

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Lambley to the Minister for Education:

Attendance at Northern Territory Schools Less than 30%

According to the Department of Education Annual Report 2019-20¹ Northern Territory Schools have attendance rates as below.

- Alyarrmandmanja Umbakumba School had an attendance rate of 29.8 %
- Angurugu School had an attendance rate of 24.8 %
- Rockhampton Downs School had an attendance rate of 28.3 %
- Willowra School had an attendance rate of 26.4 %

1. Please explain your plan for how you intend to improve the attendance rate of each school listed above?
2. Please provide details of particular strategies and resources that have been allocated to each school listed above to address the problem of school attendance.

ANSWERS:**1. Strategies for improving student attendance and engagement**

The Department of Education (the department) is improving student attendance and engagement across all Territory schools, and employs various strategies and programs to realise that objective. Some of these strategies are system-driven and enacted across multiple or all schools, with appropriate resources and support. Other strategies are school-led and place-based, specifically tailored to the identified needs of students, families and communities.

In development

Education NT Engagement Strategy

- There are many complex and long term factors that affect attendance rates in the Territory – this is why we are working on the new Education NT Engagement Strategy.
- The Department is having a conversation with children, young people, families, educators and experts about engagement in learning. These conversations are

¹ The attendance rates stated are derived from published attendance rates for the 2020 school year, not the 2019-20 financial year.

informing the development of a new engagement strategy that will support all Territory children and young people from birth to Year 12 to engage in education.

- The strategy is broader than lifting attendance; it focuses on developing systemic and deep engagement in education.

Quality Standards Framework for Alternative Education Programs

- The Department is committed to keeping students engaged at school through early intervention, supporting the re-engagement of disengaged students within mainstream schools, and by supporting quality alternative education programs delivered in the Northern Territory (NT).
- Alternative education programs range from system level designed programs to school-based and place-based initiatives that deliver individualised learning environments to give each student an education pathway to further employment, training or learning.
- The department is developing a Quality Standards Framework for Alternative Education Programs across the NT. The framework will provide mainstream schools and program providers with an understanding of what high quality alternative education services look like and measures of success, with the aim to increase the quality of alternative education programs and improve outcomes for students.

The following system-driven attendance and engagement strategies are implemented across multiple school sites:

- **Own Our Own:** an initiative that supports all Territory government schools to work with students who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from their learning including students away from their home communities.
- **Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS):** an Australian Government funded program that employs local community members to support student and family engagement at school.
- **Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation programs:** through a tripartite funding model comprised of philanthropic, Commonwealth and NT Government contributions, the Department delivers targeted engagement programs for Aboriginal students in government schools. These programs provide school-based mentoring and wellbeing support to help students remain engaged in and committed to completing school.
- **Student Engagement Officers:** engagement officers across the Territory are specifically tasked with supporting the development of engagement capability and programs in schools. Some officers are embedded within schools and form part of the complex care teams that engage with students and families to remove barriers to attendance by coordinating access to services. Other engagement officers work across multiple schools within each region, providing intensive support to an identified group of 'focus schools' with pressing attendance needs.
- **Local Decision Making:** support for improving engagement and attendance, and actions underpinning that, are often undertaken by schools utilising their school representative bodies or within the context of community led decision making.

- **Community-Led Schools:** Community-Led Schools empower and support a number of remote communities to establish formally recognised school decision making bodies and mechanisms so they can lead the running of their schools.
- **FaFT:** Developing good learning habits early and engaging families in their child's learning.

In addition to the above system lead initiatives to address engagement and attendance, the department works with other agencies and non-government programs to support children and young people to meaningfully engage in education. Some of these initiatives include:

- **Learning on Country:** targets remote Indigenous students and disengaged young people eligible for enrolment. The program is community driven and supported by well-established local governance arrangements that ensure communities guide and control program delivery and outcomes.
- **Remote Sports Academy:** Wanta Aboriginal Corporation staff work with upper primary and secondary students to increase school attendance and improve educational outcomes and youth transition to vocational opportunities. They do this through the provision of sport, recreation and cultural activities
- **Back on Track:** the Department of Education supports Back on Track, an alternative youth diversion program, for young people aged between 8 and 17 years coordinated by Territory Families, Housing and Communities. The program addresses at-risk behaviour, consequences and restitution, life skills and cultural connection, family capacity and responsibility. It also supports re-engagement with education, training and employment (Element 4 of the program).
- **Multi Agency Community and Child Safety Teams (MACCST):** the Multi-Agency Community and Child Safety (MACCS) Framework brings together community members with cultural authority, locally based heads of government agencies, and non-government organisations through MACCS Teams (MACCSTs) to identify issues, create action plans for child, family and community safety, and carry out actions together.

2. As part of the school resourcing model, every government school in the Territory manages their own budget. Alongside their community and supported by the Department of Education, schools make decisions about resourcing and deploying appropriate attendance and engagement strategies that best meet their local context and local needs.