



EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mrs RN Menkens MP (Chair)
Mr SA Bennett MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr MR Latter MP
Ms A Palaszczuk MP
Mr MJ Pucci MP
Mr NA Symes MP

Staff present:

Ms B Watson (Research Director)
Ms E Booth (Principal Research Officer)
Ms C Heffernan (Executive Assistant)

BRIEFING—QUEENSLAND AUDIT OFFICE— IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 6 JUNE 2012

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 6 JUNE 2012

Committee met at 10.59 am

CAMPBELL, Ms Terry, Assistant Auditor-General, Performance Audit, Queensland Audit Office

GREAVES, Mr Andrew, Auditor-General, Queensland Audit Office

HANWRIGHT, Mr John, Manager, Performance Audit, Queensland Audit Office

CHAIR: Good morning all. I welcome the officials from the Queensland Audit Office: Mr Andrew Greaves, the Auditor-General, and his colleagues Ms Terry Campbell, who is the Assistant Auditor-General, Performance Audit, and Mr John Hanwright, who is the Manager, Performance Audit. They are joining us today to provide an overview of the Queensland Audit Office and to brief us on the recently tabled report No. 1 for 2012, *Improving student attendance*.

I would like to introduce the members of the Education and Innovation Committee. I am Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin and the chair of this committee. With me are the committee members: Ms Anastacia Palaszczuk, the member for Inala; Mr Steve Bennett, the member for Burnett; Mr Michael Pucci, the member for Logan; Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Albert; Mr Michael Latter, the member for Waterford; and Mr Neil Symes, the member for Lytton.

As a portfolio committee of the Queensland parliament, our role is as elected representatives of the Queensland people to consider Auditor-General's reports relevant to this committee and to decide on what, if any, further action we might undertake in order to inform any report we might make back to the parliament as a whole. Your briefing today will help us to determine whether we want or need additional information about the subject of your report to inform our consideration.

The briefing today is being broadcast live via the Queensland parliament website. This briefing is also being recorded and will be transcribed by Hansard, and the intent is to publish the transcript of this briefing on the committee's web page when it is available. I would also ask members of the media who might be recording any proceedings that they adhere to the committee's endorsed media guidelines. Committee staff have a copy of the guidelines available for you should you require one. I ask everybody present to please turn off their mobile phones or set them to silent.

Mr Greaves and colleagues, the Education and Innovation Committee is very interested in hearing about the role of the Auditor-General and your ideas on how the Auditor-General and the portfolio committees can work in a complementary way. We have read with great interest your report on improving student attendance and we also look forward to hearing more from you about that. Are you happy for us to ask you any questions at the end of both of your briefings?

Mr Greaves: Yes, Chair.

CHAIR: I ask officers from the Auditor-General's office to state your name the first time you speak for the benefit of Hansard. Thank you and I now hand over to the Auditor-General.

Mr Greaves: First of all, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to brief you today on the results of my performance audit report on student attendance but also for the committee's wider interest in the activities of my office. As you said, before we turn to the report, it is probably appropriate that I give some contextual introductory remarks about the role of the Auditor-General and the role of the Audit Office. I want to focus particularly in these comments on the performance audit role, given that today we are talking about a performance audit report and also given that performance auditing in Queensland is a relatively new phenomenon.

The advent of performance auditing in Queensland in 2011 at the same time as the new committee structure and operating arrangements were introduced, while then perhaps coincidental, with hindsight certainly has been a significant step forward in strengthening not only the role of the parliament in its oversight of the executive government but also the role and contribution of my office in providing you with assurance about the accountability and performance of the public sector. As an independent officer of the parliament, traditionally I have provided members with assurance through my reports on the results of audits and, through assistance to the parliamentary committee, assigned the primary role of scrutinising public accounts. That committee has also traditionally had an oversight role for my office. While the Finance and Administration Committee properly retains its oversight role for my office, and will no doubt from that perspective at least continue to have an ongoing interest in all of my reports, the extension of the public accounts role to the other portfolio committees also naturally extends their interest in my reports.

The public accounts terminology, however, has the potential at first to mislead to the extent that it may connote for members of the committee issues only of financial management, regulatory and control, with particular focus on the financial statements of an entity. There is no doubt that such matters are central to the consideration of the proper functioning of the public sector and go to the core of its accountability, and my office plays an important role in this respect. Each year we audit the financial statements of all public sector entities, both state and local government, and the entities they control and provide an audit opinion on those statements. The audited financial statements are required to be included in the annual reports of each entity, which are tabled in the parliament. The audit opinion I express adds credibility to the financial statements, meaning that the readers and the users of those statements can be more assured that they can be relied upon. To the extent that I consider the financial statements or aspects of the financial statements to not be reliable, I will qualify my audit opinion.

Section 60 of the Auditor-General Act provides also that at least once each year I provide a report to the Assembly on the results of my financial audits. To better assist parliament in the consideration of these reports, I have commenced reporting on a sector basis. In this vein, most recently yesterday I tabled my report on the results of my financial audits of the 2011 financial statements of the seven state universities and the eight grammar schools and the entities that they control.

But financial statements and my reports on them speak primarily to one aspect of public administration. It is a truism for the public sector that its financial statements can tell the reader how much was spent but offer little insight into how well it was spent. Contrast this with the private sector where the bottom line, the profit or loss, is a much more direct measure of organisational effectiveness and efficiency. So to address this accountability gap, contemporary audit legislation in Australia—in fact, in most Western democracies—provides for Auditors-General to undertake performance audits.

Queensland, while late to this, now has audit legislation that is among the most progressive in Australia in that it not only provides for performance audits but also extends the Auditor-General's mandate to follow the public dollar outside the public sector and to collaborate with my interstate and federal counterparts on joint audits. The joint audit provision reflects the present realities of the COAG reform agenda and the associated assurance mechanisms required for the national agreements and national partnership agreements, while the follow-the-dollar provision reflects the trend towards greater outsourcing of Public Service provision and the achievement of government objectives through the use of entities outside the public sector.

So these three new audit provisions—performance audit, follow-the-dollar and collaborative audit—introduced last year operate together not only to maintain the role of the Auditor-General in terms of the oversight of all public expenditure, even to the extent that it goes outside the public sector and is spent on behalf of the public sector by non-public sector entities, but also to broaden the relevant consideration beyond financial management and control, and in this regard to encompass efficiency, economy and effectiveness of public expenditures.

The report being discussed today on student attendance contains the results of the second performance audit undertaken under the new provisions of section 37A of the Audit Act—the first report being report No. 10 of 2011 on regulating waste, which was tabled on 9 November 2011. Prior to this first report in 2011, my performance audit mandate was limited only to reviewing the performance management systems established by public sector entities by which they monitored and accounted for their own performance. Of necessity, such audits focused on systems and process rather than examining directly the achievement of outcomes or the quantity, costs, timeliness and quality of outputs—in other words, the goods and services produced by the public sector.

By contrast, performance audits, compared to performance management system audits, will report directly about outputs and the achievement of outcomes and answer questions of whether they could have been produced with fewer resources—that is, more economically; more could have been done with the same resources—that is, more efficiently; or the objectives, goals and desired impacts have been delivered, which is their effectiveness. So, while it properly remains the responsibility of the governing body and executive management of each public entity to account for its performance in each of these respects, the independent auditor's report on such matters provides the same added assurance as that from the financial audit opinion.

With those opening remarks, I would be happy now to take any questions the committee may have in relation to my performance and financial audit mandate before we then turn to the report.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Greaves. I appreciate that very succinct overview and explanation of the improved auditing processes that we have set up here in Queensland. Are there any questions from the committee on the role of the Auditor-General and the Audit Office? No. Then I invite you, Mr Greaves, to give us an overview on the report.

Mr Greaves: I will ask Terry Campbell, the Assistant Auditor-General, Performance Audit, to brief the committee on the report, and then we would be happy once again to take questions on it.

Ms Campbell: The audit on improving student attendance looked at whether the department's strategies and initiatives to increase attendance have been effective. The topic was chosen as research shows that attendance is linked to achievement and students with poor attendance are more likely to leave school without a qualification or an overall position. This, in turn, can lead to limited employment and life opportunities.

The audit analysed attendance data for all state schools here in Queensland. We conducted a survey of a sample of principals and had responses from 107 principals across Queensland schools. We looked at state-wide policies and guidance and we also visited eight schools and looked at a sample of student records at those eight schools.

The key findings were that attendance rates have not improved over the last four years and that student absence is managed inconsistently. The first step at managing and improving attendance is to identify students that require follow-up. What we found was that schools were required to identify students with unsatisfactory attendance or three consecutive absences. But because there was no definition of what was considered to be unsatisfactory attendance, the focus was primarily on students who had three consecutive absences. Unfortunately, this meant that not all students with high rates of absenteeism were being identified and managed. In fact, some students were, if you like, flying under the radar.

At each of the eight schools we visited we asked for a report to be run of the students with the lowest attendance rates in that school. We found that some students on that list had not been identified by the school as having unsatisfactory attendance. One student, for example, identified by the audit had missed 45 per cent of the year but had not actually been identified by the school and was therefore not being case managed. We also found that the department and regional offices focused on schools with below state average attendance rates. This again missed students with low attendance. For example, at one school the overall student attendance rate was 94 per cent—so above the state average of 92 per cent—but 22 per cent of the students had missed more than 10 per cent of the year, which is the equivalent of one day per fortnight. So this approach to managing the average rather than the individual missed whole cohorts of students requiring attention to improve their attendance.

Why is having a definition of unsatisfactory attendance important? Providing all schools with a minimum attendance standard will remove doubt and create clarity for school principals on when to investigate and whether intervention is necessary. Without a trigger or a flag to use consistently, students with poor attendance may continue to go unnoticed. Having a minimum standard will also provide a benchmark that schools can use to identify if they are improving.

We found in three of the schools that we audited that were proactively managing poor school attendance that they used a minimum attendance standard to educate students, parents and the community on the importance of school attendance. They also used this standard to help students set goals and receive acknowledgement and reward for good attendance. The lack of a consistent minimum attendance standard across the state was also identified as an issue in a recent evaluation of the federally funded Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure program.

In summary, at this stage, strategies and initiatives to improve student attendance state-wide have not been effective. Current policies and reports encourage schools to focus on students who are absent three days in a row or whose absences are unexplained. Not all students with high rates of absenteeism are being identified and managed. Our recommendations centred around better identifying and managing individual students, rather than the average, whose attendance is unsatisfactory or persistently unexplained. This requires clearer central direction and guidance, including defining what is a minimal acceptable standard of attendance. I am happy to take any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Campbell, for that. From our committee's perspective, we believe this is a very important report. The first question we would put is: why did the Auditor-General consider this to be a matter warranting a performance audit? Was there a cost-benefit consideration? In essence, the question really is: what actually prompted this audit?

Ms Campbell: If we just take a step back to the way we choose audit topics in the first place, obviously we aim to get a spread of topics across government portfolios and also look at the significance of departments such as education and health that obviously have a significant proportion of the government's budget. It is quite usual that we would do an audit in education or health almost on an annual basis. When we were beginning to consult with the department last year on, if you like, the next performance audit in education, we did actually have a couple of potential audit topics that we discussed with them, including this one, and this was one that the department themselves felt there was value in. They felt it was an important topic and that it was certainly a topic of public interest or one that should actually be raised in the public arena. While the state average for attendance has remained consistent over the years, it is probably comparable with some other states or not as good as other states, so it was felt that it was worth some investigation of going below the overall results and looking at whether we could improve attendance, given its significant link to achievement both academically and later in life.

CHAIR: Thank you for that because it has certainly raised a large number of issues. Do we have further questions from the committee? I know we have discussed this report.

Mr PUCCI: When we got the briefing from the department, we brought up the definition of unsatisfactory attendance. They had an idea that it would set a benchmark saying that anything below that would be okay—95 per cent, for example—or anything above that is optional if you reach that. Does setting a benchmark for management purposes and not publicly advertising it have a detrimental effect on attendance in other jurisdictions?

Ms Campbell: I understand the concerns about setting a benchmark. This is more about setting a point at which we trigger attention and action. There are obviously some students with below average attendance rates who have very legitimate reasons for why they are not attending all the time. It is more

about setting a trigger that can then be used consistently across all schools. We found that there were some inconsistencies even in the department's own policies. In some instances, they talked about attendance less than 90 per cent while in others they used 85 per cent, so it was first of all getting some kind of consistency.

We also found that schools that used this did use it in a very intelligent way to actually start to look at students who might require attention. I understand that there is concern that it could become another league table but that is not the intention; it is about identifying a stage at which point they should be investigating a bit more. What we found at some schools is that there was minimal investigation into student absenteeism. I will ask John whether we looked at other states where this was used. I think in Western Australia, for example, they use this quite successfully.

Mr Hanwright: Western Australia has set some thresholds and some minimum standards, but that has only occurred recently and it is too early at this stage to be sure what the actual impact will be or whether there will be any unintended consequences for those schools or students.

CHAIR: Are there differences in attendance rates across metropolitan, regional and rural areas? Did your audit pick up any differences in the areas?

Mr Hanwright: Yes, there were some differences depending on the locations of the schools. They were not particularly large differences but there were differences between the metropolitan and some of the rural and very remote communities. There were some different patterns in attendance as well.

CHAIR: There may be areas there that could be addressed from that perspective. It would be fair to say that, in many cases, geographically remote students may suffer educational differences, shall we say, and I think the attendance rate would be an important part of that as well.

Mr Greaves: The point we make is that you first want to understand whether or not people are attending school, and then you can start diagnosing why they are not attending school. The point of this report, as the Assistant Auditor-General has said, is that we are trying to get some clarity about when you would act and what the trigger points would be—it would not be applied in a simplistic way; it would actually be applied intelligently by the department and by schools—and get some consistency across the state and between locations.

We did not drill down then into the underlying causes except to the extent that we did survey principals and ask them what their view was as to why students were not attending. Of course parental apathy scored very high in that list. We acknowledged in the report quite clearly that the primary responsibility here is with the parent or the caregiver. Having said that, we say that the department and the schools have an obligation and a duty to be identifying students who are supposed to be at school but are not at school. That is the key point we keep driving home here. We can debate about whether or not setting a minimum standard is a simplistic measure, but it is certainly just a part of the answer. It seems to us from the results of the audit and from the schools we saw that were proactively managing it that it was a good thing to do and it actually helped those schools improve and promote attendance.

CHAIR: That is excellent. Do we have some other questions?

Mr LATTER: Your report recommends that the department trial an increase in use of the option to prosecute parents when their children do not attend school which could result in a financial penalty. There seemed to be conflicting interpretations of other punitive approaches like this, such as the recent evaluation of the Commonwealth government's policy to withhold welfare payments from parents whose children do not meet school attendance rate targets. Did you find any evidence to support punitive approaches as being effective, for example, in other jurisdictions?

Mr Greaves: Maybe as a point of clarification, we looked at the provisions that currently exist in Queensland as it goes to enforcement which covers the potential for prosecution. That is a policy decision of the government and it is not within my mandate or role to question the merits of government policy so we took that as a setting.

The point of the report was that it was not clear that the department understood how effective that mechanism was. So we were not actually making a recommendation that there should be more prosecution; we were simply making the recommendation that the department, given that it is one mechanism, should be getting information about whether or not it is being effective and, given that we found very little use of it, trying to understand why it was not being used. Was it not being used because it was just not an effective mechanism at all, or were there things blocking its use? Were principals having to go through a huge process for very little gain or return? I think those types of questions should be and could be usefully answered by the department evaluating that particular mechanism.

Mr LATTER: Thank you. Just to go on from there, did you find any characteristics common to students with poor attendance who attend schools with higher than average attendance rates compared to students with poor attendance who go to schools with lower than average attendance rates? I am wondering about factors such as family income. It might be that financial penalties are effective in some situations but not in others, perhaps depending on local community norms in respect of school attendance.

Mr Greaves: I might ask John because he may have more detail than me here. To reinforce the point of the report, it really is about treating each student as an individual and understanding their individual circumstances. The reason we highlighted those students in the higher average attendance Brisbane

schools was to make the point that you need to be managing individuals; you cannot manage to an average. I do not know whether we have any more detail, John.

Mr Hanwright: No, the level of data we had access to did not go down to individual students and their characteristics, but as Andrew has already pointed out we did find that the attendance rates are consistent with the socioeconomic area the school is in. We did find that schools that were in middle or even higher socioeconomic areas had an average that seemed fine but when you looked at the actual students who were missing school there was a surprising number of students who had missed more than 10 per cent of the year.

Mr Pucci: I noticed in your report you identified that low attendance rates were not identified in schools sometimes with individual students. Were you thinking individual students need to be looked at more often? The department has indicated that schools generally are aware of the issues of individual students and work to link students and families with support groups and support services where that is needed. Did your performance audit find that this was the case?

Mr Hanwright: In many cases it was. When the schools had identified the individual students, we could see evidence that they had followed up and they had made referrals to get support for the families and for the student. Again, where we were concerned is where students had not been identified, and this was often because the systems that the school was using to mark the rolls relied on the vigilance of the person in the office to be looking at the rolls as they came through and to notice that this child has missed not just two days this week and two days the week before but in total this child has missed 10 or 15 or 20 days already. Some schools were running reports from their database that allowed them to look at the overall picture and identify those students but not all schools were able to do that.

Ms Palaszczuk: I thank the Auditor-General for the report. It is very comprehensive. I note that page 17 talks about attendance rates by year level. Primary school seems to be quite consistent, but I do notice that from years 8, 9 and 10 we are seeing relatively high numbers of students not attending. Do you think there is any scope here for the education department to perhaps prioritise those particular years? Whilst acknowledging that attendance is very important from primary school through to high school, it just seems to me that in those particular years the non-attendance rate is a lot higher. Would you care to comment on that?

Mr Greaves: I can start there. I guess one of the contextual comments is that this does not seem to be a Queensland phenomenon and we do include in the report—at page 18, figure 2E—some data we extracted from the *Report on government services* about how it looks in each other's jurisdiction. It does seem to be an Australia-wide phenomenon. From that perspective, it is something that I think should concern every jurisdiction.

I think your comment is right. Attendance obviously is important from day one, not least because it instils in the student the importance of attendance. Given that we are seeing this trailing off in years 8, 9 and 10, from my perspective in terms of performance gap that is where you would want to focus some energy and attention to understand what is happening there and why that is happening.

Ms Campbell: Just to add to that—and this goes to the crux of what we are saying—it is for the schools, not just the departments, to use the data to start to identify areas that require more attention, rather than just looking at an overall rate. Anecdotally, from the high schools we visited, years 8, 9 and 10 are critical years. There seems to be increased disengagement from the school. By using that information on where the gaps are, they can start to target very specific strategies for a particular year level or a particular region, whatever the case may be. It is using that data to identify where to manage the effort.

CHAIR: I have a comment to the Auditor-General. A high school in the community where my electorate office is has a very successful program which has been working for the last two or three years called School's In. At the beginning of the year, the school leaders go around to various businesses that are in the proximity of the high school and put signs in the windows with 'School's In' and students are expected to be in school. They invite those businesses to alert the school if they see students who have perhaps wandered off during the day. It does seem to be very successful. During your auditing, did you find many similar programs that are working successfully in schools?

Ms Campbell: I might ask John to talk about the Beenleigh case study.

Mr Hanwright: Yes, we did. It was at Beenleigh but there were also other schools across the state that had picked up this initiative. It tended to be clusters of schools. So it was geographically related, where the high schools and the feeder primary schools were working together to put those sorts of programs in place.

Mr Greaves: I think generally, Chair, the theme I take from that is that local action is very positive and obviously very effective. I think the role for the department is to identify those best practices, analyse them and try to systemise them—institutionalise them across the state. The idea is to leverage off someone's good idea and get it rolled out more broadly. I think that is where the central office and the regional offices of the department pay more attention and can be a conduit for expanding in exploring good practice.

Mr Boothman: I was looking through the charts displayed in the report and I saw that the attendance rate in Queensland schools is consistently poorer than the nation's average. Is this a significant issue? The overall attendance rate has been stable at about 90 to 91 per cent—and this is during the Every Day Counts awareness, which commenced in 2008.

Mr Greaves: To take the second point—and this goes to the issue of what a performance audit is about—as I said, we tried to report directly on the achievement of outcome. We chose to start tracking attendance particularly from that initiative to see what effect it had had. We also had our own reference point. The department itself had set a target of an average of a one per cent increase in attendance. We did not see any specific strategies beyond the Every Day Counts initiative that would lead us to achieve that one per cent increase. I think that is an important point. We did not see a clear tie-up between the intent to get a one per cent increase and what was happening on the ground as a new initiative or a new strategy to achieve that.

Regarding the earlier question about Queensland's performance against the rest of Australia, I think we would have to be cautious with the data. We put that in there because we wanted to make sure there was some context and balance in the report, but we also understand there are a lot of caveats around the data that are produced in the *Report on government services*, and it is not always comparing apples with apples. So we are quite aware of that and we would not want anyone to be misled about the relative performance of the jurisdictions. However, I think it is worthwhile looking at the comparison in a broader, more general context to see how Queensland is performing.

Mr SYMES: It was interesting to note in your report that over half of the students who missed more than 10 per cent of school attended schools that had an average or above-average attendance rate. Do you know whether the reasons given for nonattendance in these schools is consistent with the reasons given in schools with lower than average attendance rates?

Mr Hanwright: No, I do not know the answer to that one, I am sorry. If the committee would like, we might be able to look into that.

Mr Greaves: When we did the analysis, we did not dissect it from that perspective. Because we have not reported publicly on it, it is not something that we could now provide. However, I think it is a pertinent question and it may be worthwhile asking the department whether or not it could do that analysis. We can look at what extent we can share information between ourselves and the department to facilitate that.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I notice in the recommendations—and you have discussed it here today—that the key with this data collection is being able to target the students that need to be monitored. Then on page 28 it talks about improving attendance. It seems to me that the routine phone calls or meetings with parents are not necessarily the answer. Are you implying by this report that not only is the data collection important but so, too, is a case management situation—that where the schools work very comprehensively with those students we are seeing higher attendance rates?

Ms Campbell: Exactly. As we have said before, the data is a starting point but the case management, the follow-up, the work by the schools, is obviously critical to find out the underlying reasons students are not attending school and to give them support to improve their attendance rates. Certainly at some of the schools we visited we saw some very good examples, where they had attendance issues, where they had embarked on case management strategies and it had good effect. There are some of those illustrated as case studies throughout the report.

Mr Greaves: The point in section 3.6, 'Improving attendance', is that a lot of the strategies are designed to detect and then respond to try to address attendance. The point we are trying to make is that there is a balance between reactive and proactive. To what extent should schools and the department be exploring the underlying causes and trying to address underlying causes rather than simply reminding a parent that they have an obligation or sending a letter or making a phone call? There has to be a balance between being proactive and managing the root cause versus responding and reacting to someone not being at school.

CHAIR: I suppose, at the end of the day, the question is: how much responsibility lies with the teachers and with outside agencies as well?

Mr Greaves: I think you raise an important point there, Madam Chair. We are at pains to say in the report that it is not the department's or the school's primary responsibility. It is clearly the responsibility of the parent and the caregiver, both in legislative terms and in terms of the care of their children. But we do say that, given that students are supposed to attend schools and schools are supposed to be recording and monitoring their attendance, schools do have a legitimate role and responsibility in this area.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Is the current economic climate affecting the actual attendance rate? For instance, in my electorate of Albert we have had quite a few factory closures, especially in the boating industry. Is that affecting the attendance of students in those areas? I do not know where you have pooled data from, but would it be affecting it?

Mr Greaves: To me that would be speculative at this stage. We did not do an analysis that went to things like employment in a particular area. I am not sure that that data would be available in a way that could be brought together quickly or efficiently to do that analysis. It certainly could be a contributing factor, but it is not something we have looked at within the audit. It does go back to the issue of understanding the root cause and understanding what the strategies may be to proactively manage attendance.

Mr PUCCI: I refer to the member for Albert's question about attendance rates being steady at 90 to 91 per cent and the data being different from different areas. With that in mind, does the Auditor-General think the attendance rates in Queensland are poor?

Mr Greaves: What I think personally is probably not germane here. What I think is that the department has quite clearly—

Mr PUCCI: Oh, the department, yes.

Mr Greaves:—some standards by its own research that talks about an attendance of 90 per cent being an important threshold. Our job is to ask the question: is that attendance rate being achieved? If the department wanted to increase attendance, what strategies did it put in place to achieve the increase and have those strategies been successful? This report is simply saying that the department did set itself a stretch target to increase attendance but we did not see a clear link to any particular strategy, and in terms of the way the department monitors and schools monitor and manage attendance there is a cohort of students that are being missed here. From that perspective the strategies, to the extent that they exist, are not being effective. So some more work is needed in this area.

Mr SYMES: Is there a higher nonattendance rate of students from non-English backgrounds compared to Anglo-Australian students?

Mr Hanwright: We did not have access to that level of detail.

CHAIR: I would like to thank you particularly for your efforts and your assistance this morning. I congratulate you and commend you on this report because our committee believes it is a very important report. The committee will be considering the information that you have given us today and we will be deciding how to progress any of the matters we have discussed. We will be seeking a briefing from the department of education and training on where it will be taking this report. We will also possibly be seeking further information and submissions to further our investigations into this report.

On behalf of the committee, I certainly urge those with an interest in any further information to subscribe to the committee's email subscription list via the Queensland parliament's website for any updates or announcements. I thank you all very much for attending this morning.

Committee adjourned at 11.43 am