



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 289

WRITTEN QUESTION

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

School Attendance Enforcement

- 1. How much revenue is expected from school attendance-related infringement notices in 2026–27?**

The Department of Education and Training's (the department) attendance compliance framework is intended to support compulsory enrolment and attendance obligations under the *Education Act 2015* Northern Territory (NT) (the Act). The primary objective of infringement notices is behavioural compliance rather than revenue generation.

Revenue from infringement notices is not published as a specific budget measure and any forecast would be undertaken by the Department of Treasury and Finance in partnership with the Department of Corporate and Digital Development. The department does not set attendance enforcement targets based on revenue generation.

- 2. Has the Department evaluated whether attendance-related fines improve school attendance?**

The department closely monitors the impact of compliance activities on student attendance and engagement and is already beginning to see positive early indicators. These include increased engagement between schools and families following compliance, improvements in attendance for some students, and a greater focus on attendance obligations among families.

The Department has committed to conducting a process evaluation of the School Attendance Officers Program, which has been incorporated into the 2026-27 Evaluation Schedule.

The department's attendance enforcement activities are based on provisions contained within the Act and the department's Enrolment and Attendance Enforcement Procedure. The rationale is that a graduated compliance model, including information notices, compliance notices and

infringement notices, underpinned by school and system led engagement support, including complex case management, encourages parental responsibility and supports improved attendance.

a. What were the KPIs, and how is performance tracking against them?

The department publicly reports attendance outcomes through attendance rates and enrolment measures contained in Budget Paper No. 3 and periodic attendance reports. The School Attendance Officer Program aims to increase attendance, improve engagement and ensure compliance with compulsory attendance requirements. Specific program KPIs for infringement activity have not been established, as the program is not focused solely on the issuing of fines. The primary objective of the School Attendance Officer Program is to improve school attendance, with enforcement measures forming one component of a broader attendance framework. Success is measured through improved attendance outcomes, student engagement and compliance with compulsory attendance requirements.

b. What evidence does the Department hold that fining parents improves educational outcomes for children?

Regular school attendance is strongly associated with improved educational attainment and engagement. The department's position is that enforcement measures support attendance obligations established in legislation and complement a range of other compliance and engagement measures.

3. Reports and inquiries have identified racism, discrimination and cultural safety concerns as factors affecting school engagement for some Aboriginal students. How has the Department assessed the extent to which these factors contribute to non-attendance, and how is that being addressed alongside enforcement measures?

The department recognises that attendance is influenced by a range of factors including family circumstances, mobility, transience, health, housing stability, transport availability, community conditions, cultural considerations and student engagement. Schools and Student Attendance and Engagement teams work with families, communities and partner agencies to address barriers to attendance. This includes the employment of 2 Senior Aboriginal Practice Advisors who provide advice and support to school and system staff on culturally informed and responsive case management practices.

The department's attendance strategy combines supportive interventions, individual case management and the enforcement provisions available under the Act. While racism, discrimination and cultural safety concerns

may contribute to attendance challenges for some students, attendance is influenced by a complex range of interconnected factors. As a result, it is not feasible to attribute non-attendance to individual factors, or to quantify them as specific proportions of total absences.

4. Where a child is not attending because they feel unsafe, excluded or unsupported at school, what evidence does the Department hold that fining their parents addresses the underlying cause?

Where attendance issues arise from wellbeing, safety, inclusion or engagement concerns, schools and regional staff work with students and families to address those matters. This may include wellbeing and inclusion supports, Student Engagement Advisors, counselling and engagement services, individual attendance plans, transitions support, flexible learning options, and referrals to specialist or external support services.

The department also works closely with other government agencies and community service providers to address barriers to engagement and support student participation in education. Enforcement mechanisms are intended to support compliance with attendance obligations and are one component of a broader framework of educational, wellbeing and student support interventions.

5. What attendance improvement target was set for the Attendance and Engagement Officer program?

All attendance-related programs and initiatives delivered by the department contribute collectively towards achievement of the attendance targets published in [Budget Paper No. 3](#) and under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. As attendance outcomes are driven by multiple complementary strategies and external factors, it is not possible to isolate the impact of any single program or initiative.

The School Attendance Officer Program was established to increase school attendance and strengthen compliance with compulsory attendance requirements.

The department continuously reviews attendance trends, operational data and feedback from schools and communities to inform service delivery and resource allocation. The government has strengthened its attendance framework through the introduction of School Attendance Officers, expanded compliance activities, targeted attendance and engagement supports, and continued collaboration with schools, families, communities and other government agencies to address barriers to attendance. The department will continue to refine its approach in response to emerging attendance challenges and evidence of what works to support student engagement and participation.

a. Has the program met that target?

N/A.

b. If not, what changes are being made?

N/A.

6. The Government has spent or committed \$21 million on Attendance and Engagement Officers. What measurable outcomes has that investment achieved?

The objective is to increase attendance, improve engagement and strengthen compliance with compulsory attendance legislation. Activity measures include attendance monitoring, case management, family engagement, patrols, referrals and enforcement actions.

a. How many additional students are attending school as a direct result of the program?

The department does not report a causal estimate of additional students attending solely because of the program. Attendance outcomes are influenced by multiple concurrent factors and initiatives. The department reports attendance data by region, school type and Aboriginal status, all of which is publicly available.

b. What is the cost per additional student attending school?

N/A.

7. How many fined families subsequently improved attendance, and how many did not?

Under section 172 of the Act, a compliance notice must be revoked if the Chief Executive Officer for the department or School Attendance Officer is satisfied the notice has been complied with. From January 2025 to 7 September 2026, 53 infringement notices were revoked. For the same period, 1215 compliance notices were revoked. Revocations evidence that families are listening and returning their children to school.

8. What proportion of fines were issued to Aboriginal families?

To protect the privacy of parents and students, the department does not publicly report compliance notices or infringement notices by Aboriginal status. Any consideration of the release of individual-level or cohort-specific information would be subject to privacy, confidentiality and reporting obligations.

a. Where a figure for an individual region or school is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.

N/A.

- b. If Aboriginality is not recorded against a compliance notice or fine, in which system is the recipient recorded, and in what format?**

Aboriginality is not a required field on compliance notice or infringement notice forms, which are issued in relation to attendance obligations under the Act.

- 9. In January 2026 the Minister stated that in 2025 School Attendance Officers issued 1,398 compliance notices and 292 fines, of which 679 notices and 33 fines were revoked, and characterised those revocations as evidence that parents were complying. Of the revoked notices and fines, how many were revoked because the notice or fine was issued in error, was successfully challenged, or was withdrawn for a reason other than subsequent attendance?**

No compliance notices were revoked because they were issued in error.

Revocations occur where the department is satisfied that the notice has been complied with, demonstrating that the compliance process is achieving its intended purpose of encouraging re-engagement with compulsory attendance requirements.

- a. What proportion of all compliance notices issued in 2025 were subsequently revoked?**

N/A.

- b. On what evidence does the Department attribute revocations to improved attendance rather than to error or successful challenge?**

N/A.

- c. In which system are the grounds for revoking a compliance notice or fine recorded, and in what format?**

The department records compliance and infringement data in the Student Engagement, Attendance and Truancy (SEAT) case management system. The Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS) is the NT's justice information management system, used to record and manage court, infringement and related justice matters.

- 10. What assessment has the Department undertaken of the underlying causes of school non-attendance?**

The department recognises that school attendance is influenced by a range of interconnected individual, family, community and school-based

factors, including health, housing, transport, family circumstances, mobility and student engagement. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multi-agency approach.

The department works with other NT government agencies, schools, community organisations and service providers to identify and address barriers to attendance and support children and families to engage in education.

Accordingly, the department's approach combines engagement, support and case management with the enforcement provisions available under the Act. Enforcement is one component of a broader framework designed to support sustained school participation and improved educational outcomes.

a. How much non-attendance is attributed to housing instability, health issues, transport barriers, racism, and disengagement or unmet learning needs, respectively?

The department actively case manages disengaged students on an individual basis, working with families and partner agencies to identify and address the specific barriers affecting each child. The department understands and acknowledges that school attendance is influenced by a range of factors, including health and wellbeing, housing, transport, family circumstances, mobility, school connectedness, experiences of discrimination, and unmet learning or support needs.

Improving attendance requires a coordinated, multi-agency response. The department works with other NT government agencies, schools, community organisations and service providers to support students and families, with enforcement forming one component of a broader attendance and engagement framework.

b. Has the Department quantified these factors, and can that analysis be tabled?

No.

c. How does fining parents address those underlying causes?

The department's policy position is that enforcement measures reinforce attendance obligations and parental responsibility under the Act. However, enforcement forms only one part of a broader attendance and engagement framework.

Schools, Student Engagement Advisors, School Attendance Officers and regional staff work directly with students and families to identify and address barriers to attendance through individual case

management, attendance planning, wellbeing and inclusion supports, referrals to specialist services, flexible learning pathways and coordinated support from other government agencies and community organisations.

The department recognises that non-attendance is often driven by complex and interconnected factors. Accordingly, underlying barriers are addressed through support, intervention and multi-agency collaboration, with enforcement used as a complementary measure to encourage ongoing engagement in education and compliance with compulsory attendance requirements.

11. What attendance rate does the Government expect to achieve next year, and over the next five years?

The government's expectations for school attendance are reflected in the performance measures and targets published in Budget Paper No. 3 and the department's strategic and operational planning processes. Annual targets are established to support improvement in student attendance and engagement and are reviewed as part of the budget development process. There is ongoing commitment to improving attendance outcomes, recognising that regular school attendance is fundamental to improved educational achievement and lifelong outcomes for Territory children.

The agreed 2030 attendance rate target in the Better Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) for the NT is to return to 2019 levels: 79.7%.

a. What evidence supports that forecast?

Attendance forecasts are used to inform targets and are derived using historical enrolment and attendance data, projected growth trajectories and consideration of factors that influence student engagement and participation. The department also considers the expected impact of attendance-focused initiatives and broader education reforms.

b. At what point would the Government conclude the current approach is not working?

As part of the scheduled review process, the department will monitor implementation progress, outcomes and available evidence against the objectives of the initiative. The review will assess whether the current approach is achieving its intended outcomes and delivering value for investment. Based on the findings of the review, the government will be provided with the information required to make an informed decision regarding the continuation, refinement or replacement of the current approach.

12. Has the Department evaluated whether welfare payment sanctions improve attendance outcomes?

a. What evidence supports this approach?

The department has not undertaken a standalone evaluation of welfare payment sanctions as a discrete attendance intervention. The department's attendance framework comprises a range of complementary supports, engagement strategies and compliance measures. As such, program review and analysis will encompass a range of activities associated with the School Attendance Officer Program and other interrelated initiatives.

b. Has the Department assessed unintended consequences for children and families?

The approach is supported by the broader legislative framework established under the Act, which recognises parental responsibility for ensuring children of compulsory school age are enrolled and attend school. Compliance and enforcement mechanisms form part of a graduated attendance framework designed to reinforce attendance obligations while schools and partner agencies work with families to address barriers to engagement.

13. What measurable evidence demonstrates that these enforcement measures are improving attendance outcomes?

a. If that evidence cannot be identified, on what basis is the Government expanding enforcement rather than independently evaluating whether it works?

The powers available under the Act have existed for some time and continue to operate as part of the department's graduated attendance framework. The government has strengthened the implementation of the existing legislative framework through increased operational capacity and a greater focus on supporting compliance with compulsory attendance requirements.

b. If attendance rates have declined, what is the basis for continuing the current approach?

The department monitors attendance outcomes through publicly reported enrolment and attendance data and compliance activity. While attendance improvements may be observed at individual student, school or regional levels, attendance outcomes are influenced by a range of factors and initiatives. As a result, it is not possible to attribute changes in attendance outcomes solely to enforcement measures. Enforcement forms one component of a broader attendance and engagement framework that includes case management, wellbeing supports, school-based interventions and multi-agency collaboration.

14. Budget Paper No. 3 for 2026–27 publishes attendance rate targets separately by Aboriginal status. For government preschools the 2026–27 targets are at least 88 per cent for non-Aboriginal children and at least 53 per cent for Aboriginal children, against 2025–26 results of 87 and 51 per cent. For government primary and secondary schools, the non-Aboriginal target has been raised from at least 86 per cent to at least 88 per cent against a 2025–26 result of 85 per cent, while the Aboriginal target is retained at least 60 per cent against a 2025–26 result of 55 per cent.

- a. On what basis is the Aboriginal attendance target set at 53 per cent for preschool and 60 per cent for primary and secondary, and when was each last reviewed?**

Attendance targets are reviewed as part of the annual budget paper and performance reporting process. Targets are informed by recent performance, historical attendance trends, projected growth rates and the department's assessment of achievable improvement over the budget period. Published targets are intended to represent improvement on current performance while recognising the different challenges affecting attendance across cohorts.

- b. Why was the non-Aboriginal primary and secondary target raised for 2026–27 against a result that did not meet the 2025-26 target, while the Aboriginal target was retained unchanged against a result five percentage points below it?**

Targets for different cohorts are determined independently and reflect historical performance, current attendance rates and projected improvement trajectories. The department's objective is to improve attendance outcomes for all students, and target settings are based on the level of improvement assessed as achievable for each cohort over the reporting period.

- c. Is it the Government's position that an Aboriginal student attending 60 per cent of the school year meets the Department's expectation, and how does that sit with the enforcement of compulsory attendance against parents?**

No. The department's expectation is that all students attend school every day they are required to attend.

Published attendance targets are performance measures used to monitor system-wide improvement and should not be interpreted as the desired level of attendance for any individual student. The compulsory attendance requirements established under legislation apply equally regardless of the attendance target used for reporting purposes.

- d. **How many of the compliance notices and fines issued in 2025 were issued in respect of Aboriginal students, and how many in respect of non-Aboriginal students? Where a figure is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.**

The department does not report compliance data by Indigeneity.

- e. **By what date is the Government aiming for parity between the two attendance targets, and what funded measures are directed to closing the gap in 2026-27? Please identify any of those measures that is also counted toward increasing enrolment.**

The government is committed to improving attendance outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and reducing the attendance gap over time. The current performance framework sets annual improvement targets rather than a specific date for achieving parity.

Measures supporting improved Aboriginal attendance include targeted attendance and engagement services, school engagement initiatives, community partnerships, family support programs and place-based responses in remote and very remote communities.

- f. **For 2026-27 the enrolment target for Aboriginal preschool students was lowered from 1,200 to 1,150, and the attendance target for Aboriginal primary and secondary students was retained at 60 per cent while the equivalent non-Aboriginal target was raised. Taken together, what increase does the Government expect in 2026-27 in the number of Aboriginal children actually attending, expressed as a number of children rather than as a rate?**

The 2026-27 Budget paper No. 3 targets increased in enrolment and attendance in 2026 compared to actual 2025 results for both the preschool and primary/secondary Aboriginal cohorts.

Meeting these targets would equate to around an extra 718 Aboriginal primary/secondary students enrolling in school and an extra 26 Aboriginal preschoolers enrolling compared to 2025.