

Inquiry into children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings

Response to Question on Notice

Question

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a couple of questions for the Ombudsman. I wanted to ask two questions about data. The first is in relation to your submission, where you said that in the last two years there were, I think, 580 actionable complaints about the DOE. I'm curious—and you can take it on notice if you need to—about whether that kind of amount, or number, over that period of time is higher than usual or lower. Are there any trends in terms of that dataset and the number of complaints coming through your organisation?

PAUL MILLER: We might take it on notice. But to give a kind of intuitive response. I don't think it's radically out of kilter with historical numbers, at least in the sense that no-one has raised with me that the number of complaints about education are dramatically higher than in the last two years than they have been in the past or, contrariwise, that they're dramatically lower. I don't know if there's anything—

JACQUELINE FREDMAN: No, I don't have anything to add.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you can provide a few more years of data for the Committee's interest, that would be fantastic.

Answer

Table 1 below shows actionable complaints received about the Department of Education (including public schools) from 2017 to 2023.

An actionable complaint is a complaint that we are authorised by legislation to receive and, if necessary, to investigate under the *Ombudsman Act 1974*.

Table 1: Actionable complaints received about DoE (including schools) 2017 to 2023 (calendar years)

Year	Total
2017	394
2018	359
2019	344
2020	237
2021	229
2022	270
2023	307
Total	2,140

The following is noted about the above data:

- Total numbers exclude complaints about TAFE NSW, TAFE Digital, NSW Education Standards Authority, Early Childhood Education Directorate, Training Services NSW, and Schools Infrastructure.

- Total numbers exclude complaints relating to functions no longer in the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction including the employment-related child protection Reportable Conduct Scheme.
- In [our submission to the Committee](#) we reported receiving 580 complaints over the last 2 years whereas the total above shows we received 577. Minor changes in our data occur from time-to-time for reasons including data quality checks.
- The number of actionable complaints about DoE (including schools) received between 2017 and 2023 was highest in 2017 (394) and lowest in 2021 (229).

Between 2020 and 2021 actionable complaints about DoE decreased compared to previous years. However, this decrease was generally consistent with lower numbers of complaints we received across the board during this period that covered the beginning (and escalation of) the COVID-19 pandemic, including lockdowns in NSW.