

## Question on Notice

No. 173

Asked on 10 March 2021

**MR D LAST** ASKED MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND MINISTER FOR RACING (HON G GRACE)

QUESTION:

With reference to truancy having been identified as a key contributor to the youth crime epidemic, and school attendance rates released by the Department of Education showing that, in the North Queensland region, almost 60 percent of schools had an attendance rate lower than the state average—

Will the Minister advise what action is being taken by the government to address the issue of truancy in North Queensland and, therefore, help to address the youth crime problem?

ANSWER:

The attendance rate the Member refers to is based on 2019 data. In 2019, the average attendance rate for all state schools was 90.5%, with the North Queensland Region reporting a rate of 87.4%. It is misleading to link attendance rates with truancy since attendance rates take into account all absences, including absences from illness, or family reasons. It is also important to note that a major natural disaster occurred in this region in 2019, which would have impacted families and student attendance.

State schools in North Queensland use a wide range of strategies to improve and maintain student attendance and engagement, as do schools across the State. These strategies include:

- setting and communicating clear expectations to parents and students about attendance;
- having engaging curriculum and extracurricular activities;
- building strong parent and community engagement;
- providing breakfast clubs, uniforms and/or stationery packs for students as needed;
- having programs or special activities rewarding positive attendance; and
- providing support services such as guidance officers, year coordinators, youth support coordinators, chaplains or student welfare workers and Indigenous Liaison Officers and/or Indigenous mentors, to assist with overcoming barriers to attendance and engagement.

Schools closely monitor and manage student absences in line with the Department of Education's (DoE) *Managing student absences and enforcing enrolment and attendance at state schools* procedure, which is available at [www.ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/managing-student-absences-and-enforcing-enrolment-and-attendance-at-state-schools-procedure](http://www.ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/managing-student-absences-and-enforcing-enrolment-and-attendance-at-state-schools-procedure).

School and regional office staff aim for early identification of students whose attendance is not regular, and will work with parents and carers to identify issues underpinning the non-attendance of their child at school and helping as appropriate.

Schools also refer cases to the regionally-based Youth Engagement Hub which case manages and re-engages disengaged young people back into school, training and/or employment. The Youth Engagement Hub, North Queensland Region, works collaboratively with school leadership teams, internal specialist staff and external agencies, including the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs; the Queensland Police Service; and non-state schools.

DoE is rolling out FlexiSpaces throughout Queensland, with 32 schools currently delivering or in stages of establishing a FlexiSpace, and a further 20 to be established in 2022. FlexiSpaces demonstrate how mainstream schools can achieve inclusive practices in meeting the needs of students who may otherwise disengage from school. An independent evaluation has provided early insights into the success of this program in lifting outcomes for students who are at risk of disengagement. This initiative was recently awarded an Australian Education Award.

In the North Queensland Region, there are currently three FlexiSpaces located at Heatley Secondary College, Charters Towers State High School and William Ross State High School, with two more being established in 2021 at Thuringowa State High School and Kirwan State High School.

In late 2019, DoE introduced the Link and Launch service to support young people who have completed Year 12 but are not in education, employment or training. The Link and Launch service currently operates from four schools in the North Queensland region.

DoE aims to ensure the vast majority of students enrol at a mainstream school. However, there are a small number of young people who cannot thrive in mainstream school settings. Some of these students may enrol in alternative education settings, such as the Queensland Pathways State College, which is a senior transition program for 15 to 17 year-olds who face significant barriers in accessing mainstream education. A campus of the Queensland Pathways State College is located in Pimlico, Townsville.

North Queensland regional officers and school leaders continue to support successful engagement and transition of children, students and young people by:

- continuing to build capability in positive transitions from early education, to school and further education, training and employment pathways for every student and young person;
- enhancing the service delivery of the Regional Youth Engagement Hub for students and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school;
- helping to better co-ordinate the support provided by different agencies in the region for vulnerable families and young people;
- strengthening community engagement and cultural competence through capability building services provided by the regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Team and school-based Community Education Counsellors and Indigenous Education Workers; and
- implementing and supporting programs including:
  - the Education Justice Initiative in Townsville where the Court Liaison Officer (CLO) attends Townsville Children’s Court and High Risk Youth Court, and responds to any requests from the Magistrate regarding enrolment, education history and suitable education options;
  - the CLO forms part of SMART (Specialist multi-agency response teams) at Townsville Children’s Court to assess what services are required and assist with providing the right kinds of support to a young person;

- the Stars Foundation and Clontarf Foundation mentoring programs support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to remain engaged at school:
  - the Stars Foundation, for Year 7 to Year 12 girls, is offered at three schools in Townsville—Heatley Secondary College, Thuringowa State High School and Pimlico State High School.
  - the Clontarf Foundation, for Year 10 to Year 12 boys is offered at four schools in Townsville—Heatley Secondary College, Thuringowa State High School, Kirwan State High School and Townsville State High School;
- the Positive Learning Unit, Stanton Lodge, in Townsville focuses on the development of social and emotional competencies which are designed to improve behaviour. Attendance is part-time, usually one or two days a week, and students attend their base school for the remaining days of the week; and
- School Based Police Officers are in selected secondary schools across North Queensland. This is a joint initiative of the Queensland Police Service and DoE to enhance the safety, security and wellbeing of the school community.