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THE AUDIT OFFICE
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The Hon Grant McBride MP
Acting Chair
Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

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21 December 2009

Dear Mr McBride

Examination of Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report
Improving Literacy and Numeracy in NSW Public Schools

We have reviewed the submission provided by the Department of Education and Training concerning the recommendations in the above performance audit report.

Following tabling of the report, we were pleased that the Department of Education and Training accepted all of our recommendations.

The Department's submission indicates that it is making progress in implementing the recommendations.

Please find attached our comments on the progress reported in relation to each recommendation in our original report. We have not substantiated the submission.

In some instances, more information would be helpful to better understand what has been done to address our recommendations. In others, where the time target in the recommendation has not been fully achieved, the Department's timeline for completing the necessary actions would be helpful.

I plan to forward a copy of this correspondence to the Director-General of Education and Training for his information.

I am happy to provide any further assistance the Committee may need in completing its examination.

Yours sincerely

Peter Achterstraat
Auditor-General

Attachment

Noted
Proceed with reference

Recommendation	Reported Action	Comment
We recommend that the Department sharpens its focus on those individual students at risk, including:		
1) ensuring by July 2009 that schools use the *School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit* (SMART) to help understand their performance	▪ workshops for Principals on using SMART ▪ Smart made available to all teachers ▪ Smart to be installed on laptops for all secondary teachers along with a training video ▪ Smart training to be provided for low SES schools and schools identified for involvement	Need to monitor and assess % of schools actively using SMART.
2) expanding the literacy and numeracy assessment templates developed for the *Best Start* program to apply by December 2009 from kindergarten through to Year 10	▪ development of draft for K-6 in numeracy ▪ development of K-2 for literacy, with 3-6 well advanced.	Further work will be needed to develop, trial, evaluate, finalise and issue templates for use in schools through to Year 10.
3) developing by December 2009 a more systematic means of identifying and supporting the 'at risk' student, so as to facilitate early identification, assessment and targeting of resources	▪ prepared draft definition of 'at risk' students ▪ consulted with key groups to formalise proposed definition ▪ finalising definition as draft for broader departmental and stakeholder consultation	Further work will be needed to develop, trial, evaluate finalise and issue a tool for use in schools.
4) providing by July 2009 clear guidelines to support the development of individual learning plans and requiring such plans for all 'at risk' students	▪ scoping the elements of individual learning plans ▪ developing draft materials and consulting with key groups ▪ developing document *Working Together: Supporting at risk students in literacy and numeracy.* ▪ initiating work on document *Working Together: Developing individual learning plans.*	Further work will be needed to complete, finalise and issue the guidelines for use in schools. There will then need to be a requirement that the guidelines be used to complete learning plans for all 'at risk' students.
5) ensuring its new management systems are fully developed by December 2010 and	▪ some software has been developed for K-2 (only).	Systems will need to be developed for all students that track and analyse student performance, needs

quickly put to use to enable the effective tracking and analysis of student performance and student needs over time		and interventions over time.
6) working with other agencies to provide earlier identification, intervention and information sharing prior-to-school on children with learning difficulties	▪ scoping opportunities to identify children with additional learning needs ▪ investigating ways in which information gathered by other agencies, service providers about additional learning needs of children under school age can be shared with schools.	
We recommend that the Department more effectively targets its limited resources and support to the needs of individuals, including:		
7) systematically assessing student needs for literacy and numeracy support at the school and regional level	▪ providing specific level curriculum based assessment tools ▪ support document to be developed *Working Together: Assessing the additional learning needs of students*	Assessment tools need to be developed, trialled, evaluated, refined and issued to all schools, particularly those most at risk.
8) periodically surveying the adequacy of resources and support	▪ a survey of literacy and numeracy resources and support is being conducted	It would be interesting to learn more about the nature, extent and results of the survey, and also the planned schedule for future surveys.
9) providing by July 2009 better information for all schools on what additional instruction and support students should be given, what learning resources works best for their specific needs and what funding programs a school may be eligible for	▪ mapping and documenting the range of resources accessed by schools for teaching literacy and numeracy ▪ developing and finalising draft guide detailing materials for teachers that links specialist support and specialist resources for literacy and numeracy teaching across program areas ▪ support document to be developed *Working Together: Providing instruction, interventions and support*	This needs to link to the results of the assessment templates of recommendation 2, so providing a direct linkage between individual student needs and the necessary resources and support.
10) strengthening by December 2009 the	▪ identifying professional learning support available	It would be interesting to know the results from

literacy and/or numeracy teaching skills of teachers working with the lowest performing students, such as by accelerating its planned introduction of expert literacy and numeracy learning leaders, particularly those with expertise in teaching 'at risk' students	to support teachers in literacy and numeracy teaching • building capacity of regular classroom teachers and literacy/numeracy leaders to teach 'at risk' students with on line document *From Assessment to Programming* • developing and documenting professional learning and include in new support material *Working Together: Supporting at risk students in literacy and numeracy*	introduction of expert literacy and numeracy learning leaders.
11) undertaking more intensive monitoring and review of how under-performing schools are using their resources, what changes are being made, and what impact they are having	• focused support schools identified • review of school development policy and focused school support • developed materials to support monitoring of student progress • developed school self-evaluation support materials	While materials have been developed, it is not clear that there has been more intensive monitoring and review of how under-performing schools are using their resources, what changes are being made, and what impact they are having.
12) developing by July 2009 clear and consistent guidance on what intervention is needed, based on the results of a student's assessment, regardless of the overall performance or funding status of the student's school	• providing a guide to the steps to be taken when a student is not making progress against the continuums • support document to be developed *Working Together: Providing instruction, interventions and support*	
13) strengthening accountability arrangements by rationalising funding programs to more closely align with student needs, increasing quality assurance, and more clearly establishing authority and responsibility for such programs at the school and regional level	• developing the new *Working Together: Supporting at risk students in literacy and numeracy* document.	This does not address the recommendation, which is about strengthening accountability arrangements and aligning the overall resourcing model so that it more closely aligns to the needs and disadvantage of individual students.
14) providing by July 2009 more specific guidance to parents on what support students can	• support document to be developed *Working Together: Working in partnership with parents*	

expect and how they can be involved in helping schools		
We recommend that the Department more rigorously reviews its programs and the performance of low achieving schools, including:		
15) ensures that all regions and schools work together to set explicit targets for literacy and numeracy attainment by December 2008	• new state and regional targets for At and Below Minimum Standard for reading and numeracy determined • new state and regional targets for Proficient for reading and numeracy determined • school target setting tool to be updated and distributed to schools	It is not clear from this that targets have been, or will be, set for individual schools.
16) rationalising and consolidating the programs that aim to improve literacy, and (separately) the programs that aim to improve numeracy	• mapping and profiling current programs to identify overlaps and gaps • will then plan action and implementation	
17) establishing at the outset of such programs the expected impact over time on literacy or numeracy outcomes	• developing procedures by which schools implementing programs identify current performance and set improvement target.	Where such programs extend over a range of schools, the Department needs to establish: • target audience • expected outcomes • performance indicators • program evaluation, including longitudinal studies.
18) monitoring program performance with a suite of performance indicators and with studies of individual students over time	• identifying indicators for each program • will then develop procedures by which indicators are to be monitored and reported	
19) leading a whole of government assessment by July 2009 of the value of strengthening transition to school support and programs in communities with the poorest performing public schools	• work with other government agencies to determine value of strengthening transition to school programs for children in disadvantaged areas.	It would be helpful to know more about the results of the review and what actions the Department intends to take.