

**Submission  
No 7**

**EXAMINATION OF AUDITOR-GENERAL'S PERFORMANCE AUDIT  
REPORTS FEBRUARY 2019 - JULY 2019**

**Organisation:** Department of Education

**Date Received:** 29 June 2020



Mr Greg Piper  
Chair, Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee  
Parliament of New South Wales  
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DGL20/336

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Dear Mr Piper

Thank you for your letter of 26 May 2020, seeking the Department of Education's response to the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report *Wellbeing of Secondary School Students*.

An update on the Department's implementation of the recommendations from the Audit Report is attached.

The Department remains committed to its goal that every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools. Wellbeing contributes significantly to the learning and other life outcomes of children and young people.

The NSW Government has invested more than \$290 million since 2015/2016 to support the wellbeing and mental health of students.

In 2019, an additional \$88 million has been allocated, over four years, to provide every public high school with two dedicated professionals so that students have access to vital mental health and wellbeing support. This funding will enable employment of up to 100 additional school counselling staff so that every public high school will have full-time psychology support on site. The Department is looking at ways to provide regular and timely access through a dedicated fly-in fly-out telepsychology service in rural and remote NSW schools.

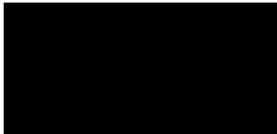
An additional 350 student support officers will also be employed, enabling every high school to have a full-time student support officer to provide an access point for students who might be experiencing issues such as bullying, stress, peer or family conflict.

The Department is committed to providing school staff with the most up-to-date, evidence-based training. The training will equip them to effectively recognise, support and refer students showing signs of mental distress through extending its existing partnerships with leading mental health organisations including headspace, Black Dog Institute and Project Air for Schools, University of Wollongong.

In addition, new partnerships with organisations such as batyr and the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University, will provide secondary school students with access to the batyr@school program and Chilled Out Online program to support student's mental health.

The Department has also made a range of wellbeing data available to principals and Director's, Educational Leadership, to better inform planning about wellbeing in schools and across schools in local networks.

Yours sincerely



Mark Scott AO  
**SECRETARY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

25 June 2020

## IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Wellbeing of secondary school students

	RECOMMENDATION	ACCEPTED OR REJECTED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN (taken from initial response)	DUE DATE	STATUS (completed, on track, delayed) and COMMENT
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	Supported	The School Excellence Framework supports all schools in their pursuit of excellence. Wellbeing has been integrated into the updated School Excellence Framework and, from the beginning of 2019, all schools have been able to use the updated version. The department is working to simplify and align the Wellbeing Framework for Schools with the School Excellence Framework to support schools in understanding the systems requirements for wellbeing	Dec 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>Following consultation across the Department, the 'Wellbeing for School Excellence tool' has been developed. This tool aligns shared measures of excellence from both frameworks to explicitly show how wellbeing approaches align with elements throughout the three domains of Learning, Teaching and Leading as outlined in the School excellence Framework.</p> <p>This tool may be included in resources to support the Departments new School Excellence in Action – External Validation and planning process.</p> <p>The tool has been integrated into recently released Wellbeing modules professional learning for school staff.</p> <p>This tool is on track for publishing on department intranet on wellbeing pages in August 2020.</p>

1b	align other related wellbeing policies, such as behaviour and discipline policies, to achieve consistency	Supported	In addition, the department will scope and review a range of policies and frameworks related to wellbeing, behaviour and discipline so they are better aligned, and schools can use them to inform wellbeing practices. This work has commenced and we are reviewing the school attendance and discipline policies in consultation with school principals, staff and a range of stakeholders. The updated policies will provide consistent requirements and approaches for schools.	Dec 2019	<p><b>Delayed</b></p> <p>The creation of the Behaviour Strategy (including updated discipline and suspension procedures) has been informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Telethon Kids Institute (TKI) report commissioned by Department in 2018.</li> <li>the 2017 Ombudsman's Inquiry into Behaviour Management in schools</li> <li>the NSW Department of Education's 'Suspension data review'.</li> </ul> <p>The Behaviour Strategy aligns with the Wellbeing Framework for Schools using consistent language and approaches such as the care continuum (all, some, few) to support students. On-ground models of support and a suite of professional learning are currently being developed to support students' behaviour and wellbeing (in alignment with the Wellbeing Framework).</p> <p>Further consultation is planned with key stakeholders regarding the revised procedures for suspension and associated models of support.</p> <p>The finalisation of these documents is expected in the next few months with a policy roll-out for Week 1, 2021</p>
2	Define a service model, and commensurate resourcing models, so that schools can better deliver wellbeing activities in a coordinated way	Supported	<p>The department is working to improve its approach to supporting schools. We are doing this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving our systems so that we can track and monitor our engagement with schools and the impact this has.</li> <li>Working in partnership with schools to provide</li> </ul>	December 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>The Department has recently introduced a service management system (CSAW – Collaboration-Support-Analytics-Workflows) within School Services that is consistently recording engagement with schools and collecting information about student support requests and service delivery. Since the 30 March 2020, more than 1737 schools have been provided with operational or responsive</p>

			<p>tailored support on the areas that are of most importance to them. In 2019 we will provide support to 471 schools and 43 will be working on wellbeing related initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will be reviewing the program funding and positions in place to support elements of the Wellbeing Framework to determine whether this funding should be provided more flexibly to schools to support their local wellbeing priorities.</li> </ul>		<p>tailored support across 7,938 record counts in the system.</p> <p>As of 1 June 2020, 594 schools are engaging with School Services teams to participate in strategic tailored support to improve student outcomes. This support is co-designed with DELs and Principals through an Agreement of Service. Of these schools 152 will be engaging in wellbeing related professional learning and initiatives.</p> <p>Funding has been reallocated from the previous four cost centres arrangement to a state-wide Wellbeing portfolio team. This will allow funding to be more flexibly allocated to schools to support their wellbeing activities.</p>
3a	Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by: •addressing allocation cut offs in the formula to allocate school counsellors and psychologists to schools with growing enrolments and/or high needs	Supported	<p>The Department is implementing measures that will provide significant enhancements in wellbeing resources for high schools. We are doing this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employing up to 100 additional school counselling staff over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) so that every high school will have full time school counselling support on site.</li> <li>an additional 350 student support officers will be employed over four years (2019-2020 to 2021-2022) so that every high school will have a student support officer.</li> </ul>	March 2020	<p><b>Partially Complete</b></p> <p>The Department is increasing wellbeing and mental health support to all NSW high schools by establishing up to 100 additional school counselling positions and 350 student support officer positions by July 2023.</p> <p>The new school counselling positions will be phased in with 25 positions in 2020/21; 50 positions in 2021/22 and 25 positions in 2022/23.</p> <p>23.4 of the initial 25 positions have already been recruited</p> <p>220 high schools already have a full time school counselling allocation. 69 high schools will receive an increased allocation for July 2020.</p>

			Addressing allocation cut-offs in the formula to allocate school counsellors and psychologists.		School counselling allocations are calculated on a three-year cycle. 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. The reviewed allocation methodology will be implemented for the commencement of the new allocation cycle in 2022.
3b	Implement measures to support the targeting of wellbeing resources by: •redesigning the workforce demand and supply forecasting to specifically identify counsellor/psychologists separately from general teaching positions.	Supported	Demand forecasting will initially focus on attrition rates as well as forecasted attrition rates based on the workforce demographics and geographic need.  In addition, data generated from the department's School Services strategic initiatives project will be used to inform key areas of need in schools, and shape future resources and training requirements. More broadly the department is undertaking work on its staffing methodology and how it can best support student outcomes.	March 2020	<b>Completed</b>  Reporting on school psychologists and counsellors is available. This includes current positions, counsellors in training, separation and leave rates. This provides the basis for supply and demand.
4	Consolidate any new funded policy initiatives into established evidence based programs, such as whole-school approaches, school counsellors and flexible funding for wellbeing	Supported	The department is committed to providing evidenced based programs and services for our schools and has work underway to address this recommendation through new funded initiatives. An example is the NSW state budget investment of an additional \$88 million over four years	From 2019 Onwards	<b>Completed</b>  Through the NSW Government investment of an additional \$88 million over four years (2019-20 to 2022-23) the Department is recruiting an additional 100 FTE school counselling service positions. The new school counselling positions will be phased in with 25 positions in 2020/21; 50 positions in 2021/22 and 25 positions in 2022/23. 23.4 of the initial 25 positions have already been recruited

			<p>(2019-20 to 2021-22) to provide every public high school with both a school counsellor/school psychologist and a student support officer so that students have access to vital mental health and wellbeing support. These staff will be trained to deliver evidenced based interventions in high schools.</p> <p>As part of this investment, the Department of Education will also partner with other government agencies and leading mental health organisations to support schools and specialist staff in delivering evidence-based prevention and early intervention programs.</p>		<p>The Department will also employ 350 additional student support officers in NSW secondary schools, with funding to employ 183 of these positions commencing in July 2020. Recruitment is underway for these positions with anticipated entry on duty from July 2020.</p> <p>Also, through the NSW Government' \$88 million election commitment, the Department of Education is partnering with leading mental health organisations to support schools in delivering best practice prevention and early intervention in mental health support.</p> <p>The Department of Education is committed to providing school staff with the most up-to-date, evidence-based training to equip them to effectively recognise, support and refer students showing signs of mental distress through extending existing partnerships with the Black Dog Institute, the University of Wollongong and NSW Ministry of Health. Programs include Project Air Strategy for Schools and Youth in Distress: Managing Suicidality and Self-harm. New training through the Black Dog Institute includes online workshops and a toolkit to further develop skill and expertise of school counselling staff to support students with anxiety and depression.</p> <p>Through a new partnership with headspace, the Department is offering staff and school community members Schools and Families Enhancing Minds (SAFEMinds). This face to face and online training, resources and tools, based on the latest research will enhance the capacity of school communities to support the mental health and wellbeing of students.</p>
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					<p>The Department has also engaged the SAX Institute and Monash University to undertake an evidence check of wellbeing programs for schools and produce a user-friendly guide for school staff to guide choice of programs to suit schools in their planned approach to wellbeing.</p> <p>The Department continues to work with the Black Dog Institute to deliver Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM), a universal mental health program and suicide prevention program for young people aged 14 – 16 years. Preliminary findings from research by Black Dog Institute in NSW have shown that students participating in YAM report lower levels of depression and suicidal ideation up to 6 months after completing the program. They also report greater intentions to seek help for a personal or emotional problem up to 6 months after completing YAM.</p> <p>New partnerships with batyr, and Macquarie University will provide secondary school students with access to the, batyr@schools program and Chilled Out Online program.</p> <p>Batyr is a mental health organisation, created by young people for young people. Batyr runs preventative mental health programs for high school students in years 9 to 12 that aim to reduce the stigma around mental health and educate and empower young people to reach out for support. 2017 research showed that the batyr Standard School Program was successful in reducing the stigma young people had towards others experiencing mental health issues, and an increase in willingness to seek help from professional sources for mental health issues and suicidal thoughts.</p>
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					Chilled Out is an interactive online, skills-based program for young people aged 13-17 years that teaches strategies to better manage anxiety. Results show most young people who complete the program experience significant improvements, with decreases in worry, fear, family stress and life interference.
5	Integrate requirements to monitor wellbeing activities and outcomes into current systems and platforms.	Supported	School planning and reporting processes will be reviewed to explore inclusion of explicit student wellbeing targets and related monitoring and reporting as an element in current systems and platforms.	From 2019 onwards	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>SCOUT reports show data on the three indicators used to set the wellbeing target for schools and to measure the Department's strategic plan goal that 'Every student is known, valued and cared for'. These indicators are drawn from the Tell Them From Me student survey.</p> <p>The wellbeing targets also forms part of the target setting tool in SCOUT.</p> <p>School-level wellbeing targets are based on a school's position relative to the state average baseline. There is no additional uplift based on disadvantage.</p> <p>Tell Them From Me wellbeing measures are in SCOUT, and a Target is available for schools, however this is an optional target. It will become mandatory at the end of 2020.</p>
6	Increase the use of quantifiable wellbeing improvement measures in school planning and reporting by assisting schools to design and use targets and benchmarks	Supported	School planning and reporting is a priority for the department. The department's 50 Principal School Leadership (PSL) positions as part of their role will support schools to set appropriate targets and benchmarks, and include wellbeing improvement	Dec 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>The Department has developed a wellbeing target based on Tell Them From Me. All high schools have been informed of their individual school based target. All schools have the opportunity of using the targets to track the wellbeing of their students over time.</p>

			measures as an area of focus for support.		
7a	include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership: •Trends in suspension numbers and rates against normative benchmarks, either NSW averages or like school comparators	Supported in principle	<p>Directors Educational Leadership have access to suspension data to inform school planning and improvement through a dashboard.</p> <p>The department is currently working to improve the visibility of data, including suspension data, to better inform planning in schools and across schools in local networks.</p> <p>The work is complex with a number of factors impacting on the capacity to identify normative benchmarks for all schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• privacy legislation requires the department to ensure that any presentation of suspension data on dashboards protects the privacy of individual students</li> <li>• developing reliable trends and normative benchmarks is difficult due to the volatility of suspension data in many schools from year to year. This is a particular issue for small schools that have few suspensions. While suspension data will</li> </ul>	Dec 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>Suspension reports have been available in Scout for more than 12 months. These allow for comparison across time within the same school by different characteristics (scholastic year, gender, aboriginality, suspension type, suspension duration).</p> <p>The Wellbeing indicator was also reported on in the 2019 Department of Education Annual Report.</p>

			continue to be included in dashboards for directors for these schools, performance reporting and normative benchmarks would not be appropriate for small schools or schools with very few suspensions.		
7b	Include the following key operational indicators in the performance dashboards which inform school improvement and oversight by Directors Educational Leadership: •Student attendance, contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit	Supported	<p>The department has been working on ways to provide important data to Directors to guide their planning and support for schools.</p> <p>The department's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has developed a Directors Portal which shows attendance rates and the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time for each school, using data harvested from the department's IT platform (known as ebs: central).</p> <p>For high schools the data is presented for each term, by years 7-10 and 11-12. The portal was released to directors at the beginning of Term 2 2019 and includes comparison of 2019 attendance rates with 2018 rates.</p>	Dec 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>The Department is committed to developing a dashboard to provide Director's Educational Leadership with access to high level Child Wellbeing data to inform school improvement.</p> <p>The data will be provided per term (not live as remediation to ensure data accuracy is required) in the format of a dashboard that is accessible via SCOUT</p> <p>The type of data available will detail Child Wellbeing Unit contact rates for each Director Educational Leadership.</p> <p>This method enables the Child Wellbeing Unit to maintain visibility over who accesses such data, the use and content given the sensitive nature and commentary required to interpret it.</p> <p>It will also enable the Child Wellbeing Unit to provide school level data that is exclusively visible to individual DELs.</p> <p>The planning and development of the dashboards is now complete and dashboards will be available to Directors, Educational Leadership from the beginning of Term 3 2020.</p>

			<p>The Department's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation is developing school level targets for the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time.</p> <p>The department's Child Wellbeing Unit currently provides Executive Directors and Directors, Educational Leadership a range of data around contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit.</p>		<p>Attendance targets are in available SCOUT. These targets are currently optional for schools in 2020, but will become mandatory for schools in 2021.</p>
7C	<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 counsellors/psychologists and for identified student wellbeing positions, such as the Student Support Officer.</li> </ul>		<p>Planning for the introduction of a new online system for the school counselling service is underway.</p> <p>A 'user group' has identified detailed business requirements for the system which includes reporting functions that capture key activity measures for school counsellors/psychologists.</p> <p>We are employing an additional 350 Student Support Officers over four years (2019-20 to 2021-22) so that every public high school will have a student support officer.</p> <p>The student support officers will be provided high level training, resources and tools to identify and deliver evidence-</p>	Dec 2019	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>A comprehensive design, development and delivery plan has been completed.</p> <p>Pilot activities will commence in August 2020 and conclude in December 2020 with representatives across the state.</p> <p>Implementation of the new online system will be staggered across Terms 1, 2 and 3 2021.</p>

			based wellbeing initiatives and activity measures.		
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.	Supported with comment	The department will report on the wellbeing indicator in its 2019 Annual Report which will be published in May 2020. This will align with the department's annual reporting cycle and ensure the wellbeing indicator is reported along with other performance measures.	Dec 2019	<b>Completed</b>  Schools publicly report on the wellbeing of their students through their school plan which are made available on each school's website. A transitional process has been implemented, and schools can opt in to the wellbeing target in 2020 which will then be reflected in the 2020 school plan. All schools will include this component in their reporting from 2021.