

Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety - Community safety in regional and rural communities – 24 February

Supplementary Questions

Department of Education

1. How does the Team Around a School and Team Within a School model work? How is it resourced?

Response

The Team Around a School (TAaS) is a coordinated system-wide approach comprised of school-based and non-school-based staff with various specialist skills.

There are 28 TAaS teams across the state. The TAaS service model is focused on:

- partnering with schools to provide additional targeted support to individual students
- assisting school teams to improve student learning and wellbeing practices
- strengthening school and staff initiatives.

Each TAaS works alongside teams within schools to share specialist knowledge, skills, and understanding in the areas of learning and wellbeing, disability and inclusion, mental health, behaviour, attendance and transition.

2. How are schools supported to develop partnerships with local allied health and social services? How are these partnerships managed? Is there a framework?

Response

The Department of Education's Specialist Allied Health and Behaviour Support Provider Scheme (the Scheme) supports schools that may need to engage specialist allied health services to ensure learning adjustments are appropriate and effective for students. Services available under this Scheme include occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, exercise physiology and specialist behaviour support. The Scheme includes prequalified providers that have met the necessary qualifications and requirements to deliver effective and appropriate support to students and staff.

The Team Around a School enables schools to develop partnerships with a range of interagency services to provide personalised support for students, including with allied health workers, specialists and other government agencies. Specialist positions in the teams, including Support and Interagency Coordinators, directly support schools to establish and maintain a sustainable network of interagency relationships.

3. The NSW Government's submission notes that 'specialised and alternative education settings' can provide support and interventions for students that have 'complex social and emotional needs'. What are these settings, and how many of them are regionally located?

Response

The Department of Education provides a range of support class options to support students with high support needs including:

- Support classes in mainstream schools and Schools for Specific Purposes for students with a mental health diagnosis and complex behaviour support needs.
- Support classes in mainstream schools and Schools for Specific Purposes for students with complex behaviour support needs.
- Schools for Specific Purposes with a behaviour and/or a social emotional learning support class focus.
- Tutorial centres/classes for students with complex behaviour support needs.

4. The Committee has heard that non-government/community service providers who work directly with at-risk children could play a key role in improving school attendance, such as collecting children and dropping them at school. However, community service providers told us there are communication issues with local schools about attendance. Do you think there is an opportunity to leverage community organisations to help improve school attendance rates?

Response

The Department of Education commissions community organisations to support improved student attendance, both directly and in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice. For example, the department's Perfect Presence program funds community organisations to provide students in Years 8-10 with support for their wellbeing, school attendance, and personal development.

5. What support is available for students who do not fit into the traditional mainstream school setting, who have been suspended or expelled, and/or are exiting juvenile detention?

Response

Students who are expelled are supported as per the Student Behaviour policy, section 3 of the procedures: [Suspension and expulsion procedures](#).

The department funds some community providers to support students who have been suspended, including through Perfect Presence program noted in response to question 4.

The department works with the Department of Communities and Justice to consider how the community organisations it commissions can support schools and students to achieve educational outcomes. The department also supports schools in understanding community supports in their area that may be suitable for their students.

The department and Youth Justice work collaboratively to support schools and students by preparing children and young people for their return to education and the community following their release from a Youth Justice centre. Both agencies implement transition programs to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge required for a successful transition. When an earliest release date is known, Youth Justice convenes a discharge conference to plan for a supported transition. Staff in schools in Youth Justice centres work with Youth Justice, the home school and Team Around a School to facilitate this process.

6. What impact does the remoteness of the school community have on what support is available and how accessible it is to students?

Response

The Department of Education seeks to ensure that regional, rural and remote schools have access to supports that meet their needs.

To ensure compliance with NESA curriculum requirements, teaching and learning resources for all new NSW syllabuses have been developed by the Department of Education. This comprehensive resource package is designed to be taught in all classrooms across the state, inclusive of rural and remote schools. The resources are accessible online with associated professional learning through our statewide staffrooms, which offer online professional learning for teachers, regardless of location.

Additionally, the department's Perfect Presence program supports 30 principal networks across NSW, 21 of which are regional or rural.

7. How do regional schools connect young people with alternative education pathways, such as work-based learning programs or on-country learning?

Response

A student's local public school, regardless of its geographic location in NSW, is best placed to support student learning needs. For students living in NSW who are isolated or whose special circumstances prevent them from attending school on a regular basis, the NSW Department of Education provides distance education. Distance education may also be available for those students unable to access specific curriculum in their local school. Some of these curriculum offerings include Vocational Education and Training (VET) options.

Additionally, the department operates a number of important programs that are designed to support student transitions into further work or training. These programs include:

- **Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP):** the program connects employers with schools to deliver bespoke opportunities for students to learn about training and career pathways, connect with employers, and get hands-on experience of local industries. In February 2024, the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education established RIEP as a permanent NSW Government service for schools and industry. The program has provided opportunities for over 250,000 students to connect directly with almost 4,000 employers across NSW to explore different career pathways.

Educational Pathways Program (EPP): the program provides support to identified schools, including 77 in regional, rural and remote NSW. A key aim of the program is to address skills shortages with targeted courses, career immersion activities and access to School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT) in these priority industries. Through the delivery of the Innovative Careers Education initiative that is part of the EPP, on-country learning opportunities have included a Cultural Exchange Program for First Nations students to travel to the New England North West region to participate in a week-long program of industry immersion activities and cultural connection opportunities.

8. Can you provide more information on the Back in the Game referral service?
 - a. How do local service providers work with TAFE NSW to deliver the service?
 - b. How does the service work with young people who have been suspended or expelled from local schools?
 - c. How do local service providers work with TAFE NSW to deliver the service?

Response

The Back in the Game (BIG) service providers have good working relationships with their local TAFE NSW. BIG services students in the school system who are disengaged from education. Get in the Game (GIG) is part of the program supporting young people who have entirely disengaged from the school system. Both BIG and GIG are part of the broader Get Back in the Game program.

The most prevalent interaction of the BIG program with TAFE NSW is through negotiating access to training for individual young people, supporting the transfer of those young people from schools into TAFE NSW, and providing wraparound support for the young person while they settle into their training. In some areas BIG service providers partner with TAFE to use their facilities for program delivery.

Service providers are strong advocates for the young people they work with and provide feedback locally to TAFE on the need for specific courses for those young people – particularly in rural/regional areas where course availability may be limited.

As the BIG program is a program that operates beyond the school gate, suspension and expulsion from school doesn't have any impact on the work of the BIG program. The service providers continue to work with the young person to overcome barriers and find them a pathway into education, employment and/or training.

9. How is the Connected Communities Strategy operating? (p12) GB
- d. How is the success of the Strategy monitored and reported on, and will it be expanded?
 - e. What work has the Ministerial working group completed to date?

Response

In 2023, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation and the University of Newcastle evaluated the Connected Communities Strategy. The evaluation sought to understand the experiences of stakeholders and communities, highlight success factors, challenges and barriers, with a focus on system-level factors.

Key recommendations included the development of a long-term continuation plan for the Connected Communities Strategy and the establishment of a ministerial working group to ensure cross-government collaborations that support Aboriginal students and families.

In September 2024 the NSW Government announced the extension of the Strategy for a further 10 years in all 33 Connected Communities schools. The Ministerial working group is now being established.

The evaluation report is available on the department's website:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/cese-evaluations/evaluation-of-the-expanded-connected-communities-strategy>.