to design and use targets and benchmarks</p>	<p>The Department reported that it had completed this Recommendation, involving increasing the use of quantifiable well-being improvement measures in school planning and reporting by assisting schools to design and use targets and benchmarks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can the Department confirm when data from these targets is expected to be publicly reported?</li> </ul>	<p>Schools that take up the wellbeing target will report the target through the school's Strategic Improvement Plans. These will be finalised and uploaded to the school's website by the end of Term 1, 2021.</p> <p>All schools will be supported to reach their wellbeing targets. Schools will need to report on the achievement of their wellbeing target through their 2022 School Reports. Schools that do not reach their wellbeing targets in 2022 will be asked to review the support structures available at the school through their ongoing planning process.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the Department respond if schools do not meet targets?</li> </ul>	
7a	<p>include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trends in suspension numbers and rates against normative benchmarks, either NSW averages or like school comparators</li> </ul>	<p>In responding to Recommendation 7a, the Department notes it has made suspension reports available, showing comparisons across time in the same school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the Department using the suspension reports to investigate reasons for differences in suspension rates between schools with similar characteristics?</li> </ul>	<p>Schools have access to suspension data at the school level via Scout. Principals can view historical data (data from the previous years validated by CESE). Directors, Educational Leadership can use Scout to view data at system-level and school-level.</p> <p>The Department is designing an enhanced suspension dashboard which will allow Principals and Directors, Educational Leadership to view suspension data by school with various filters to support analysis. The dashboard is being designed in consultation with stakeholders and user acceptance testing will begin in late November 2020.</p>
7b	<p>Include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform</p>	<p>How is the Department using data on Child Wellbeing Unit contact rates to target resources to areas of greatest need?</p>	<p>The Director Educational Leadership Dashboards were made available at the start of Term 3, 2020 and are updated twice a term. This has expanded to now include the eight Executive Directors who are responsible for the Director's Educational Leadership.</p> <p>In 2020, data analysis was conducted around the current locations of the Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) positions and where the greatest areas of need are,</p>

	<p>school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student attendance, contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What proportion of schools chose to 'opt in' to attendance targets in 2020?</li> </ul>	<p>based on educational neglect reports. Over the next 12 months, further data analysis will occur based on referrals for Attendance Program Support.</p> <p>Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) Roll Checks – Three large bodies of work have been undertaken by the Department which required the HSLOs to conduct roll checks to ascertain how many students have not returned to school since 25 May 2020 (end of Learning From Home period). The Department collected the responses and provided recommendations based on any contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit (CWU) or Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) before the forms were then returned to the HSLOs. The HSLOs were able to provide support to the schools based on the feedback they were given. Subsequent roll checks have been held to ascertain if the interventions and recommendations have been implemented.</p> <p>1,149 schools have submitted attendance targets out of 2,055 schools that can submit targets. Some schools do not have targets as they are too small or don't have permanent student enrolments (e.g. environmental education schools). Small schools can have erratic attendance trend lines, as what would be a very small thing in a larger school, like 2 students being sick for 5 days, can cause a significant percentage shift in a school with only 20 students.</p>
7 C	<p>include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity measures for</li> </ul>	<p>Recommendation 7c:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What activity measures are to be included in the new online system and how will these be used to target resources to areas of greatest need?</li> </ul>	<p>The activity measures available in Online Student Counselling Records (OSCR) include the number of referrals; source of referrals; number of Disability Confirmation Sheets; and the types of confirmed disabilities.</p> <p>These can only be shared outside the School Counselling Service in a highly aggregated form due to obligations relating to student privacy. The detailed data will be taken into consideration by leadership roles within the School Counselling Service as part of decision making to ensure adequate support for areas with high caseloads and emerging challenges.</p> <p>A simplified version of OSCR for Student Support Officers will be developed in 2021. This system will capture duties undertaken by student support officers in their schools. This available dataset may be used to inform future resourcing and program development.</p>



	counsellors/psychologists and for identified student wellbeing positions, such as the Student Support Officer.		
8	Publicly report on the wellbeing key performance indicator 'Increased proportion of students reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school' including its design and 2018 performance as a baseline for measuring progress in wellbeing.	<p>The Department reported on student wellbeing in its 2019 Annual Report, together with other performance measures. The reporting included data on the 2018 baseline and 2022 target. It is noted that there was no consistent reporting of student wellbeing through school annual reports for 2019 (published in May 2020).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What proportion of schools chose to 'opt in' to the 2020 wellbeing target?</li> </ul>	<p>Schools which opt in will need to report on the achievement of their wellbeing target through their School Reports.</p> <p>As at 30 October 2020, 25% of eligible high schools have opted in to the centrally negotiated wellbeing target. A second round of target setting is now underway, the other eligible high schools continue to have the option of taking up this target until the end of Term 1, 2021.</p>