

School education: An overview of challenges and reforms

Key issues for the 58th Parliament

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Key points

- Funding on school education has increased over the last decade but disparities persist across school sectors. In 2023, NSW public schools will be funded to 92% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), while non-government schools will receive 103% of their SRS funding.
- Despite the overall increase in funding, some measures of student achievement (such as PISA) have declined, while others (such as NAPLAN) have remained relatively constant.
- Efforts to improve student achievement can be informed by an extensive body of research that has identified more than 300 individual factors that have an impact on achievement.
- The School Success Model has replaced the Local Schools Local Decisions policy. The new policy aims to provide greater departmental support, oversight and accountability.
- Major curriculum reform has commenced and is expected to be complete by 2027. The reform is principally designed to encourage depth, rather than breadth, of learning.
- There is overcrowding of public schools in specific locations due to infrastructure shortages and increased enrolments. Efforts to build, maintain and upgrade infrastructure are ongoing.
- There are teacher shortages in specific locations and subjects; as well as concerns about initial teacher education, professional standards, working conditions and salaries.

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1. Introduction

School education is vital for the personal development and prospects of students, for the economic prosperity of the state, and for fostering positive social and cultural outcomes. Despite attracting large and increasing amounts of funding, school education in NSW faces wide-ranging challenges. These challenges relate to funding disparities, declining or stagnant student achievement, school overcrowding, curriculum design, teaching standards, teacher shortages and teachers' working conditions. These issues have been examined in detail by governments, agencies, committees, researchers, academics and teachers. Multiple solutions have been proposed.

Resolution of the challenges facing school education is a direct concern for parents of children attending schools across the state. But the school education system is complex and resolving these challenges is not straightforward. As such, school education will be the subject of ongoing policy focus and continued parliamentary scrutiny and debate.

This paper provides an overview of school education in NSW, the major challenges it faces and the reforms that have been implemented to address those challenges. The paper discusses the:

- Goals of school education
- Structural, legislative and policy foundations of school education
- Funding arrangements for schools, including funding trends over the last 10 years
- Targets used to drive improvements in school education outcomes
- Factors which have been shown to influence student achievement
- Review of the curriculum and resulting reforms
- Efforts to improve teaching standards
- Concerns about teacher shortages and teachers' working conditions.

2. What are the goals of school education?

Identifying the goals of school education initially appears straightforward. But this can be a contested area and decisions about the goals of school education have widespread implications for the way in which the education system is structured, funded and operated.

In 1902 philosopher and educator John Dewey captured the essence of 2 key goals of school education – the academic goal and the humanistic goal – and the tension that can arise between them:

One school fixed its attention upon the importance of the subject-matter of the curriculum as compared with the contents of the child's own experience. Not so, says the other school. The child is the starting point, the centre, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. Not knowledge, but self-realization is the goal.¹

In addition to these 2 goals, school education also has economic, societal and cultural goals. Economic goals include developing an educated and skilled workforce. Societal goals include fostering national identity and shared values, such as democracy and the rule of law. Cultural goals include fostering religious, secular, artistic, sporting and community activities. The academic, humanistic, economic, societal and cultural goals of school education are reflected, both explicitly and implicitly, in the [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Declaration](#), the [National Education Reform Agreement](#), the [Australian Education Act 2013 \(Cth\)](#) and the [Education Act 1990 \(NSW\)](#). These documents provide the framework for the structure, funding and operation of the education system in Australia and NSW.

2.1 The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration (the declaration) was signed by all education ministers in 2019 and has 2 goals:

- **Goal 1:** The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity
- **Goal 2:** All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Goal 1 promotes the academic, humanistic, societal and cultural goals of school education. Academically, the Declaration states that Australian governments commit to provide all young Australians with access to a 'high-quality education' that is 'recognised

¹ Cited by SB Kaufman (ed), Introduction, *Twice Exceptional: Supporting and educating bright and creative students with learning difficulties*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p 1.

internationally for delivering high quality learning outcomes.² From a humanistic perspective, Goal 1 also includes 'providing varied, challenging, and stimulating learning experiences and opportunities that enable all learners to explore and build on their individual abilities, interests, and experiences.'³ Goal 1 also supports societal and cultural goals by promoting the value of equity and the development of a 'cohesive society that values, respects and appreciates different points of view and cultural, social, linguistic and religious diversity.'⁴ This includes supporting all school education sectors.

Goal 2 promotes all 5 of the goals of school education. For instance, it seeks to develop students who:

- Have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy as the foundation for learning
- Have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing
- Are confident and motivated to reach their full potential
- Have an understanding of Australia's system of government, its histories, religions and culture
- Are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life by connecting with their community and contributing to local and national conversations
- Have the confidence and capability to pursue learning throughout life, leading to enjoyable, fulfilling and productive employment
- Are well prepared for their potential life roles as friends, family, community and workforce members.⁵

2.2 The National School Reform Agreement

The current [National School Reform Agreement](#) commenced on 1 January 2019 and will expire on 31 December 2023.⁶ The objective of the Agreement is that Australian schooling provides a 'high quality' and 'equitable' education for all students.⁷ Meeting the objective of the Agreement requires improvement in the academic achievement of all students

² Education Council, [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), December 2019, p 5.

³ Education Council, [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), December 2019, p 5.

⁴ Education Council, [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), December 2019, p 5.

⁵ Education Council, [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), December 2019, p 6-8.

⁶ Australian Government Department of Education, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 18.

⁷ Australian Government Department of Education, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 34.

(academic goal), including priority equity cohorts (societal goal).⁸ It also requires all students to be engaged in their schooling (humanistic goal) and all students to gain the skills they need to transition to further study and/or work and life success (economic and humanistic goals).⁹

2.3 Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)

In its preamble, the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth) states that the Parliament of Australia acknowledges that education:

- Is the foundation of a skilled workforce and creative community (economic, cultural and humanistic goals)
- Critical for Australia's future prosperity (economic goal)
- Prepares students for full participation in society, both in employment and in civic life (economic and societal goals)
- Has a role to play in overcoming social and economic disadvantage (societal and economic goals).¹⁰

2.4 Education Act 1990 (NSW)

The *Education Act 1990* (NSW) defines the goals of school education in broad terms that include:

- Assisting each child to achieve their educational potential (academic goal)
- Fostering the intellectual, social and moral development of students (humanistic goal)
- Promoting a high standard of education in government schools, which is free of charge and without discrimination on the basis of sex, race or religion (societal goal)
- Mitigating educational disadvantages arising from the child's gender or from geographic, economic, social, cultural, linguistic or other causes (societal goal)
- Providing an education that promotes family and community values (cultural and societal goals)
- Providing students with access to opportunities for further study, work or training (economic goal)

⁸ Council of Australian Governments, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 35.

⁹ Council of Australian Governments, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 35.

¹⁰ [Preamble](#) to the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth).

- Preparing students for employment and full and active participation as members of the community (economic, cultural and societal goals).¹¹

2.5 Multiple goals require multiple measures

The multiple goals of school education require multiple measures to assess performance. This is the approach that has been adopted in NSW. The multiple measures and targets that have been introduced are discussed in section 6 and set out in appendices 1 to 4.

¹¹ *Education Act 1990* (NSW), [section 6](#).

3. The different school sectors

School education in NSW is not a single, unified, system. It is comprised of distinct sectors, which can be broadly classified as government and non-government schools, or more narrowly classified as government, Catholic and independent schools. The categorisation of NSW schools into 3 sectors is a product of the historical development of the state and is reflected in the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).¹²

3.1 Statistical overview

Table 1 sets out the most recent data on the number of NSW schools by sector.¹³ In August 2022 there were 2,939 schools in NSW; of these 69% were government schools, 20% were Catholic schools and 11% were independent schools.¹⁴ Of interest is the different profile in the 3 school sectors, with independent schools far more likely to have combined primary and secondary schools (76% for independent schools, compared to 3% for government and 6% for Catholic schools).

Table 1: Number of schools by level and sector, NSW, August 2022

School level	Government	Catholic	Independent
Primary	1,602	420	64
Secondary	369	129	11
Combined	66	34	244
Total schools by sector	2,037 (69%)	583 (20%)	319 (11%)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Schools](#), Table 35b.

Figure 1 sets out the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students by sector from August 2013 to August 2022, and the percentage increase in FTE students per sector over that ten-year period. From 2013 to 2022, the total number of FTE students increased by 87,405 to 1,241,564. In both actual and percentage terms, the growth in FTE students was largest in

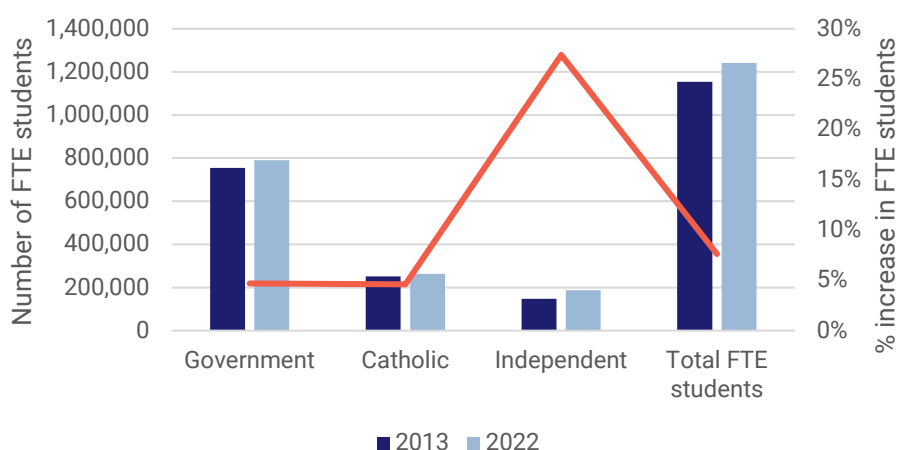
¹² [Part 6](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) provides for the establishment, operation and closure of government schools, while [Part 7](#) provides for the registration, operation and cancellation of registration of non-government schools. Part 7 also provides for the registration, operation and cancellation of registration of home schooling, which is not further discussed in this paper. For more information on home schooling, see: NSW Education Standards Authority, [Home schooling data reports relating to 2021](#), April 2022.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Schools](#), released 15 February 2023.

¹⁴ This figure excludes 181 special schools, which enrol students with: mental or physical disability or impairment, slow learning ability, social or emotional problems, or students who are in custody, on remand or in hospital: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools methodology, [Explanatory notes](#), 15 February 2023.

independent schools (27%), followed by government schools (4.7%) and Catholic schools (4.6%).¹⁵

Figure 1: FTE students by school sector, NSW, August 2013 and August 2022



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Schools](#), Table 43a.

Table 2 sets out the number of FTE teaching staff in the three school sectors. As at August 2022 there were 91,373 teaching staff across the three school sectors; of these 61% worked in the government sector, 21% worked in the Catholic sector and 18% worked in the independent sector.

Table 2: FTE teaching staff by school level and sector, NSW, August 2022

School level	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
Primary	31,936	8,359.3	6,196.4	46,491.7
Secondary	23,941.1	10,846.3	10,094.1	44,881.5
Total	55,877.1	19,205.6	16,290.5	91,373.2

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Schools](#), Table 51a.

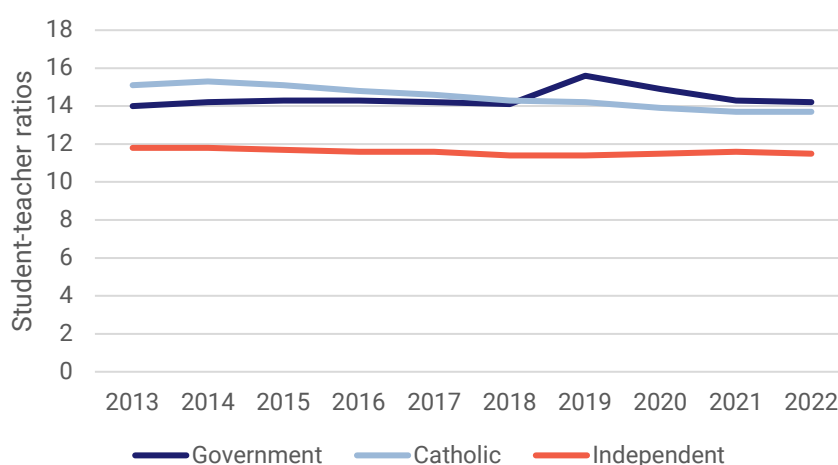
Figure 2 provides data on NSW student-teacher ratios by school sector. From 2013 to 2022, independent schools had the lowest ratios. Before 2018 Catholic schools had the highest ratios but now have slightly lower ratios compared to government schools. A lower student-teacher ratio means there are fewer students per teacher and, potentially, smaller class sizes. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) notes that

¹⁵ For a discussion of this issue, see: L Carroll and C Harris, [Parents flock to private schools amid public system exodus](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 February 2023. Note that this article uses data on full-time and part-time enrolments, whereas Figure 1 presents data on the number of FTE students.

ratios, by themselves, 'are only approximate indicators of actual class size'.¹⁶ That point is also made by the OECD, which further noted:

... there is no consensus on what the best ratio of students to teachers should be at different students' ages, but there is wide agreement that younger children need more time and interaction with teachers for a quality education ...¹⁷

Figure 2: FTE student-teacher ratios, by sector, all levels, NSW, August 2013–2022



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Schools](#), Table 53a.

3.2 Establishment and regulation of schools

In NSW the Minister for Education may establish a public school in any location if the minister is satisfied that a sufficient number of students will regularly attend the school and the school will comply with its regulatory requirements.¹⁸ It is the role of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to monitor and advise the minister on whether public schools comply with their regulatory requirements.¹⁹

NESA considers applications for the initial registration of new non-government schools and provides the minister with a written report that includes a recommendation on whether the non-government school should be registered.²⁰

The distinction between Catholic schools and independent schools relates to their mode of registration. The Catholic school sector comprises schools that are registered as members

¹⁶ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, [National Report on Schooling in Australia 2021](#), 2023, p 26.

¹⁷ OECD, Education GPS, [Class size and student-teacher ratio](#), n.d., last updated 3 October 2022.

¹⁸ [Section 27](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁹ [Section 27A](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

²⁰ [Section 50](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

of a single Catholic school system (Catholic Schools NSW).²¹ Independent schools can be registered independently or as part of another system.²² The minister makes a determination on the application under [section 51](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). The initial registration of a non-government school is provisional and can be for a maximum period of 12 months.²³ NESA also makes recommendations to the minister about the renewal of registrations.²⁴ Registrations can be renewed by the minister under [section 55](#) or cancelled under [section 59](#), depending on whether the non-government school is complying with its registration requirements.

The key regulatory requirements for schools in all three sectors are essentially the same. Each sector must comply with the requirements set out in [section 47](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW), which include:

- Financial viability
- Adequate educational facilities
- That people responsible for the school satisfy a fit and proper person test
- Having proper governance procedures in place
- Teaching staff having the necessary experience and qualifications
- A safe and supportive environment for students, including through policies that provide for the welfare of students
- Policies on discipline that do not permit the corporal punishment of students
- Teaching of the minimum primary and/or secondary curricula (as set out in sections [8](#) and [10-12](#) of the Act).²⁵

The minister may close a government school in accordance with [section 28](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). One of the requirements prescribed by section 28 is the establishment of a School Closures Review Committee that can make recommendations to the minister about the proposed closure.²⁶

²¹ Catholic Schools NSW, [The role of Catholic Schools NSW](#), n.d., accessed 24 February 2023.

²² See further: sections [38](#) and [39](#) of the *Education 1990* (NSW). As provided by section 39, 20 or more registered or proposed non-government schools (or a number less than 20 but greater than 10 as the Minister approves in special circumstances on the recommendation of the Authority) may form a system of non-government schools for the purposes of this Act.

²³ [Section 52](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

²⁴ [Section 55](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

²⁵ See also sections [27A](#) and [54A\(3\)\(a\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). For further information on registration requirements, see: NSW Education Standards Authority, [Registration process for the NSW Government schooling system manual](#), November 2022, [Registered and accredited individual non-government schools \(NSW\) manual](#), November 2022, and [Registration systems and member non-government schools \(NSW\) Manual](#), November 2022.

²⁶ Section [28\(3\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). For a discussion of school closures, see: RMIT ABC Fact Check, [Premier Dominic Perrottet claims NSW Labor closed 90 schools when they were last in power. Is that correct? ABC News](#), 23 March 2023, accessed 24 March 2023.

4. What are the roles of the Australian and NSW Governments?

The Australian Constitution does not expressly grant the Australian Government the power to make laws about school education.²⁷ Accordingly, school education remains the responsibility of the NSW Government. Under the *Education Act 1990 (NSW)*, the NSW Government is responsible for the following aspects of school education:

- The school curriculum
- The establishment, administration and operation of government schools
- Registering and accrediting non-government schools
- Ensuring that only government schools or registered non-government schools operate in NSW
- Granting the Record of School Achievement (ROSA) and Higher School Certificate (HSC).²⁸

The Australian Government, however, establishes national policy and influences state policy through the provision of conditional funding under [section 96](#) of the Australian Constitution.²⁹ Under the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)*, a condition of receiving Australian Government funding is that NSW complies with intergovernmental agreements and implements nationally-agreed policy initiatives.³⁰ The conditions imposed upon NSW are formalised in [national school reform agreements](#) and associated [bilateral agreements](#).³¹ The conditions in bilateral agreements include minimum state and territory funding contributions.³² The reforms agreed to by the NSW Government in its current [bilateral agreement](#) with the Australian Government, which commenced on 1 January 2019 and expires on 31 December 2023, are set out at Appendix 1.³³

²⁷ *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, [section 51](#).

²⁸ *Education Act 1990 (NSW)*, [section 5](#).

²⁹ [Section 96](#) states that the Australian Parliament “may grant financial assistance to any State *on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit.*” [italics added].

³⁰ See further: sections [4](#), [22](#) and [22A](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)*.

³¹ Australian Government Department of Education, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, last modified 22 September 2021 and [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#), 7 November 2018, last modified 4 October 2021.

³² Australian Government Department of Education, [The National School Reform Agreement](#), n.d., last updated 1 December 2022; and [section 22A](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)*.

³³ Australian Government Department of Education, [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#), 7 November 2018, last modified 4 October 2021, p 4. See also: Australian Government, Department of Education, [New South Wales 2021 Bilateral Progress Report](#), 21 November 2022.

5. How are schools funded?

5.1. The Schooling Resource Standard

Broadly reflecting the recommendations of the 2011 review of school funding (the ‘Gonski review’), the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is the basis of school funding in Australia. It is an estimate of ‘how much total public funding a school needs to meet its students’ educational needs.’³⁴ The SRS provides a base amount of recurrent funding for each student and additional funding in the form of needs-based loadings in 6 areas:

- Disability
- Low English language proficiency
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Socio-educational disadvantage
- School location
- School size.³⁵

The SRS base amount and loadings are annually indexed at or above any increase in wages and consumer prices.³⁶ The calculation of the base amount of the SRS for non-government schools includes a capacity to contribute assessment, which is a ‘measure of the capacity of the parents and guardians of students ... to contribute financially to the operating costs of the school.’³⁷ The capacity to pay contribution ‘reduces the SRS base amount for most non-government schools.’³⁸ Previously, the capacity to contribute assessment was calculated using an area-based socioeconomic status score, but in 2020 this score was replaced by a score that reflected a direct measure of income.³⁹

The SRS funding process is initiated by the Australian Government under Part 3 of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth). Under Part 3, the Australian Government provides recurrent funding for schools that is calculated in terms of the SRS. The Australian

³⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, [Schooling resource standard](#), 13 July 2017, last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 11 April 2023. See also: D Gonski et al., [Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report](#), Australian Government Department of Education, December 2011, Recommendation 1, p xxi and 69.

³⁵ Australian Government Department of Education, [Schooling resource standard](#), 13 July 2017, last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 11 April 2023.

³⁶ Australian Government Department of Education, [Schooling resource standard](#), 13 July 2017, last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 11 April 2023.

³⁷ Australian Government Department of Education, [Schooling resource standard](#), 13 July 2017, last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 11 April 2023.

³⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, [Schooling resource standard](#), 13 July 2017, last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 11 April 2023.

³⁹ Australian Government Department of Education, [What is the Direct Measure of Income?](#), n.d, accessed 11 April 2023, and [Direct Measure of Income \(DMI\) Methodology](#), n.d., last updated 24 February 2023, p 3.

Government funding is then distributed to the relevant approved authority for a school or, in the case of a system of schools, the approved system authority. The approved system authority for NSW public schools is the NSW Government.⁴⁰

As previously discussed, states and territories must meet minimum school funding contributions as a condition of receiving Australian Government funding.⁴¹ The minimum state and territory funding contributions are set out in the bilateral reform agreements as a percentage of the SRS.⁴² Under its [bilateral agreement](#) the NSW Government agreed to funding the share of the SRS set out in Table 3.⁴³ The NSW Government also agreed that its final share of funding for government schools will be at least 75% of the SRS by 2027.⁴⁴

Table 3: NSW minimum funding contribution expressed as a percentage of the Schooling Resource Standard

Sector	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Government	70.73%	70.84%	71.05%	71.37%	71.80%	72.22%
Non-government	25.29%	24.70%	23.16%	22.74%	23.04%	22.57%

Source: Australian Government and NSW Government [Bilateral Agreement](#).

Reflecting the minimum Australian Government share set out in section 35A of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth), in 2023 the Australian Government will provide ‘at least 20% of each government school’s Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) and 80% of each non-government school’s SRS.’⁴⁵

The funding of NSW public schools in 2023 comprises the Australian Government’s contribution of 20% of the SRS and the NSW Government’s contribution of 72.22% of the SRS (Table 3). Based on these figures, in 2023 NSW public schools are scheduled to be funded to 92.22% of their SRS. In contrast, non-government schools are scheduled to

⁴⁰ Australian Government Department of Education, [How is Australian Government funding for schools distributed according to need?](#), 16 March 2021, last modified 30 March 2022, accessed 2 February 2023, and Part 6 of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth). The approved system authority for the catholic school system is Catholic Schools NSW Ltd: see, Catholic Schools NSW, [The needs-based funding arrangement for the NSW Catholic schools system](#), July 2020, p 2.

⁴¹ Discussed above at Section 4. See also [section 22A](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth) and Australian Government Department of Education, [Annual review of state and territory funding contributions](#), n.d., last updated 12 September 2022.

⁴² Australian Government Department of Education, [How are schools funded in Australia?](#) 13 July 2017, last updated 30 March 2022, accessed 31 January 2023.

⁴³ Australian Government Department of Education, [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#), 7 November 2018, revised 4 October 2021, p 6.

⁴⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#), 7 November 2018, revised 4 October 2021, p 6.

⁴⁵ [Section 35A](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth) and Australian Government Department of Education, [How schools are funded](#), n.d., last updated 23 February 2023, accessed 27 March 2023.

receive 102.57% of their SRS funding in 2023 (80% from the Australian Government and 22.57% from the NSW Government).

This situation was broadly commented upon by the authors of a report by the McKell Institute. The authors first noted that 'public schools are not funded to the SRS in any state or territory, except the ACT.'⁴⁶ They then stated:

From 2023, the Commonwealth's contribution to public schools will have reached the 20 per cent target. Therefore, the underfunding of Government schools is due to the failure of States to outline a pathway to reach their 80 per cent contribution towards the SRS.⁴⁷

In February 2023 former NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell noted that '...public schools were underfunded according to allocations set out in the Gonski funding agreements' and '...called on the current federal government to increase its contribution in the next five-year funding deal for both public and private schools'.⁴⁸

A feature of the Labor party's 2023 state election campaign was its promise to introduce a \$400 million Education Future Fund that will 'ensure that New South Wales reaches 75% of its Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) by 2025' and result in NSW public schools being funded to 95% of the SRS.⁴⁹ The Labor party further stated that, during the term of the next National School Reform Agreement, NSW public schools will be funded to 100% of the SRS.⁵⁰

5.2 NSW Government Resource Allocation Model

While recurrent school funding is calculated using the SRS, the NSW Government (in its role of approved system authority) distributes funding to each of its public schools using its own needs-based model, the Resource Allocation Model (RAM).⁵¹

The RAM simplifies the funding of public schools by combining Australian and NSW Government funding into one allocation:

The Commonwealth provides NSW with aggregate funding for its government school students based on the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). NSW then pools the Commonwealth funding with the State's contribution and distributes it to schools through its

⁴⁶ R Holden, F Martinenghi and M Lefebvre, [Setting the standard: Improving educational outcomes in Australia](#), The McKell Institute, November 2022, p 29.

⁴⁷ R Holden, F Martinenghi and M Lefebvre, [Setting the standard: Improving educational outcomes in Australia](#), The McKell Institute, November 2022, p 29.

⁴⁸ G Marchant, [Private schools are poaching teachers from the public sector with better salaries](#), principals say, ABC News, 5 February 2023, accessed 5 February 2023.

⁴⁹ C Minns, [\\$400M Education Future Fund](#), n.d., accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵⁰ C Minns, [\\$400M Education Future Fund](#), n.d., accessed 28 March 2023.

⁵¹ NSW Department of Education, [Resource Allocation Model](#), n.d., last updated 31 October 2022, accessed 3 February 2023. The use of such a model is required by [section 78](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)*.

Resource Allocation Model (RAM), which NSW has used since 2014. This simplifies arrangements for NSW government schools, as they receive their State and Commonwealth funding as a single amount. ...⁵²

The RAM is comprised of three funding levels (Table 4).⁵³

Table 4: Main components of the NSW Resource Allocation Model

Funding level	Purpose and scope
Base school allocation	Provides funding for the 'core cost' of educating students and operating schools. It includes funding for staffing, location funding and various categories of operational funding. ⁵⁴
Equity loadings	Provides funding for the additional learning needs faced by students from a low socio-economic background, an Aboriginal background, students learning English as an additional language or dialect, and students requiring a low-level adjustment for disability. ⁵⁵
Targeted funding	Provides funding for the particular needs of newly arrived students from refugee backgrounds, students who have just begun learning English as an additional language or dialect, and students with a disability who require high levels of adjustment and access support. ⁵⁶

Source: NSW Government, Department of Education, [Resource Allocation Model](#).

The RAM funding allocated to each NSW public school in 2023 has been published by the Department of Education.⁵⁷

⁵² NSW Department of Education, [Submission to the National School Resourcing Board Review of needs-based funding requirements](#), 2019, accessed 3 February 2023, p 1.

⁵³ NSW Department of Education, [Resource Allocation Model](#), n.d., last updated 31 October 2022, accessed 31 October 2022.

⁵⁴ NSW Department of Education, [Base school allocation](#), n.d., last updated 19 October 2022, accessed 6 February 2023.

⁵⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Equity loadings](#), n.d., last updated 19 October 2022, accessed 6 February 2023.

⁵⁶ NSW Department of Education, [Targeted funding](#), n.d., 27 October 2022, accessed 6 February 2023.

⁵⁷ NSW Department of Education, [The Resource Allocation Model \(RAM\) in 2023](#), n.d., accessed 4 February 2023. The data also includes each public school's Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI) score. The FOEI is a 'school-level index of educational disadvantage related to socio-economic background. FOEI values range from 0 to approximately 300, with higher FOEI scores indicating higher levels of need (that is, lower socio-economic status). FOEI is used as the basis of the equity loading for socio-economic background in the department's Resource Allocation Model.': NSW Department of Education, [Family Occupation and Education Index \(FOEI\)](#), n.d., last updated 9 December 2021, accessed 4 February 2023.

5.3 Funding trends over the last 10 years

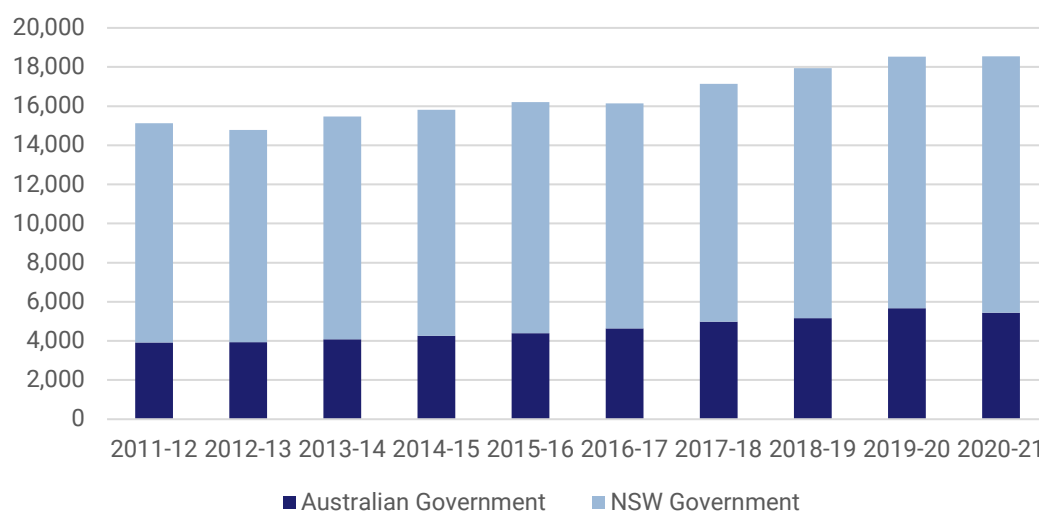
5.3.1 Recurrent expenditure for all schools

From 2011–12 to 2020–21, real recurrent expenditure (2020–21 dollars) from the Australian and NSW Governments on all NSW schools has increased:

- The NSW Government increased real recurrent expenditure from \$12.7 to \$16.3 billion (28%)
- The Australian Government increased recurrent expenditure from \$4.5 billion to \$6.8 billion (51%)
- Total recurrent expenditure increased from \$17.2 billion to \$23 billion (34%).⁵⁸

To take account of the increase in student numbers that has occurred in NSW during that period, Figure 3 presents the expenditure data on a dollar per FTE student basis. Figure 3 shows that, from 2011–12 to 2020–21, Australian and NSW Government real recurrent expenditure increased from \$15,135 to \$18,548 per FTE student (23%), with most of that increase occurring since 2017-18. From 2011–12 to 2016–17, recurrent expenditure increased from \$15,135 to \$16,136 per FTE student (7%).⁵⁹

Figure 3: Real Australian and NSW Government recurrent expenditure, dollar per FTE student, 2020–21 dollars, all NSW schools, 2011-12 to 2020-21



Source: Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023*, [Chapter 4, table 4A.14](#).

⁵⁸ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023*, [Chapter 4: School Education, data table 4A.10](#).

⁵⁹ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023*, [Chapter 4: School Education, data table 4A.14](#)

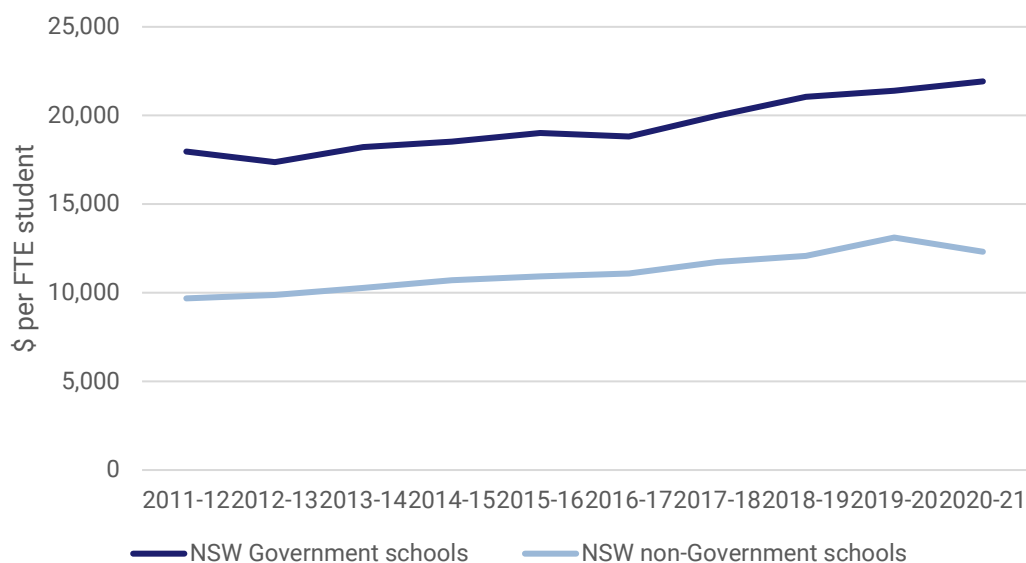
5.3.2 Recurrent expenditure for government and non-government schools

Figure 4 sets out the real recurrent expenditure from both the Australian and NSW Governments per FTE student, in 2020-2021 dollars, for government and non-government schools. From 2011-12 to 2020-21:

- Australian and NSW Government recurrent expenditure on government schools increased from \$17,963 to \$21,923 per FTE student (an increase of 22%)
- Australian and NSW Government recurrent expenditure on NSW non-government schools increased from \$9,683 to \$12,313 per FTE student (an increase of 27%).

In 2020-21, government schools received \$9,610 (44%) more recurrent funding per FTE student than non-government schools. The percentage difference has changed little since 2011-12.⁶⁰

Figure 4: Australian and NSW Government real recurrent expenditure (combined) per FTE student (2020-21 dollars), government and non-government schools, 2011-12 to 2020-21



Source: Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023*, [Chapter 4](#), [data table 4A.14](#).

⁶⁰ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2023*, [Chapter 4: School Education](#), [data table 4A.14](#)

5.4 For-profit schools cannot receive government funds

There are national and NSW prohibitions on government funding being provided to for-profit schools.⁶¹ The prohibitions are expressed in straightforward terms, although determining what constitutes a for-profit school is not straightforward.⁶² A school operates on a for-profit basis if its assets or income are used for any purpose other than for the operation of the school.⁶³ Non-government schools must therefore operate on a not-for-profit basis to be eligible to receive government funding.⁶⁴ A [Non-Government Schools Not-for-profit Advisory Committee](#) provides advice on compliance with not-for-profit requirements.⁶⁵ The Department of Education has published resources to assist schools maintain their not-for-profit status.⁶⁶

While the *government funding* of for-profit schools is prohibited, there is no prohibition on the establishment and operation of for-profit schools in NSW. In 2006 former Education Minister Carmel Tebbutt noted that ‘... as a matter of principle, the Government has no intention of preventing the establishment of profit-making schools if they do not intend to seek funding from the public purse ...’.⁶⁷ This contrasts with the situation in Victoria, where for-profit schools are prohibited.⁶⁸

In 2019 the Sydney school [Reddam House](#) became a for-profit school, after it relinquished its \$5 million-a-year government funding to become part of the global education company [Inspired](#).⁶⁹

⁶¹ Sections [75\(3\)](#), [84\(3\)](#) and [92\(3\)](#) of the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth) and [section 83C\(1\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

⁶² See, for instance, [sections 83C\(2\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW), which sets out the test for when a school operates on a for-profit basis.

⁶³ [Section 83C\(2\)\(a\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

⁶⁴ For a recent illustration of this issue, see: L Carroll, [Sydney private schools forced to repay \\$23 million in government funding](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April 2023.

⁶⁵ [Section 83K](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

⁶⁶ NSW Department of Education, [Information sheet: Not-for-profit compliance process](#), n.d., [Not-for-profit guidelines for non-government schools](#), June 2019, [Not-for-profit governance compliance self-check tool](#), n.d., [Non-Government Schools Not-for Profit Advisory Committee newsletters](#), 2016-2022, and [Non-government schools not-for-profit good governance principles series](#), July 2021. Additionally, in December 2019, the NSW Department of Education entered into Memoranda of Understanding with the [Association of Independent Schools](#) (AIS) and [Catholic Schools NSW](#) (CS) to strengthen overall financial management of non-government schools.

⁶⁷ Tebbutt C, [Education Amendment \(Financial Assistance to Non-Government Schools\) Bill \(Second Reading\)](#), *Hansard*, 7 June 2006.

⁶⁸ See: [Schedule 4\[17\]](#) of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic), which states that a “registered school must be a not-for-profit school”. [Schedule 4\[17\]\(2\)](#) adds that the “proprietor of a registered school must have sufficient controls in place to ensure that school property and assets are not distributed or used for the profit or gain of another person or entity.” The meaning of the term “not-for-profit school” is defined in [clause 7](#) of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic).

⁶⁹ J Baker, [Sought-after private school to swap government money for profit status](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2019 and Reddam House Sydney, [An Inspired School](#), n.d., accessed 2 March 2023.

6. What are the targets for school education?

Targets are viewed by stakeholders as important means for driving improvements in school education outcomes, principally by promoting accountability.⁷⁰ The following discussion focuses on targets and indicators that have been:

- Agreed to under the National School Reform Agreement
- Incorporated into the NSW Budget as outcomes indicators
- Incorporated into the NSW Department of Education's School Success Model.⁷¹

A notable feature of the targets and indicators discussed in sections 6.2 and 6.3 is that they collectively encompass the diverse goals of school education discussed in section 2.

6.1 National School Reform Agreement

Clause 36 of the National School Reform Agreement sets out national targets that have been agreed by the Australian, state and territory governments. These targets are:

- a. Australia considered to be a high quality and high equity schooling system by international standards by 2025
- b. by 2031, increase the proportion of people (age 20-24) attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent
- c. by 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.⁷²

The parties to the National School Reform Agreement have also agreed to the outcomes and 'sub-outcomes' set out in Appendix 2. None of these outcomes and sub-outcomes have quantitative measures associated with them.

In a December 2022 review of the National School Reform Agreement, the Productivity Commission found that the agreement did 'not include sufficient clear, measurable targets

⁷⁰ See, for example, Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 9 and NSW Legislative Council, [Measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools](#), February 2020.

⁷¹ But see also: Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2023](#), Part B Section 4, [School Education](#), 7 February 2023; and NSW Legislative Council, [Measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools](#), February 2020.

⁷² Council of Australian Governments, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 36 (as amended in accordance with Schedule F, effective from July 2020).

to drive reform and hold jurisdictions to account for their performance.⁷³ For instance, there was ‘no outcome that captures wellbeing’ and only a ‘single weak target for academic achievement.’⁷⁴ Accordingly, the Productivity Commission recommended establishing ‘realistic yet ambitious’ targets to ‘strengthen the focus on achieving outcomes’, including targets for:

- The academic achievement of all students
- The academic achievement of students from priority cohorts
- The proportion of students who do not meet the basic levels of literacy and numeracy
- Achieving key academic benchmarks at regular stages of a student’s education.⁷⁵

The Productivity Commission added that each jurisdiction should settle their targets with the Australian Government and ‘own’ their target. Bilateral agreements should explain how jurisdictions expect to achieve their targets, and jurisdictions should report on their progress in achieving their targets each year.⁷⁶

6.2 Outcome budgeting in NSW

The Department of Education’s *Strategic Plan 2018–2023* contains outcomes that do not incorporate quantitative targets.⁷⁷ The NSW Budget 2022–23 has adapted these outcomes to include quantitative forecasts (Appendix 3).⁷⁸ The Budget includes 19 performance indicators grouped under 5 headings:

- Academic achievement
- Student wellbeing
- Student equity (Aboriginal students)
- Student equity (disadvantaged students)
- Independence (which includes the proportion of school leavers from the previous year who are participating in higher education, training or work).

⁷³ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 34.

⁷⁴ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 33.

⁷⁵ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 34.

⁷⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 34.

⁷⁷ NSW Department of Education, [Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#), n.d., accessed 14 February 2023.

⁷⁸ NSW Government, [NSW Budget 2022-23, No.02 Outcomes Statement Budget Paper](#), June 2022, p 2-12.

Each performance indicator has a 2021–22 actual value and a 2022–23 forecast value. While the term ‘target’ has not been used, the forecasts are a measure of the expected effect of budget expenditure and associated reforms.

6.3 Local Schools Local Decisions replaced by the School Success Model

Under Local Schools Local Decisions (LSLD), schools operated with greater autonomy and less accountability. LSLD has been replaced by the School Success Model, which has reduced autonomy and increased accountability. Schools are required to report against targets that have been specifically designed for each school.⁷⁹

6.3.1 Local Schools Local Decisions

Local Schools Local Decisions was launched in 2012 to give public schools ‘more authority to make local decisions about how to best meet the needs of their students.’⁸⁰ It was a policy of devolution, with administrative responsibilities moved from the Department of Education to individual schools:

The LSLD reform package encompassed 37 different initiatives across five key reform areas—making decisions, managing resources, staffing schools, working locally, and reducing red tape. ... The reforms focused on allowing principals to make decisions based on the needs of their school community, with the view that individual schools are ‘best placed’ to understand, and respond to, local complexities ... The reforms would also allow schools to manage more than 70% of the state’s public school education budget, a substantial increase from 10% in 2013.⁸¹

LSLD is regarded by stakeholders as a failed policy that undermined, rather than supported, effective school performance. For instance, the Audit Office of NSW reported that, since the introduction of LSLD, the NSW Department of Education:

... has not had adequate oversight of how schools are using needs-based equity funding to improve student outcomes ... While it provides guidance and resources, it has not set measures or targets to describe the outcomes expected of this funding, or explicit requirements for schools to report outcomes from how these funds were used. Consequently, there is no effective mechanism to capture the impact of funding at a school, or state-wide level.⁸²

⁷⁹ See: M Gavin and M Stacey, [Enacting autonomy reform in schools: The re-shaping of roles and relationships under Local Schools Local Decisions](#), *Journal of Educational Change*, 21 April 2022, doi.org/10.1007/s10833-022-09455-5

⁸⁰ Audit Office of NSW, [Local Schools Local Decisions: needs-based equity funding](#), 8 April 2020, p 1.

⁸¹ M Gavin and M Stacey, [Enacting autonomy reform in schools: The re-shaping of roles and relationships under Local Schools Local Decisions](#), *Journal of Educational Change*, 2022, doi.org/10.1007/s10833-022-09455-5.

⁸² Audit Office of NSW, [Local Schools Local Decisions: needs-based equity funding](#), 8 April 2020, p 1.

An evaluation of LSLD found that, while it had a positive impact on schools' ability to make context-specific decisions, there was:

- No overall improvement on NAPLAN reading and numeracy results, HSC completion and performance, and student wellbeing scores during the period of implementation
- Limited information on how schools spent the LSLD funding
- An increase in the administrative burden on schools
- A loss of Department of Education support staff and systems.⁸³

An independent inquiry commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation also commented on the loss of departmental support under LSLD, which required schools to develop their own services or purchase replacement services.⁸⁴

6.3.2 School Success Model

On 6 December 2020, the NSW Government announced that the Schools Success Model was replacing LSLD as its key school administration policy.⁸⁵ Discussing the change in policy, former Education Minister Sarah Mitchell noted the adoption of school-level targets under the School Success Model, in contrast to the absence of school-level targets under LSLD:

I make clear that Local Schools, Local Decisions ... no longer exists. We have moved to the School Success Model. We have been open and transparent about the fact that, *for the first time*, every school across the State has targets in place across a range of metrics to measure student growth and get the outcomes that we want to see.⁸⁶ [italics added]

The School Success Model is an evidence-based program that offers centralised (departmental) support to individual schools based on identified areas of need. Areas where support is provided include literacy, numeracy, Aboriginal HSC attainment, behaviour and attendance.⁸⁷ The School Success Model effectively reverses the policy of devolution

⁸³ A Griffiths et al., *Local Schools Local Decisions: Evaluation final report*, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, December 2020, p 10-13. NAPLAN refers to the [National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy](#), which is administered by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. For background information on NAPLAN, see T Gotsis, *NSW school education: NAPLAN, Measurement and Performance*, NSW Parliamentary Research Service, 2015.

⁸⁴ G Gallop, T Kavanagh and P Lee, *Valuing the teaching profession: An independent inquiry*, NSW Teachers Federation, 20 February 2021, p 56.

⁸⁵ NSW Department of Education, *New School Success Model to lift outcomes*, 6 December 2020, accessed 13 February 2023. But see: L Cormack and L Carroll, *Failed school reforms remain three years after 'ad-hoc' policy dropped*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 2023.

⁸⁶ S Mitchell, *School improvement targets*, *NSW Hansard*, 11 October 2022.

⁸⁷ NSW Government Department of Education, *School Success Model*, n.d., last updated 22 December 2022, accessed 13 February 2023. For concerns about the relationship between low socioeconomic status and low

introduced under LSLD and replaces it with a shared responsibility model that 'drives partnerships with key roles and groups within the NSW Department of Education and schools to deliver educational resources and strategies tailored to their improvement needs.'⁸⁸

The School Success Model aligns with the School Excellence Framework. The School Excellence Framework guides public school performance by providing a 'clear description of the key elements of high-quality practice across the three domains of learning, teaching and leading.'⁸⁹ Schools are required to self-assess on an ongoing basis against all elements of the School Excellence Framework and undertake an external validation process once every 4 years. The School Excellence Policy guides schools on strategic improvement planning, annual reporting, self-assessment, and external validation.⁹⁰

The School Success Model includes targets for the government sector ('department targets') and individual schools targets (Appendix 4).⁹¹ The department targets relate to the areas of NAPLAN, Aboriginal education, HSC, attendance, student growth (equity), and post-school pathways.

The individual school targets are incorporated into a strategic improvement plan (SIP) that each government school is required to publish.⁹² The SIPs are developed in consultation with the school community and have:

... up to 3 strategic directions and associated improvement measures which form the basis of each planning cycle... One of these strategic directions will be 'Student growth and attainment' for all schools. The remaining strategic directions are chosen by each school to reflect and respond to their unique context. Improvement measures should include system-negotiated targets for student growth and attainment and references to effective classroom practices.⁹³

attendance, see: C Harris, '[Positively Dickensian: Why some students are increasingly likely to miss school](#)', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 2023.

⁸⁸ NSW Government Department of Education, [School Success Model](#), n.d., last updated 22 December 2022, accessed 13 February 2023. Support includes access to resources and lesson plans via the online Universal Resources Hub.

⁸⁹ NSW Government Department of Education, [School Excellence Framework](#), version 2, July 2017, accessed 20 February 2023.

⁹⁰ NSW Government Department of Education, [School Excellence](#), n.d., accessed 20 February 2023.

⁹¹ NSW Government Department of Education, [School Success Model](#), n.d., last updated 22 December 2022, accessed 14 February 2023.

⁹² NSW Department of Education, [The Strategic Improvement Plan](#), n.d., last updated 13 December 2022, accessed 14 February 2023.

⁹³ NSW Government Department of Education, [The Strategic Improvement Plan](#), n.d., last updated 13 December 2022, accessed 20 February 2023.

7. Which factors influence student achievement?

There has been extensive research to identify the factors that influence student achievement. Despite the growth in this evidence base, there is not yet a definitive answer as to what makes students in one school perform better than students in another school:

One of the more elusive goals of education research is answering the question: what makes one school perform better than another? The evidence base is growing but, so far, the answer is: it depends.

School success depends on context. What works for one group of students and teachers might not work for another. Teachers themselves may vary in their effectiveness depending on the students they teach.⁹⁴

The research discussed in sections 7.1 and 7.2 has identified factors that influence school outcomes. While incorporating successful interventions into education policy at a system level is important, individual schools need to consider and assess the application of these interventions in their own unique circumstances.⁹⁵

7.1 Factors identified by Professor John Hattie

One of the leading researchers in this area is Professor John Hattie from the University of Melbourne, who has used the technique of meta-analysis to understand the relationship between different factors and student achievement.⁹⁶ These meta-analyses have included more than 108,000 studies that involved more than 300 million students.⁹⁷ Hattie's work has been widely used in Australia to understand student achievement, including by the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee, NSW Department of Education and Productivity Commission.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ J Jackson and S Lamb, [What makes a school good? It's about more than just test results](#), *The Conversation*, 4 April 2019.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Lefebvre M, Martinenghi F and Holden R, , [Setting the Standard: Improving educational outcomes in Australia](#), the McKell Institute, November 2022, p 43-44.

⁹⁶ Professor Hattie's original book was *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, Routledge, 2008. His latest book is *Visible learning: The sequel: A synthesis of over 2,100 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, Routledge, March 2023.

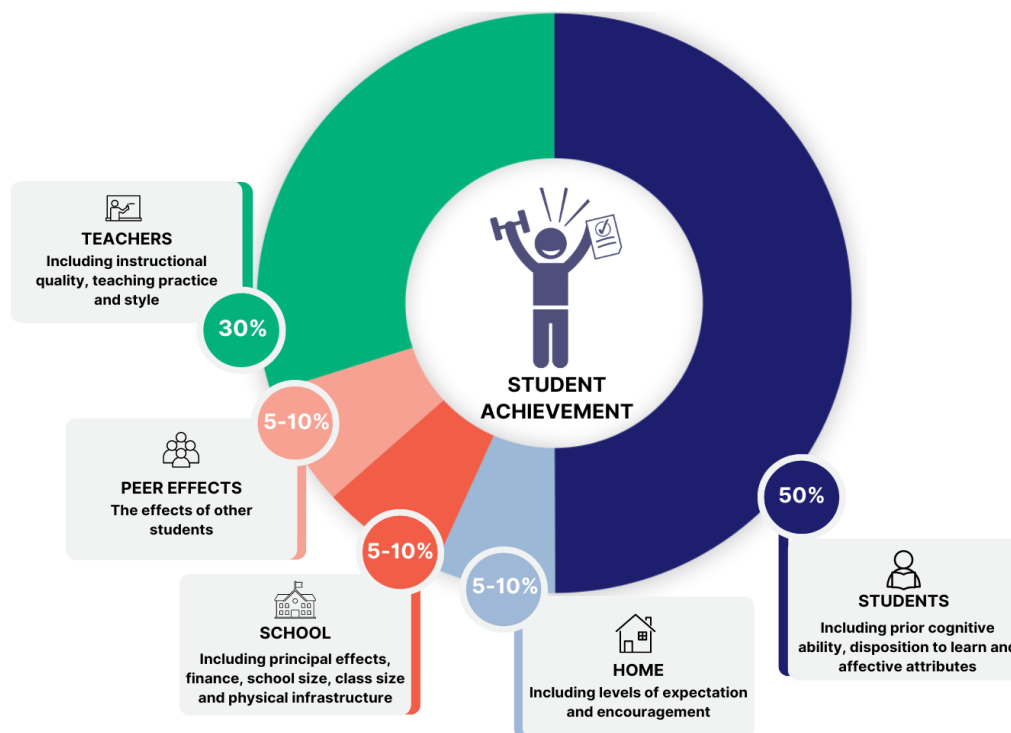
⁹⁷ Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x, [Global Research Database, About Meta^x](#), n.d. accessed 24 March 2023.

⁹⁸ NSW Legislative Council, [Measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools: Informed by the data: evidence-based education in NSW](#), February 2020; NSW Government Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, [What works best: 2020 update](#), 24 April 2020; Australian Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 73.

The results of Hattie’s research are presented in an online database that provides information relating to 322 factors.⁹⁹ The factors are expressed in terms of an ‘effect size’, which is a statistical measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables. In general, the larger the effect size, the stronger the relationship between a particular factor and student achievement.¹⁰⁰ The effect size can be a positive number, negative number or zero. A positive effect size means that a factor is associated with an increase in student achievement. A negative effect size means that a factor is associated with a decrease in student achievement. An effect size of zero means that a factor is not associated with a change in student achievement.

In its review of the National School Reform Agreement the Productivity Commission used Hattie’s work to understand student achievement. The review highlighted that variance in achievement is influenced by numerous factors, the 2 most significant being student characteristics (50%) and teachers (30%). School factors, home factors and peer effects each account for between 5 to 10% of variance in student achievement (Figure 5).¹⁰¹

Figure 5: Factors influencing the variance in student achievement



Source: NSW Parliamentary Library, adapted from the [Productivity Commission](#).

⁹⁹ Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x, [Global Research Database](#), accessed 10 February 2023.

¹⁰⁰ The effect sizes in the database are subject to change as more data becomes available.

¹⁰¹ Australian Productivity Commission, [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report](#), December 2022, p 73, adapted from the work of Professor Hattie. The student and home factors are affected by the student’s and family’s wellbeing, which are affected by the family’s socio-economic context and broader policy settings.

The student factors that were associated with half the variance in achievement included:

- Prior ability and achievement (effect size 0.82)
- Attitude and disposition, including self-efficacy (effect size 0.65)
- Capacity for critical thinking (effect size 0.49)
- Physical influences, such as wellbeing (effect size 0.36), anxiety (effect size -0.36) and exercise/relaxation (effect size 0.20).¹⁰²

Although most of the variance in student achievement (55-60%) was associated with out-of-school factors (that is, student factors and home factors), there is clearly an important role for 'in-school' factors, including those related to classrooms, principals, peers, teachers and teaching strategies.

Table 5 provides a selection of in-school factors that have been found to increase, decrease or have no effect on student achievement.¹⁰³ These factors have been selected because they inform issues addressed in recent reports and public commentary; such as teacher effectiveness, small group tuition programs, school infrastructure, mobile phones, single-sex schools and behaviour management.¹⁰⁴ An overall 'confidence factor' is assigned to each effect size, which indicates the level of confidence in the quality of the underlying research. It varies from 1 (lowest level of confidence) to 5 (highest level of confidence).

¹⁰² Australian Productivity Commission, *Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study report*, December 2022, p 72. See further: [Prior ability and achievement, self-efficacy, critical thinking, wellbeing, anxiety, exercise/relaxation](#), Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x [Global Research Database](#), n.d., last updated August 2021, accessed 21 February 2023

¹⁰³ Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x, [Global Research Database](#), n.d., last updated August 2021, accessed 21 February 2023.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance: M Carr-Gregg, S McLean and A Third, *Review into the non-educational use of mobile devices in NSW schools*, NSW Department of Education, July 2020; A Smith, *New behaviour adviser to work across all schools as student conduct worsens*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 2022; C Harris, 'In crisis for years': *The struggle to fix Australia's worst classrooms*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 2023; J Sonnemann, *How to embed small-group tuition in all schools*, Grattan Institute, 30 January 2023; NSW Audit Office, *Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools*, 26 September 2019; NSW Audit Office, *Delivering school infrastructure*, 8 April 2021; and L Carroll, *NSW students promised access to co-ed high schools under Labor plan*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 2022.

Table 5: Selection of in-school factors, effect size and confidence score

In-school factor	Description	Effect size	Confidence score
Teacher estimates of student achievement	Teacher estimates set expectations and inform teacher practices and strategies	1.46	3
Collective teacher efficacy	Shared belief by teachers that, in a given educational environment, they have the skills to improve student outcomes	1.36	2
Teacher credibility	Student perceptions of teacher competence, trustworthiness and caring	1.09	1
Classroom discussion	Students able to discuss a topic with each other, often prompted by open questions	0.82	1
Direct instruction	Instructional approaches that are structured, sequenced, and led by teachers	0.59	4
Positive peer influences	A positive peer influence reduces risk-taking (including alcohol and drug abuse) and improves mental health	0.53	2
Small group learning	Students are grouped into smaller groups within the class	0.47	3
School climate	A school's 'social and environmental context', 'school culture' or 'learning environment'	0.44	5
Formative evaluation	Providing instruction or feedback during a lesson, rather than at the end of a lesson, series of lessons or term	0.40	4
Wellbeing	How students feel and think about their lives	0.36	3
Classroom management	Teachers maintaining in their classrooms an environment of order and respect	0.35	2
Building quality	The quality of school buildings	0.24	3
Reducing class size	Number of students reduced to improve student-teacher interactions	0.18	4
Single-sex schools	Schools where students are of the same sex	0.08	3
Open versus traditional classrooms	A flexible space that can include multiple teachers with large numbers of students	0.00	3
Bullying	Repeated behaviour that causes physical, social, and/or psychological harm, which can occur in person, online, by individuals or by groups	-0.33	3
Mobile phones	The presence of mobile phones in class that is typically unrelated to teaching and learning	-0.34	2

Source: Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x, [Global Research Database](#).

7.2 School infrastructure

School infrastructure is a major issue of concern in NSW. School infrastructure can affect student achievement both directly (through the quality of buildings (effect size 0.24)) and

indirectly (through, for instance, its impact on school climate or learning environment (effect size 0.44)).¹⁰⁵ In NSW issues about school infrastructure involve overcrowded classrooms and infrastructure quality.

7.2.1 Overcrowded classrooms and schools

Overcrowding affects student achievement and there is evidence 'that students learn less effectively in overcrowded schools.'¹⁰⁶

In 2017, the Audit Office of NSW reported that there has been 'chronic under-investment in NSW government school infrastructure' leading to the situation where 'many schools have more students than can be accommodated in existing classrooms, and demountables are widely used for extended periods.'¹⁰⁷

In 2017, [School Infrastructure NSW](#) was established to ensure that there is sufficient supply of learning spaces in government schools to meet the expected growth in public school enrolments.¹⁰⁸ A 2021 NSW Audit Office report noted that, based on 2019 data, there will be an additional 180,000 enrolments in public schools by 2039.¹⁰⁹ The increase in enrolments is expected to mostly occur in established areas of metropolitan Sydney, rather than in new land release areas, or in regional and rural areas.¹¹⁰

In 2021, the NSW Audit Office found that School Infrastructure NSW needed to better prioritise projects that best meet future demand:

School Infrastructure NSW has been focused on delivering existing projects, election commitments and other government announcements. This has diverted attention from identifying and delivering projects that would have better met present and future student and classroom needs. ... [it] has made progress in planning across geographic areas but needs to better prioritise which projects move forward.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Corwin Visible Learning Meta^x, [Global Research Database](#), n.d., last updated August 2021, accessed 10 February 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Audit Office of NSW, [Planning for School Infrastructure](#), 2017, p 6. See, for example: D Ready, V Lee and K Welner, [Educational equity and school structure](#), *Teachers College Record*, 2004, 106 (10), p 1989-2014 and Orina W, Macharia S and Okpalaenwe E, [Managing overcrowded classrooms to accommodate learner centred methodologies](#), *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, November 2021, 10 (11), p 67-73.

¹⁰⁷ Audit Office of NSW, [Planning for School Infrastructure](#), 2017, p 2.

¹⁰⁸ NSW Government, [New unit to deliver better school infrastructure](#) [media release], 27 April 2017, accessed 24 February 2023.

¹⁰⁹ NSW Audit Office, [Delivering school infrastructure](#), 8 April 2021, p 6. For issues relating to school enrolment projections, see: NSW Government, School Infrastructure NSW, [Planning for growth: Fact Sheet](#), n.d., accessed 24 February 2023 and NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure. Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 18-28.

¹¹⁰ NSW Audit Office, [Delivering school infrastructure](#), 8 April 2021, p 6.

¹¹¹ NSW Audit Office, [Delivering school infrastructure](#), 8 April 2021, p 2, 3 and 4 (including recommendation 1 and 2).

In the report of its inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure (October 2022) the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee commended School Infrastructure NSW for trying to develop systems to improve the allocation of funding.¹¹² In its response to the Legislative Council committee report, the NSW Government said that School Infrastructure NSW now uses a prioritisation framework that 'identifies and ranks schools and school community groups across a broad range of criteria, including equity, urgency and longer-term system requirements.'¹¹³ The Legislative Council committee also recommended that information on school enrolment caps be made publicly available. The NSW Government's response to this recommendation (which it did not support) reveals why it is currently difficult for some schools to avoid becoming overcrowded:¹¹⁴

... every student is entitled to enrol at the local school they are eligible to attend. Enrolment caps are for schools to know whether they can accept non-local enrolments. *Schools continue to enrol students who live in their local intake area, regardless of the school's cap status.* Parents and carers should talk to the principal of their local school to discuss enrolment.¹¹⁵ [italics added]

7.3.2 Infrastructure quality

In NSW, the main issues concerning school infrastructure quality currently relate to:

- **Maintenance of existing infrastructure:** In its inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure, the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee found that there was an imbalance between building new infrastructure and maintaining existing infrastructure, highlighting doors falling off hinges, playground seating falling apart and uneven walkways.¹¹⁶ The committee recommended that school infrastructure be maintained to an acceptable standard; a recommendation supported by the NSW Government, which noted recent investments in the 2022–23 Budget that have added to investments made since 2015–2016.¹¹⁷
- **Unflued gas heaters:** Historically, heating in NSW public schools has been provided predominantly by unflued gas heaters, with a 2011 report estimating that

¹¹² NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 9 (Finding 1).

¹¹³ NSW Government, [NSW Government Response to the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education, Report into planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), n.d., accessed 24 February 2023, p 3.

¹¹⁴ NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 28, 29 (Recommendation 9).

¹¹⁵ NSW Government, [NSW Government Response to the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education, Report into planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), n.d., accessed 24 February 2023, p 8.

¹¹⁶ NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 62.

¹¹⁷ NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 62 (recommendation 18); NSW Government, [NSW Government Response to the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education, Report into planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), n.d., accessed 24 February 2023, p 12.

47,000 to 52,000 unflued gas heaters were being used in NSW public schools.¹¹⁸ The use of unflued gas heaters in schools has been found to be associated with increased coughing and wheezing among students, and greater levels of exposure to nitrogen dioxide and formaldehyde.¹¹⁹ Over the last three decades, several programs have sought to replace the unflued gas heaters or convert them into flued gas heaters.¹²⁰ The latest program to do so is the Cooler Classrooms Program.¹²¹ In August 2020 former Education Minister Sarah Mitchell informed the Legislative Council that, since 2009, approximately 5,450 unflued gas heaters had been removed or converted, and that the Cooler Classrooms Program would result in the removal of 'approximately 3,300 additional unflued heaters.'¹²²

- **Air-conditioning:** The Cooler Classrooms Program was introduced as a five-year program in 2018 and provides \$500 million over five years for reverse-cycle air conditioning for eligible schools.¹²³ To be eligible, schools must either have a mean maximum January temperature of 30 degrees Celsius or above where there is currently no air conditioning, or need to replace existing air conditioning units.¹²⁴ Schools that are not automatically eligible can apply under the program.¹²⁵
- **Demountable classrooms:** Concerns about the use of demountable classrooms primarily relate to their quality, long-term use and effect on available outdoor space. In its inquiry about planning and delivery of school infrastructure the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee noted that, while the quality of modern demountable classrooms had improved, 'the objective should always be to maximise the number of purpose-built permanent classroom buildings.'¹²⁶ The committee recommended that the NSW Government 'set a community/educational standard of no school having more than 50 per cent of its classrooms as demountable.'¹²⁷ This recommendation was supported in principle by the NSW Government, which said that it is investing in capital projects that are replacing demountables with permanent buildings in schools with long term enrolment

¹¹⁸ B Jalaludin, *Environmental Health Risk Assessment of School Heating Options: Implementation Strategy*, NSW Department of Education, Deloitte Access Economics, October 2011, p 7, 16-17.

¹¹⁹ GB Marks et al., *Respiratory health effects of exposure to low-NO_x unflued gas heaters in the classroom: a double-blind, cluster-randomised, crossover study*, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 2010, (10) 118 1476-1482.

¹²⁰ B Jalaludin, *Environmental Health Risk Assessment of School Heating Options: Implementation Strategy*, NSW Department of Education, Deloitte Access Economics and Vos Group Consulting Engineers, October 2011, p 10.

¹²¹ NSW Government School Infrastructure NSW, *Cooler Classrooms Program*, n.d., accessed 26 February 2023.

¹²² S Mitchell, *Unflued gas heaters*, *NSW Hansard*, 27 August 2020.

¹²³ NSW Government School Infrastructure NSW, *Cooler Classrooms Program*, n.d., accessed 26 February 2023.

¹²⁴ NSW Government School Infrastructure NSW, *Cooler Classrooms Program*, n.d., accessed 26 February 2023.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of concerns about the application process, see: J Baker and N Gladstone, *School air-con winners and losers raise concerns over fairness*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November 2021.

¹²⁶ NSW Legislative Council, *Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW*, October 2022, p 47.

¹²⁷ NSW Legislative Council, *Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW*, October 2022, p 47 (recommendation 13).

growth.¹²⁸ New building methods were also being developed that will enable the rapid construction of permanent classrooms and reduce the need to overly rely on demountable classrooms. The NSW Government also noted that ‘demountables will always be required in emergency responses to natural disasters and during major upgrades to minimise operational impacts for schools.’¹²⁹

- **Limited access to outdoor space and nature:** Research in this area is not conclusive but does indicate that access to playgrounds and natural environments is associated with increased physical activity, student health and academic achievement; particularly where ‘loose parts’ toys (such as balls, boxes and blocks) or climbing equipment are available to entice students to play.¹³⁰ The lack of natural surroundings in some schools was noted by the Legislative Council’s Education Portfolio Committee in their inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure.¹³¹ Recommendations from the committee included having access to ovals at new schools and the need for tree and garden planting where synthetic play and sporting surfaces are used.¹³² These issues will become increasingly relevant as new ‘vertical schools’ are built.¹³³ The NSW Government’s *Educational Facilities: standards and guidelines* state that open play space must be provided for students to access during recess, lunch breaks and for outdoor learning.¹³⁴ Except in limited circumstances, schools must provide a minimum of 10 m² per student.¹³⁵ The required play space can be located off-site, provided the off-site facilities are close to the school, easily accessible, safe and secure.

¹²⁸ NSW Government, [NSW Government Response to the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No 3: Education, Report into planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 10.

¹²⁹ NSW Government, [NSW Government Response to the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No 3: Education, Report into planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 10.

¹³⁰ See, for instance: AC Grunseit et al., [Ecological study of playground space and physical activity among primary school children](#), *BMJ Open* 2020;10:e034586; JE Donnelly et al., [Physical activity, fitness, cognitive function, and academic achievement in children: A systematic review](#), *Med Sci Sports Exerc*, 2016 June, 48(6), 1,197-1,222; RD Telford et al., [“Schools with fitter children achieve better literacy and numeracy results: evidence of a school cultural effect”](#) *Pediatr Exerc Sci* (2012) 24(1) 45-57 (Erratum in: *Pediatr Exerc Sci* (2012) 24(4) ii) and T Gray et al., [Vertical schools and green space: Canvassing the literature](#), University of Western Sydney, 2018, p 18.

¹³¹ NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 47 and 48 (Recommendations 14 and 15).

¹³² NSW Legislative Council, [Building better schools: Improvements to NSW school infrastructure, Report of the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW](#), October 2022, p 47 and 48 (Recommendations 14 and 15).

¹³³ T Gray et al., [Vertical schools and green space: Canvassing the literature](#), University of Western Sydney, 2018, p 18.

¹³⁴ NSW Government Department of Education, [NSW Educational Facilities: standards and guidelines](#), Design Guide 10 “Area”, Guideline 10.3 (Open Play Space), n.d., accessed 10 October 2022. See also, NSW Audit Office, [Planning for school infrastructure](#), 2017, p 23.

¹³⁵ NSW Government Department of Education, [NSW Educational Facilities: standards and guidelines](#), Design Guide 10 “Area”, Guideline 10.3 (Open Play Space), n.d., accessed 10 October 2022. See also, NSW Audit Office, [Planning for school infrastructure](#), 2017, p 23.

8. What should be taught?

School education is, at its core, the transmission from one generation to the next of knowledge, skills, attributes and values, so that students can thrive and contribute to their society. But what, from the vast array of potential topics, should be taught in schools to best help students meet their future needs? The answer to this question is not straightforward and requires regular consideration due to advances in knowledge, technology and social change. In NSW, this question had not been comprehensively addressed since 1989, when the last major review of the NSW curriculum occurred.¹³⁶

The curriculum covers everything taught in schools (Figure 6). The curriculum comprises key learning areas (KLAs), subjects and syllabuses.¹³⁷ Syllabuses set out the content of each subject and form the basis of the individual lesson plans used by teachers. NESA is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of the curriculum.¹³⁸

In 2018 the NSW Government commissioned a comprehensive review of the school curriculum to 'ensure every student leaves school well-prepared for a lifetime of on-going learning and informed and active citizenship and with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help equip them for meaningful work and satisfying careers.'¹³⁹

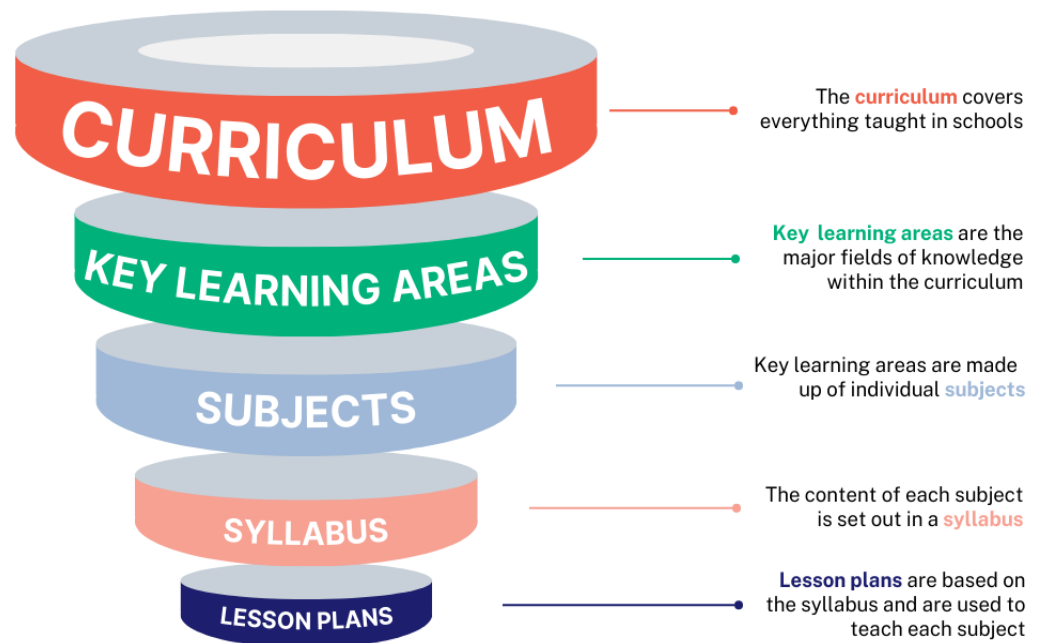
¹³⁶ [Excellence and Equity: NSW Curriculum Reform White Paper](#), NSW Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, November 1989. See also: T Drabsch, [NSW Curriculum Review](#), NSW Parliamentary Research Service, May 2019, p 3 and G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p v.

¹³⁷ As provided for by [Part 3](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹³⁸ [Section 11](#) of the *Education Standards Authority Act 2013* (NSW), See also: S Mitchell, [NSW Education Standards Authority Statement of Expectations](#), n.d., accessed 11 April 2023, and NSW Education Standards Authority, [NSW Curriculum](#), n.d., accessed 1 March 2023.

¹³⁹ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p v.

Figure 6: The curriculum and its relationship to key learning areas, subjects, syllabuses and lesson plans



Source: NSW Parliamentary Library and Parliamentary Research Service.

The recommendations of the curriculum review have provided the platform for recent reforms of the NSW school curriculum. Before describing the review and its outcomes (sections 8.2 and 8.3), the legislative provisions on key learning areas, curriculum and syllabuses are set out (section 8.1), as they provide the statutory context in which the NSW Government’s program of curriculum reform will occur.

8.1 Legislative provisions

Primary schools are required to teach across six key learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science and technology, Human society and its environment, Creative and practical arts, and Personal development, health and physical education.¹⁴⁰ The following minimum requirements are prescribed for the primary school curriculum (kindergarten to year 6):

- Each year each child must be provided with courses of study for each of the six key learning areas
- Human society and its environment is to include courses of study on Australia

¹⁴⁰ [Section 7](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

- Creative and practical arts is to include courses of study in art and music
- Courses of study are to be appropriate for the children concerned (in terms of their level of achievement and needs).¹⁴¹

The key learning areas for secondary education (years 7 to 10) are: English, Mathematics, Science, Human society and its environment, Languages (other than English), Technological and applied studies, Creative arts, and Personal development, health and physical education.¹⁴² The curriculum for secondary school children during years 7 to 10 must meet the following requirements:

- Courses of study in six out of the eight key learning areas are to be provided to each child
- Courses of study in the key learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science and Human society and its environment are to be provided each year.¹⁴³

For both primary and secondary school, courses of study are to accord with any relevant guidelines developed by NESA and approved by the minister, and are to be based on, and taught in accordance with, a syllabus developed or endorsed by NESA and approved by the minister.¹⁴⁴

NSW public schools provide strictly non-sectarian and secular instruction.¹⁴⁵ Catholic and independent schools may, in certain situations, request modifications to the syllabus to accord with their educational philosophy or religious beliefs. Specifically, NESA may approve modifications to a primary or secondary (years 7 to 10) syllabus that are requested by a non-government school, if it appears to NESA that a course of study contains parts that are incompatible with the educational philosophy or religious outlook of the school.¹⁴⁶ The modifications must be consistent with any relevant NESA and ministerial guidelines.¹⁴⁷

The curriculum for years 11 and 12 for each student who is a candidate for the HSC must comprise courses of study determined by the minister on the recommendation of NESA.¹⁴⁸ The courses of study are to include a course of study in English, comply with an approved

¹⁴¹ [Section 8\(1\) and \(2\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁴² [Section 9](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁴³ [Section 10\(1\) and \(2\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). Students who leave school before completing the HSC can apply for the Record of School Achievement (ROSA) see: NSW Government NSW Education Standards Authority, [Record of School Achievement](#), n.d., accessed 28 February 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Sections [8\(1\)](#) and [10\(1\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁴⁵ [Section 30](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW). For the values espoused by NSW Public Schools, see: NSW Government Department of Education, [Values in NSW public schools](#), n.d., accessed 28 February 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Sections [8\(3\)](#) and [10\(3\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁴⁷ Sections [8\(4\)](#) and [10\(4\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁴⁸ [Section 12\(1\)\(a\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

pattern of study, and be taught in accordance with a syllabus developed or endorsed by NESA and approved by the minister.¹⁴⁹

In recommending to the minister that a course of study be provided for students, NESA is to establish the need for the course, provide an assurance of its quality, identify assessment procedures and any other implications for educational institutions.

NESA also requires students to meet a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy to receive the HSC.¹⁵⁰ The tests for passing the HSC minimum standard can be taken up to five years after a student starts their first HSC course.¹⁵¹

8.2 Review of the NSW curriculum

The review of the NSW curriculum (led by Professor Geoff Masters and known as the Masters review) proposed the introduction of a new syllabus for each key learning area and subject across all school years. The purpose of the new syllabuses is to address the three main areas of concern identified by the review:

- Breadth of learning is currently prioritised over depth of learning because syllabuses are overcrowded
- Skills needed to apply knowledge are devalued and underdeveloped because there is a separation of knowledge and skills in the way subjects are taught
- Teachers do not have the flexibility to respond to the learning needs of each child and ensure that each child makes ongoing progress throughout their schooling because existing syllabuses are time-limited.¹⁵²

Table 6 summarises how the existing syllabuses contribute to the three key concerns and how the proposed reforms would address these issues.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ [Section 12\(1\)\(b\), \(c\) and \(d\)](#) of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW).

¹⁵⁰ NSW Education Standards Authority, [HSC minimum standard](#), n.d., accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁵¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, [HSC minimum standard](#), n.d., accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁵² G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xiii.

¹⁵³ Based on Figure 1 (at p xiii) of G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020.

Table 6: Concerns in existing syllabuses and features of proposed new syllabuses

Concern	Existing syllabus	Proposed new syllabus
Syllabuses are overcrowded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers say syllabuses are overcrowded, which makes it difficult to teach important content in depth Declining scores in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that many students lack the depth of understanding required to apply subject learning in new and unfamiliar contexts¹⁵⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching and learning are focused on developing deep understanding of important concepts, principles and methods Factual and procedural knowledge remain essential Depth of learning is prioritised over breadth of learning
Knowledge and skills in applying knowledge are separated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing syllabuses undervalue and underdevelop skills in applying knowledge This separation is evident in most examinations, but also in the division between knowledge-based and skills-based learning in the senior years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every subject integrates knowledge and skills New syllabuses develop skills in applying knowledge, such as critical and creative thinking, and allow students to develop and demonstrate those skills
Existing syllabuses are inflexible because they are time constrained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under existing syllabuses, progress is based on time Many students are forced to move to the next year-level syllabus before they have mastered the current syllabus, and can fall behind at an increasing rate Many other students are required to mark time because they are not adequately challenged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under new syllabuses, progress is based on attainment, rather than time They do not specify when every student must commence, or how long they have to learn, each syllabus Students progress to the next level syllabus once they have mastered the prior syllabus Students who require more time have it; students who are able to advance to the next syllabus are able to do so

Source: [NSW Curriculum Review](#)

¹⁵⁴ PISA is administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For a discussion of PISA and NSW's declining PISA scores, see: T Gotsis, [NSW school education: PISA 2018, socioeconomic background and proposals for reform](#), NSW Parliamentary Research Service, August 2020.

8.2.1 The untimed syllabus proposal

The proposal for untimed syllabuses requires special mention because it seeks to introduce a highly personalised or differentiated approach to learning. Considering this issue, the Productivity Commission noted that while there is currently no evidence supporting the implementation of untimed syllabuses at a system level, there is evidence that differentiated teaching catering to each student's abilities leads to moderate improvements in student achievement.¹⁵⁵ On the basis of that evidence, the Productivity Commission suggested:

In seeking to improve student outcomes, it may be worth trialling untimed syllabuses in Australian schools to shore up the skills of lower-achieving students and extend the capacity of those at the higher end.¹⁵⁶

It has been reported that the NSW Government was intending to conduct a small-scale trial of untimed syllabuses in the next few years.¹⁵⁷

8.2.2 A different focus for each stage of learning

The review proposed that curriculum reform should have a different focus for each stage of learning.

The early years: During this stage of schooling, the curriculum should focus on the foundational aspects of learning and development: namely, social and emotional development, oral language skills, early reading skills and early numeracy skills.¹⁵⁸

The middle years: During this stage of schooling, the curriculum should maintain the existing set of subjects but set 'clear standards that every student is expected to achieve in mandated subjects by the completion of their schooling – something that does not exist currently.'¹⁵⁹ Additionally, all students would be expected to commence learning a second

¹⁵⁵ Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Five year productivity inquiry: From learning to growth (Interim report)*, September 2022, p 37. The same point was made by the University of Sydney's Associate Professor in Education Rachel Wilson: R Wilson, *A school system tailored to individual ability rather than age sounds good, but there's no evidence it works*, *The Conversation*, 24 February 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Five year productivity inquiry: From learning to growth (Interim report)*, September 2022, p 37.

¹⁵⁷ N Chrysanthos, *Schools will trial 'untimed syllabuses' before ambitious state-wide reform*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 February 2021.

¹⁵⁸ G Masters, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review*, NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xv. The importance of this approach was illustrated by the results from the latest year 1 phonics test, which showed that 55% of all year 1 students met or exceeded expected phonics achievement, with 31% of year 1 students from the most disadvantaged background meeting or exceeding expected phonics achievement: L Carroll, *'We need to keep improving': Almost half of year 1 students not reading at expected level*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 March 2023.

¹⁵⁹ G Masters, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review*, NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xvi.

language and develop ‘a common understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and histories.’¹⁶⁰

The later years: This stage of learning currently features a broad division between academic and vocational learning; with status attached to academic learning and entrance to university via a high Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).¹⁶¹ The Masters review found the division between academic and vocational learning unhelpful and proposed that vocational learning not be ‘... quarantined to a set of vocational education and training (VET) subjects ... but seen as relevant to every student and area of learning.’¹⁶² Fewer but more rigorous subjects were proposed, which integrate knowledge and skills, in part by requiring students to undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing. The subjects would be organised into learning areas which ‘function as focal points for schools’ relationships with relevant industries ... [and] developing students’ understandings of career opportunities, courses and pathways.’¹⁶³

The review also recommended that the merits of continuing to use the ATAR be investigated.¹⁶⁴

The review noted that for the new curriculum to be introduced successfully, the following conditions were necessary:

- More time for teachers to focus on teaching and learning (to be achieved through a decluttered curriculum, fewer competing priorities and reduced administrative requirements)
- An aligned school system, where teaching, assessment and reporting practices are designed to support the delivery and goals of the new curriculum
- Strengthening of the professional capacity of teachers (to be achieved through better teacher education, professional development and support services).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xvi.

¹⁶¹ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xvii.

¹⁶² G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xviii.

¹⁶³ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xvii.

¹⁶⁴ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xviii. See also: R Joseph, [ATAR's rising relevance: Exploring admission standards and the falling completion rates of school leavers at Australia's universities](#), The Centre for Independent Studies, February 2023; and M O'Connell, S Milligan and T Bentley, [Beyond ATAR: A proposal for change](#), Koshland Innovation Fund, 2019.

¹⁶⁵ G Masters, [Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a new school curriculum: NSW curriculum review](#), NSW Education Standards Authority, April 2020, p xix-xx.

8.3 NSW Government response to the Masters review

The NSW Government was supportive of the overall reform principles of the Masters review and most of its specific recommendations, and committed to having new syllabuses for all subjects taught in schools by 2027.¹⁶⁶ The new English K-2 and Mathematics K-2 syllabuses have been taught in schools from the start of the 2023 school year.¹⁶⁷

The NSW Government supported in principle the recommendation for making the new syllabuses untimed but added that further advice will be sought from NESA.¹⁶⁸

The NSW Government supported in principle the recommendation that every student undertake a major investigative project in a subject of their choosing with further advice to be sought from NESA.¹⁶⁹

The NSW Government noted the recommendation that every student learn a second language during primary school and the recommendation to establish a taskforce to investigate the feasibility of not calculating and reporting on the ATAR.¹⁷⁰

An independent inquiry commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation has raised concerns that curriculum reform is being implemented too quickly and without proper consultation, and that teachers are not being provided with the support needed to teach the new curriculum effectively.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ NSW Government, [NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review: Final Report](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 7 and 14. NSW Education Standards Authority, [Curriculum reform timeline](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023.

¹⁶⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Curriculum reform timeline](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023.

¹⁶⁸ NSW Government, [NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review: Final Report](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 17.

¹⁶⁹ NSW Government, [NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review: Final Report](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 19.

¹⁷⁰ NSW Government, [NSW Government response to the NSW Curriculum Review: Final Report](#), n.d., accessed 27 February 2023, p 18 and 19.

¹⁷¹ G Gallop, T Kavanagh and P Lee, [Valuing the teaching profession](#), n.d, NSW Teachers Federation, p 9 and 13-14; G Gallop, T Kavanagh and P Lee, [Valuing the Teaching Profession Report: An update](#), NSW Teachers Federation, n.d., p 3.

9. Who is teaching?

Teachers have a fundamental role in ensuring that a school system functions effectively and turns the goals of school education into a reality for all students, their families and the broader community. The extent to which teachers can fulfil their role in a school system in part depends on systemic factors, such as funding, specialist support and overcrowding. But it also depends on whether there is a sufficient supply of quality teachers available across the state. The quality of teachers is a factor which can be assessed indirectly via improvements in measures of student achievement.¹⁷²

The issues of teacher supply and quality are interrelated, and have a range of contributing factors, many of which are discussed in sections 9.1 and 9.2. Of note is that a ‘...teacher’s role and how they teach students is arguably becoming more complex and time-consuming.’¹⁷³ This increase in the complexity of teaching is in part due to the use of differentiated teaching strategies and ongoing formative assessment, which have been shown to improve student achievement.¹⁷⁴ While beneficial to students, such practices place additional demands on teachers:

A more customised learning experience means that teachers need to understand a student’s prior knowledge, provide appropriate instruction to that student’s need, evaluate knowledge learnt through assessment (increasingly formative assessment), provide feedback to students and determine the next step in the learning progression. The skills, capability and time needed for teachers to personalise learning for their students is significant when the spread of ability in individual classes is large.¹⁷⁵

These demands are placed on all teachers, but are particularly felt by teachers in public schools, given that ‘[i]t is the public system that carries the vast bulk of students with disability and disadvantage.’¹⁷⁶ For instance, between 2015 and 2019, the population of students who were learning English as second language or dialect grew by 21.5% in NSW government schools, and in 2019 represented 23.7% of the public school student population.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² NSW Treasury, *Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy*, May 2021, p 48.

¹⁷³ Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Five year productivity inquiry: From learning to growth (Interim report)*, September 2022, p 29.

¹⁷⁴ D Gonski et al., *Through growth to achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, Australian Government, March 2018, p 61.

¹⁷⁵ Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Five year productivity inquiry: From learning to growth (Interim report)*, September 2022, p 30.

¹⁷⁶ G Gallop, T Kavanagh and P Lee, *Valuing the teaching profession: An independent inquiry*, NSW Teachers Federation, 20 February 2021, p 20.

¹⁷⁷ NSW Department of Education, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, *Schools: English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) learners 2015 to 2019*, June 2021, p 8.

9.1 Teacher quality

Efforts to improve teacher quality are becoming increasingly formalised at national and state levels. For instance, accreditation of teachers was introduced in NSW in 2004, with the enactment of the [Teacher Accreditation Act 2004 \(NSW\)](#), establishment of the NSW Institute of Teachers and the introduction of the NSW Professional Teaching Standards.¹⁷⁸

In 2010 the Australian Government established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership ([AITSL](#)) to lead efforts to promote excellence in teaching. In 2011 AITSL released the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Australian Standards).¹⁷⁹ NSW adopted the Australian Standards in 2012 and required all teachers employed after 1 October 2012 to become accredited. From 2018, the [Teacher Accreditation Act 2004 \(NSW\)](#) required all NSW teachers to be accredited against the Australian Standards.¹⁸⁰ The 7 standards relate to 3 professional domains (Table 7). NESA is the sole accreditation authority for all teachers in NSW.¹⁸¹

Table 7: Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Professional knowledge		Professional practice			Professional engagement	
1. Know the students and how they learn	2. Know the content and how to teach it	3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning	4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments	5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning	6. Engage in professional learning	7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

Source: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#).

The standards have different requirements that apply to the four accreditation levels of graduate teacher, proficient teacher, highly accomplished teacher and lead teacher.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ The NSW Institute of Teachers was replaced by the NSW Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOTSES) in 2014. In turn, BOTSES was replaced by NESA in 2017: NSW Government, Department of Education, [Teaching standards timeline](#), n.d., last updated 15 February 2023, accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁷⁹ Australian Institute for Training and School Leadership, [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#), n.d., accessed 9 March 2023.

¹⁸⁰ NSW Government, Department of Education, [Teaching standards timeline](#), n.d., last updated 15 February 2023, accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁸¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Teacher accreditation reform](#), n.d., accessed 10 March 2023.

¹⁸² For the requirements that apply to each level of accreditation, see: Australian Institute for Training and School Leadership, [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#), n.d., accessed 9 March 2023. See also: NSW

The NSW Government has supported teacher quality through its Great Teaching, Inspired Learning program, which was launched in 2013.¹⁸³ This package of 47 actions relates to the areas of initial teacher education, professional practice, and recognising and sharing outstanding practice. According to NESA, the reforms implemented to date relate to tougher entry standards for teaching degrees, teacher accreditation, and improving the quality of initial teacher education.¹⁸⁴ Specific initiatives include:

- Strong Start, Great Teachers program, which provides schools with funding and resources for effective induction programs for beginning teachers¹⁸⁵
- Quality Teaching Successful Students program, which provides a staffing allocation to improve teaching quality in schools with primary student enrolments. The staffing allocation can be used for mentoring, analysis of student data, numeracy and literacy specialists, and curriculum implementation¹⁸⁶
- Improving the quality of initial teacher education degrees¹⁸⁷
- Improving the professional experience component of teacher education degrees¹⁸⁸
- Accreditation of teaching degrees¹⁸⁹
- Minimum HSC entry requirements for entry to teaching degrees¹⁹⁰
- Requirement to pass the National Literacy and Numeracy test¹⁹¹
- Requirement for graduates or experienced teachers seeking employment in NSW public schools to obtain approval to teach from the NSW Department of Education.¹⁹²

Education Standards Authority, [The Standards](#), n.d., accessed 9 March 2023 and [NSW Teacher Accreditation Manual](#), 2022. Persons apply for teacher accreditation in NSW for the first time may initially be provided with conditional or provisional accreditation.

¹⁸³ NSW Government, [Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: A blueprint for action](#), March 2013. See also: NSW Education Standards Authority, [Great Teaching, Inspired Learning](#), n.d., accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁸⁴ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Great Teaching, Inspired Learning](#), n.d., accessed 8 March 2023 and [GTIL implementation](#), n.d., access 8 March 2023.

¹⁸⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Strong Start Great Teachers](#), n.d., last updated 8 December 2022, accessed 9 March 2023.

¹⁸⁶ NSW Department of Education, [Quality Teaching, Successful Students](#), n.d., last updated 19 October 2022, accessed 10 March 2023.

¹⁸⁷ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Initial Teacher Education: Providers](#), n.d., accessed 11 March 2023. See also: Australian Government Department of Education, [Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper](#), March 2023 and [Next steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review](#), 2022.

¹⁸⁸ See also NSW Education Standards Authority, [Professional experience in initial teacher education](#), 2017, accessed 8 March 2023.

¹⁸⁹ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Accredited Teaching Degrees](#) and [Initial Teacher Education: Providers](#), n.d., accessed 11 March 2023, where NESA states that it is 'part of a national initial teacher education program accreditation system and works with the [Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership \(AITSL\)](#)'

¹⁹⁰ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Studying Teaching](#), n.d., accessed 11 March 2023.

¹⁹¹ NSW Education Standards Authority, [Studying Teaching](#), n.d., accessed 11 March 2023.

¹⁹² NSW Department of Education, [Approval to teach](#), n.d., last updated 18 May 2022, accessed 11 March 2023.

9.1.1. Concerns about accreditation and performance management

In 2019 the NSW Audit Office reported that efforts to ensure teacher quality across the NSW public school system were inadequate.¹⁹³ Key findings from the NSW Audit Office related to:

- The absence of a mechanism to ensure that minimum standards for teaching were consistently met
- Failure to effectively monitor teaching quality at a system level and ensure strategies to improve teaching quality were appropriately targeted
- A lack of support for principals and supervisors to actively improve teacher performance and teaching quality via the department's Performance and Development Framework.¹⁹⁴

The NSW Audit Office recommended that NESA improve the accreditation process, ensure people making accreditation decisions were adequately trained, and introduce a system of reviews. Recommendations made to the NSW Department of Education included that it improve its Performance and Development Framework by strengthening the quality and rigour of observations of teaching practice, and by providing support to teachers and principals.¹⁹⁵ The NSW Government supported all the recommendations made by the NSW Audit Office.¹⁹⁶

As part of an inquiry into measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools, the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee recommended that the NSW Government 'establish a School Inspectorate as an independent unit undertaking regular inspections of classroom practices, teacher quality and school management.'¹⁹⁷ The NSW Government noted this recommendation and responded:

Oversight and accountability mechanisms will be strengthened and integrated. NESA inspection functions will be improved, focusing on teaching and learning. Departmental oversight will be increased through enhanced school planning and public reporting, external validation through the School Excellence Framework, stronger performance and development

¹⁹³ Audit Office of NSW, [Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools](#), 26 September 2019, p 2-4

¹⁹⁴ Audit Office of NSW, [Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools](#), 26 September 2019, p 1. See also: NSW Government, Department of Education, [Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and teachers in NSW Public Schools](#), March 2015.

¹⁹⁵ Audit Office of NSW, [Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools](#), 26 September 2019, p 5.

¹⁹⁶ Audit Office of NSW, [Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools](#), 26 September 2019, p 30-33.

¹⁹⁷ NSW Legislative Council, [Measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW Schools](#), February 2020, p 59 (Recommendation 37).

processes for principals and teachers, and significantly enhanced system level public reporting.¹⁹⁸

The NSW Productivity Commission has also commented on the need to improve the teacher performance framework by, for instance, incorporating value-added measures of student achievement, feedback from students, more effective use of classroom observations, and measurable goals.¹⁹⁹

9.1.2 Concerns about excessive workload

The Productivity Commission has noted that excessive workload is diminishing the quality of teaching, as well as the attractiveness of teaching as a career.²⁰⁰ Some non-face-to-face teaching tasks are a legitimate and core part of teachers' work; especially high-value non-teaching tasks that enable teachers to 'track and analyse students' progress, inform parents of their child's achievement, and maintain and improve their professional practice.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Commission added, 'some teacher time is spent on tasks that are overly burdensome or do not actively support quality teaching – almost 10% of teacher time is spent on "general administrative work".²⁰² As noted earlier, this administrative burden exists at a time when teachers are being expected to increase their use of differentiated teaching and formative assessment as part of their daily practice.

Following a review of teachers' workload, the NSW Government acknowledged that too much time was being spent by teachers on low-value administrative work.²⁰³ In response, the NSW Government launched a *Quality Time Action Plan* and Quality Time Program to streamline administrative requirements.²⁰⁴ Initiatives to reduce administrative tasks and the overall workload of teachers include the launch and ongoing development of the Universal Resources Hub, streamlined administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation, the digitisation of manual forms and payment process for extracurricular activities, and the development of on-demand formative assessment resources.²⁰⁵ According to the NSW Department of Education, its target of reducing low-value

¹⁹⁸ NSW Government, [NSW Government Response, Portfolio Committee No 3: Education, Measurement and outcome-based funding in NSW schools](#), August 2020, p 16-17.

¹⁹⁹ NSW Treasury, [Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy](#), May 2021, p 70-77.

²⁰⁰ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Five-year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth: Interim report](#), September 2022, p 30.

²⁰¹ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Five-year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth: Interim report](#), September 2022, p 31.

²⁰² Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Five-year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth: Interim report](#), September 2022, p 31.

²⁰³ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [Five-year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth: Interim report](#), September 2022, p 32.

²⁰⁴ NSW Department of Education, [Quality Time Action Plan](#), September 2021, and [Quality Time Program](#), n.d., last updated 1 August 2022, accessed 12 March 2023.

²⁰⁵ NSW Department of Education, [Quality Time Program](#), n.d., last updated 1 August 2022, accessed 12 March 2023 and the [Quality Time Mid-year update](#), July 2022, p 12, 14, 15 and 21.

administrative work by 20% before the end of 2022 had been met and efforts were being made to identify further reductions.²⁰⁶

9.2 Teacher demand and supply

Quality teaching requires a reliable supply of quality teachers.²⁰⁷ Teacher supply is, however, a current issue for all states and territories; particularly in rural, regional and remote areas, and in the science, mathematics, engineering and technology (STEM) fields, as well as agriculture, languages and special/inclusive education.²⁰⁸ A shortage of STEM teachers has resulted in teachers being required to teach 'out of field', in subjects which they have no qualifications.²⁰⁹ To address this issue a *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* was published on 15 December 2022.²¹⁰

Although there is general agreement that teacher supply is a current issue, the extent of the issue is unclear.²¹¹ Uncertainty regarding the extent of the issue was also noted in February 2023 by the Legislative Council's Education Portfolio Committee as part of an inquiry into teacher shortages and education outcomes. The committee commented that it was 'disappointed that further information to clarify the full extent of total vacancies is not available' and called for 'more fulsome information regarding the number of temporary and casual vacancies to ensure that a more accurate understanding of the teacher supply shortage can be ascertained and to support better workforce planning.'²¹²

This uncertainty is in part due to the complex and dynamic factors that underly teacher demand and supply, including:

- Fluctuations in school student enrolments
- Fluctuations in enrolments in teacher education programs
- Reduced retention (an increased rate of resignations) due to working conditions (administration, teaching load and casualisation of work)

²⁰⁶ NSW Department of Education, [Quality Time Action Plan Explained](#), n.d., last updated 1 August 2022, accessed 12 March 2023; and NSW Department of Education, [Quality Time Mid-year update](#), July 2022, p 4.

²⁰⁷ NSW Treasury, [Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy](#), May 2021, p 54.

²⁰⁸ C O'Neil, [National Action Plan on teacher shortage](#) [media release], Australian Government, 15 August 2022.

²⁰⁹ NSW Treasury, [Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy](#), May 2021, p 54-55.

²¹⁰ Education Ministers Meeting, [The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan](#), December 2022.

²¹¹ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), [Building a sustainable teaching workforce](#), October 2022. See also: Australian Government Department of Education, Issues Paper, [Teacher workforce shortages](#), 2022, p 10.

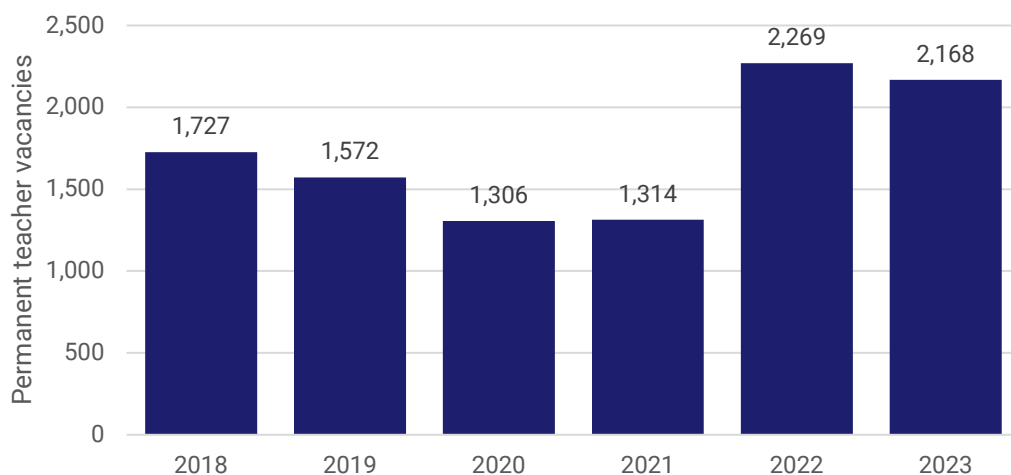
²¹² NSW Legislative Council, [Teacher shortages and education outcomes in NSW](#), February 2023, p 11. A 2019 report by the NSW Audit Office also found that the NSW Department of Education was not accurately tracking the supply and demand for secondary teachers by discipline due to incomplete data, but noted that the NSW Government was attempting to address this issue by measures that included a new workforce model: NSW Audit Office, [Supply of secondary teachers in STEM-related disciplines](#), 29 January 2019, p 1.

- An ageing workforce leading to an increased rate of retirements
- Remuneration levels relative to other professions and the demands of the job
- Professional standing
- The need to recruit in regional and remote locations
- The need to recruit in specific subject areas.²¹³

The change in enrolments in teacher education programs affects both supply and quality, with the NSW Productivity Commission noting that undergraduate enrolment data indicates that the attractiveness of teaching has declined relative to other professions for higher achieving students with an ATAR of 80 or above.²¹⁴ There are also reports that supply and quality in public schools is being affected by higher salaries being offered to teachers by non-government schools.²¹⁵

Figure 8 shows that, since 2018, permanent teacher vacancies in NSW public schools have increased by 26%, from 1,727 to 2,168.²¹⁶ But Figure 9 shows that the current and projected supply of teachers exceeds the current and projected demand.²¹⁷

Figure: 8 Permanent teacher vacancies, NSW public schools, January 2018 to January 2023



Source: [NSW Legislative Council](#) reporting NSW Department of Education data.

²¹³ Australian Government Department of Education, Issues Paper, *Teacher workforce shortages*, 2022.

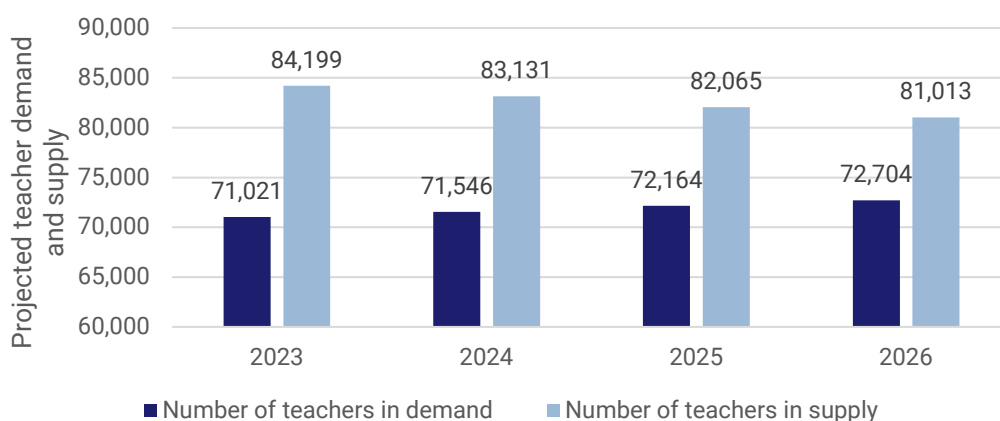
²¹⁴ NSW Treasury, *Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy*, May 2021, p 54, citing P Goss and J Sonnemann, *Attracting high achievers to teaching*, Grattan Institute, August 2019, p 14.

²¹⁵ See for instance: G Marchant, *Private schools are poaching teachers from the public sector with better salaries, principals say*, ABC News, 5 February 2023; and L Cormack and L Carroll, *Failed school reforms remain three years after 'ad-hoc' policy dropped*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 2023.

²¹⁶ NSW Legislative Council, *Teacher shortages and education outcomes in NSW*, February 2023, p 38.

²¹⁷ NSW Legislative Council, *Teacher shortages and education outcomes in NSW*, February 2023, p 38.

Figure 9: Projected teacher (FTE) demand and supply, NSW public schools, 2023-2026



Source: [NSW Legislative Council](#) reporting NSW Department of Education data.

The NSW Government has commented on this situation and noted that it faces challenges not in overall terms but in deploying teachers to fill vacancies in specific geographical areas and subject specialties:

Over the past five years we've permanently filled, on average, more than 6,000 teaching roles each year, with more than 8,000 filled in 2022. Because of these efforts the state is no longer on course for a teacher shortage in the simple terms of supply and demand. Rather it is facing a deployment challenge ... It has been, and will continue to be, a key priority for the Department to increase the supply of teachers across our system. It is imperative that we increase the supply of teachers where they are most needed.²¹⁸

Due to the complex and dynamic nature of the teacher supply issue, in May 2021 the NSW Productivity Commission recommended that the NSW Government establish a long-term teacher supply strategy.²¹⁹ In line with that recommendation, the NSW Government published its *NSW Teacher Supply Strategy 2021–2031*.²²⁰ The key strategic priorities of the strategy are to:

- Grow the overall supply of teachers
- Encourage more teachers to train in high-need and specialist subject areas
- Provide targeted support for existing teachers and prospective teachers.²²¹

²¹⁸ NSW Government, [NSW Government response to parliamentary inquiry into teacher shortages](#), 8 February 2023, p 1, accessed 20 March 2023.

²¹⁹ NSW Treasury, [Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy](#), May 2021, p 56.

²²⁰ NSW Government Department of Education, [NSW Teacher Supply Strategy 2021-2031](#), 2021.

²²¹ NSW Government Department of Education, [NSW Teacher Supply Strategy 2021-2031](#), 2021, p 4.

Measures to increase the overall supply of teachers include recruiting teachers from beyond NSW and media campaigns to raise awareness of employment opportunities. Measures to encourage more teachers to train in high-need and specialist subject areas include supporting teacher retraining and providing accelerated mid-career pathways for experienced subject matter professionals to enter the teaching profession. The targeted support provided under the strategy includes scholarships and other financial incentives to attract existing and prospective teachers to rural and remote areas.²²²

In February 2023 the Perrottet Government announced that, to streamline entry into the profession, it would replace the current two-year Master of Education with a one-year course.²²³ It announced financial incentives to encourage more teachers to gain highly accomplished and lead teacher (HALT) accreditation, which carries a salary of up to \$120,000. It also announced a new Rewarding Excellence in Teaching pathway, which would offer chosen HALT teachers up to \$152,000.²²⁴ That approach was aimed at attracting new teachers and retaining existing teachers by providing career progression and increased salaries to high-performing teachers. Some commentators suggested, however, that such an approach may erode collaboration and act as a disincentive to the majority of teaching staff.²²⁵ As part of its 2023 election campaign, NSW Labor stated that it would make teacher salaries more competitive by removing the existing cap on wages.²²⁶ It also said that it would create 10,000 additional permanent teaching positions by turning temporary jobs into permanent positions.²²⁷

²²² NSW Government Department of Education, [NSW Teacher Supply Strategy 2021-2031](#), 2021, p 4.

²²³ NSW Government Department of Education, [Changes to pathways into teaching for aspiring teachers](#), 25 January 2023, accessed 6 April 2023. See also: NSW Treasury, [Productivity Commission White Paper: Rebooting the Economy](#), May 2021, p 45 (recommendation 2.2); and NSW Treasury, [The economic impacts of longer postgraduate initial teacher education: A cost-benefit analysis](#), January 2023.

²²⁴ S Mitchell, [New cash incentives on offer for highly accomplished and lead teachers](#) [media release], NSW Government, 20 February 2023, accessed 14 March 2023.

²²⁵ See, for instance, P Sahlberg, [It's great education ministers agree the teacher shortage is a problem, but their new plan ignores the root causes](#), *The Conversation*, 13 August 2022.

²²⁶ Australian Labor Party (NSW Branch), [Labor's Fresh start plan for education](#) and [scrap the wages cap](#), n.d., accessed 5 April 2023.

²²⁷ Australian Labor Party (NSW Branch), [10,000 additional permanent teachers](#), n.d., accessed 5 April 2023.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Australian and NSW Government bilateral agreement reform plan

Appendix 1 sets out the action plan that is part of the [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#).²²⁸

Reform direction and actions	Sector(s)	Timing
Reform direction A: Support students, student learning and achievement		
Deliver the review of the K-12 curriculum to ensure the school education system is preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the future	All sectors	End of 2019
Implement the refreshed curriculum post 2019 review, ensuring teachers are supported to implement a streamlined curriculum, including timely and formative assessments	All sectors	From 2020
Embed practices (particularly to boost early achievement in literacy and numeracy), including implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Plan (LNAP)	All sectors	End 2020 for (LNAP), ongoing
Meet the needs of students at risk of educational disadvantage (including students with disability, Aboriginal students, students with low English proficiency and students in rural and regional areas) through evidence-based pedagogy, quality teaching and leadership and innovation	All sectors	Ongoing
Reform direction B: Support teaching, school leadership and school improvement		
Strengthen the mandatory content requirements of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in identified areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), literacy/numeracy, students with special needs and classroom management	All sectors	Ongoing
Identify and support cohorts of high-quality teachers across sectors for certification at highly accomplished and lead teacher level	All sectors	2019
Raise the bar for entry as a teacher in government schools through strengthened employment mechanisms	Government	2019
Improve the quality and relevance of professional learning, focused on improving student learning outcomes	Government	2019
Build a strong pipeline of leaders through early talent identification, systematic induction of new principals and delivering high quality development programs for current and aspiring school leaders through a School Leadership Institute	Government	2019
Lifting the burden to allow schools to focus on teaching and learning:		

²²⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, [Bilateral Agreement between New South Wales and the Commonwealth on Quality Schools Reform](#), 7 November 2018, revised 4 October 2021, p 4-5.

Reform direction and actions	Sector(s)	Timing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the administrative burden on schools, principals and teachers to increase the amount of time to focus on high quality teaching and leading 	Government	2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> De-clutter the curriculum 	All sectors	2020
Harmonise national/state administrative arrangements	Non-government	2019
Targeted initiatives to improve system and school effectiveness:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide tailored support to improve every school, from capability-building to targeted intervention, using the School Excellence Framework to identify need and drive improvement 	Government	2019
The Commonwealth will work with NSW to address identified NSW teacher workforce needs (particularly in the areas of maths and science) including through the development of a national and state specific teacher workforce strategy reflecting respective areas of responsibility	All sectors	2019
Strengthen accountability measures for non-government schools that receive state funding, initially through the development of memoranda of understanding with the sectors	Non-government	2019
Implement a school level investment strategy to ensure that needs-based funding makes an impact on student learning through effective expenditure, aligned to school planning	Government	2019
Reform direction C: Enhancing the national evidence base		
Establish a Catalyst Lab to explore and test innovative educational practice in partnership with schools and other partners	Government	2019

Appendix 2: National School Reform Agreement outcomes and sub-outcomes

Appendix 2 sets out the outcomes and sub-outcomes in the National School Reform Agreement²²⁹

Outcome	Sub-outcome
Academic achievement improves for all students, including priority equity cohorts	Lower the proportion of students in the bottom levels (bottom two bands) and increase the proportion of students in the top levels (top two bands) of performance in the NAPLAN assessment for literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9
	Lower the proportion of Australian students in the bottom levels (proficiency levels 1 and 2) and increase the proportion of students in the top levels of performance (proficiency levels 5 and 6) in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing in reading, mathematics and science
	Lower the proportion of students from priority equity cohorts in the bottom levels (bottom two bands) and increase the proportion of students in the top levels (top two bands) in the NAPLAN assessment for literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9
	Reduce the gap in achievement between students from various socioeconomic backgrounds in Australia's PISA educational performance compared to other countries and the OECD average
	Increase the proportion of young people from priority equity cohorts who have completed year 12 or equivalent or gained a qualification at the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate III or above
All students are engaged in their schooling	Increase the proportion of students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time, including students from priority equity cohorts
Students gain the skills they need to transition to further study and/or work and life success	Increase the proportion of young people who have completed year 12 or equivalent or gained a qualification at AQF Certificate III or above

²²⁹ Council of Australian Governments, [National School Reform Agreement](#), 5 November 2018, modified 22 September 2021, clause 37.

Appendix 3: NSW Budget school education outcome indicators

Appendix 3 sets the NSW Budget school education outcome indicators for 2021–22 and 2022–23, as well as the notes that accompanied those outcome indicators.²³⁰

Outcome indicators	2021-22 actual (%) ^(a)	2022-23 forecast (%) ^(a)
Academic achievement		
Proportion of public school students in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy ^(b)	33.0	36.4
Proportion of public school students above the national minimum standard for reading and numeracy	79.1	87.9
Proportion of public school students achieving expected growth in reading and numeracy ^(b)	55.9	66.4
Student wellbeing²³¹		
Proportion of public school students reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school ^(c)		
% of public school primary students	84.0	91.0
% of public school secondary students	64.0	69.4
Proportion of public school students attending school at least 90% of the time ^(d)		
% of public school primary students	77.8	82.0
% of public school secondary students	59.6	70.0
Student equity (Aboriginal students)		
Proportion of Aboriginal students attaining their HSC while maintaining their cultural identity ^(e)	43.0	58.0
Proportion of Aboriginal students in public schools in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy ^(b)	11.0	15.0
Proportion of Aboriginal students in public schools above the national minimum standard for reading and numeracy	56.0	65.5
Reduce the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in public schools reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school		
Gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal public primary school students	3.2	1.5

²³⁰ NSW Government, *NSW Budget 2022-23, No. 02 Outcomes Statement Budget Paper*, June 2022, p 2-12.

²³¹ In 2019 the NSW Audit Office found that, while the Department of Education has a strong focus on supporting secondary student wellbeing, it was “difficult to assess how well the Department is progressing as it is yet to measure or report on the outcomes of this work at a whole-of-state level”: NSW Audit Office, *Wellbeing of secondary school students*, 23 May 2019.

Outcome indicators	2021-22 actual (%) ^(a)	2022-23 forecast (%) ^(a)
Gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal public secondary school students	13.4	8.7
Student equity (disadvantaged students)		
Reduce the gap between the highest and lowest socioeconomic status students (SES) in public schools in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy ^{(b)(f)}	42.7	34.5
Reduce the gap between the highest and lowest socioeconomic status students in public schools above the national minimum standard for reading and numeracy ^(f)	33.8	26.8
Reduce the gap between the highest and lowest socioeconomic status students in public schools reporting a sense of belonging, expectations for success and advocacy at school ^(f)		
Gap between low and high SES public primary school students	10.1	5.5
Gap between low and high SES public secondary school students	23.8	16.7
Independence		
Proportion of public school students continuing to year 12 and the proportion of public school students' HSC results in the top two achievement bands ^(g)		
% of public school HSC results in top two bands	34.9	35.7
Apparent retention rate	71.3	76.7
Proportion of all recent school leavers (who left school the previous year) participating in higher education, training or work ^(h)	91.1	91.6

Notes:

(a) 2021–22 actuals and 2022–23 forecasts refer to the 2021 and 2022 school years, respectively.

(b) Data sourced from NSW Department of Education, annual NAPLAN results. The baseline is the average of 2017 and 2018 results. 'Expected growth' is based on the growth achieved by students in reading and numeracy from one NAPLAN assessment to the next (two years later).

(c) Sourced from the NSW Department of Education's *Tell Them From Me* student survey. These measures are the average of three survey metrics. The primary school measure is sourced from surveys of students in Years 4 to 6. Measures for secondary school students are for Years 7 to 12.

(d) Sourced from NSW Department of Education's mid-year census.

(e) Data sourced from NESA and NSW Department of Education. This target refers to all Aboriginal students in NSW (i.e. both government and non-government schools). Attainment rates are estimated by calculating the number of students awarded their HSC expressed as a percentage of the potential Year 12 population. The potential Year 12 population is an estimate of a single-year age group that could have attended Year 12 that year and is derived from administrative records for Year 9 and Year 10 enrolments in earlier years. The results for Year 12

Outcome indicators	2021-22 actual (%) ^(a)	2022-23 forecast (%) ^(a)
--------------------	--------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

in 2020 are interim. A number of these students will complete their HSC over three years, which will be captured as revisions.

(f) High socio-economic status students are those whose parents have a bachelor's degree or above. Low socio-economic status students are those whose parents achieved a Year 11 or below school education level and do not have any non-school education. This information is self-reported and results should be interpreted with caution.

(g) Sourced from the NSW Department of Education's mid-year census and from NESAs. The apparent retention rate is defined as the number of full time equivalent (FTE) students in Year 12 as a proportion of the cohort enrolment two years prior (when in Year 10). Retention rates are "apparent" as they do not track individual students through to their final years of secondary schooling. Care should be taken in the interpretation of apparent retention rates because the method of calculation does not take into account a range of factors including migration, interstate movement of students, transfers to and from non-government schools, part-time schooling, students repeating a year of schooling, and students pursuing other education and training pathways.

(h) Data sourced from the NSW Department of Education's NSW Post-School Destinations and Expectations Survey

Appendix 4: School Success Model targets

Appendix 4 sets out the targets for individual school and school system improvement that form part of the School Success Model.²³²

Target	Department targets	School targets
NAPLAN	Increase public school students in top two NAPLAN bands for literacy and numeracy by 15% (Premier's priority)	Individual school targets in place from 2020
Aboriginal education	Increase Aboriginal students attaining the HSC while maintaining their cultural identity by 50% (Premier's priority)	Individual school network targets in place from 2020 (percentage uplift). Individual school student uplift in place that underpins the network target
HSC	Proportion of students' HSC results in the top two achievement bands: from 34.6% (2018) to 35.7% (2023)	Individual school targets in place from 2021
Attendance	Public school students attending at least 90% of the time: from 79.4% (2018) to 82% (2023) in primary schools and 64.5% (2018) to 70% (2023) in secondary schools	Individual school targets in place from 2021
Student growth (equity)	Public school students achieving expected growth in reading and numeracy: from 62.3% (2018) to 66.4% (2023)	Individual school targets in place from 2021
Pathways	Recent school leavers participating in higher education, training or work: from 89.6% (2018) to 91.6% (2023) and 93.6 (2028) Students continuing to Year 12: from 73.9% (2018) to 76.7% (2023)	A measure will be selected with a baseline established for secondary schools in 2022, and with targets set for secondary schools from 2023

The NSW Department of Education notes that, in May 2022, schools were given additional time to meet their targets due to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemics.²³³

The NAPLAN Top 2 Bands targets for reading and numeracy were consistent with the Premier's Priorities for education published in 2019. The NAPLAN top two band targets for reading and numeracy will not be extended to 2023 due to nationally agreed changes to NAPLAN bands that were planned from 2023.²³⁴

²³² NSW Government Department of Education, [School Success Model](#), n.d, last updated 22 December 2022, accessed 14 February 2022.

²³³ NSW Government Department of Education, [School Success Model](#), n.d, last updated 22 December 2022, accessed 14 February 2022.

²³⁴ S Mitchell, [School improvement targets](#), *NSW Hansard*, 11 October 2022. For a discussion of the changes to NAPLAN, see: J Hare, [NAPLAN changes aim to fix the underachievement problem](#), *Financial Review*, 10 February 2023, accessed 14 February 2023. The changes include reducing the number of NAPLAN bands from 10 to 4 to better identify underperforming students and more effectively provide additional support to them.

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The Parliament of New South Wales acknowledges and respects the traditional lands of all Aboriginal people and pays respects to all Elders past and present. We acknowledge the Gadigal people as the traditional custodians of the land on which the Parliament of New South Wales stands.

