



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 47

## WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Education and Training, Hon Jo-Anne Hersey MLA:

### Truancy Officers

- 1. What are the training and qualification requirements for persons authorised under s.167(2) (e.g. Truancy Officers) of the Education Act 2015 ('the Act')?**

School attendance officers (SAO) (known as truancy officers) and student engagement advisors (SEA) within the Northern Territory (NT) Department of Education and Training must complete the following induction and training:

- Authorised Officer training delivered by the department
- record management
- education database and data reporting
- Safe and Supportive De-escalation training
- Trauma Responsive Practice in Education
- first aid training
- 4 wheel drive training
- department orientation.

- 2. What further training is provided for persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act during their employment?**

Refer to written question 45, question 3.

- 3. How are these training needs identified?**

Needs for training and professional development are identified based on:

- job descriptions and main responsibilities
- department goals and strategies
- employee performance and areas for further growth.

- 4. In particular what training and qualifications are persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act required to have when working with children with developmental challenges, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder(FASD) and other cognitive impairments?**

Refer to answer provided in question 1 and 2.

- 5. What happens when children do not engage with the persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act?**

Compliance actions may be considered when all reasonable efforts to engage with the child prove to be ineffective.

- 6. How are the persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act exercising their powers under s 174 of the Education Act?**

SAOs and SEAs conduct patrols in CBDs, shopping precincts, public bus interchanges during school hours to ensure school-aged children are at school, and other areas where children may be truant during school hours. They interact with a student and/or their family to seek a reason for school absence as well as their contact details for follow up.

- 7. How will persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act identify children they find on the street?**

SAOs and SEAs interact with a student and/or their family to seek personal details for follow up. Some of these children and their families maybe known to staff due to previous interactions with them. If they are not known, staff will request their names and contact details. If required staff may identify students through lines of inquiry with other NT Government agencies, elders in community or staff from local schools.

- 8. Do children have the right to silence?**

174 (2) and (3) of the Act require a child to provide their name, address, age and name of school to an authorised person.

- 9. Can you outline the process of ‘accompany’ under s.174(5). What happens if the young person refuses to be ‘accompanied’?**

If a young person refuses to be accompanied by a SAO or SEA, and there are no immediate safety concerns, staff will make efforts to engage them and their family through other means such as a home visit. If there are immediate safety concerns staff will contact the NT Police or the Department of Children and Families.

**10. Please outline the potential actions persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act can take Under s 174 (5c).**

Actions are varied depending on the circumstances. They may include conversations with the student to further understand their situation and engage them to return to school or a youth center/safe space of their own accord, or engagement with local authorities where the student is truant i.e. security staff.

**11. Can you outline the work of persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act from November 26<sup>th</sup> to December 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. How many interactions with children and adults have there been? Please outline the nature of those interactions and the outcomes.**

<b>Case managed Engagement activities</b>	Total
No. Successful Engagement Visits	<b>235</b>
No. Unsuccessful Engagement Visits	<b>133</b>
No. Stakeholder Meetings	<b>122</b>

<b>Non - Case Interaction events</b>	Total
No. MEC Patrol	<b>106</b>
No. Interaction Act	<b>307</b>
No. Unsuccessful Visit	<b>20</b>

**12. Has the Government commenced issuing penalties under the Act to families? If so, how many fines have been issued, in what locations and for what amounts?**

The issuing of penalties under the Act is not a new power.

In Term 4, 2024 (from 7 October to 13 December 2024), the department issued 476 compliance notices and 38 infringement (fines) notices. Infringement notice is a \$370 fine.

Of the 476 compliance notices, 72 were issued in Barkly, 149 in Big Rivers, 122 in Central, 19 in Darwin, 60 in East Arnhem and 54 in Top End.

Of the 476 compliance notices, 151 have been revoked. This means that parents and independent students have complied with the directions given within the allocated time.

Of the 38 infringement (fines) notices, 5 were issued in Barkly, 12 in Big Rivers, 13 in Central, 2 in East Arnhem and 6 in Top End.

Of the 38 infringement notices, 2 have been revoked. This means that parents and independent students have complied with the directions given.

**13. What department and what business area within that department are managing persons authorised under s.167(2) of the Act and making decisions on issuing fines?**

SAO and SEA positions sit under the Student Attendance and Engagement Programs and Services Branch of the Inclusion and Engagement Services division.

**14. Please provide the theory of change (and the research underpinning this theory) used by the Department of Education to link the strategy of employing truancy officers and issuing fines to the outcome of increasing school attendance.**

Proactive truancy and engagement strategies align with behaviour change theories, which explain how attendance patterns can be positively influenced. Specifically, the following theories apply:

1. Theory of Planned Behaviour – This theory suggests that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence behaviour. SAOs can improve attitudes by educating families about the long-term benefits of education. These interventions enhance perceived behavioural control by establishing attendance as a community norm and addressing logistical barriers, such as transport or family responsibilities.
2. Health Belief Model – SAOs communicate the risks of absenteeism, such as academic failure, and highlight the benefits of attendance, including better job prospects and social skills. By reducing perceived barriers and enhancing perceived life benefits, this model encourages families to prioritise school attendance.
3. Social Cognitive Theory – SAOs serve as role models, demonstrating the positive outcomes of regular attendance. Reinforcement strategies, such as rewarding good attendance, encourage the desired behaviour.