



EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mrs RN Menkens MP (Chair)
Mr SA Bennett MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr RG Hopper MP
Mr MR Latter MP
Dr AJ Lynham MP
Mr NA Symes MP

Staff present:

Ms B Watson (Research Director)
Ms M Salisbury (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT NO. 1 FOR 2012 TITLED *IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE*

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 6 AUGUST 2014

Brisbane

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Committee met at 9.33 am

BRENNAN, Mr Bevan, Assistant Director-General, State Schools, Operations, Department of Education, Training and Employment

SIMONS, Dr Roland, Executive Director, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting Branch, Department of Education, Training and Employment

CHAIR: Welcome. Before we begin this morning, I ask everybody present to turn off their mobile phones or set them to silent. Any media recording today's proceedings are asked to adhere to the committee's endorsed media guidelines. If you require another copy of the guidelines, please ask our secretariat staff.

This morning's public briefing relates to the committee's consideration in 2012 of the Auditor-General's report No. 1 for 2012 titled *Improving student attendance*. In our report back to the Queensland parliament this committee advised of our intent to review attendance rates again in 2014 to see what changes might have occurred since the 2012 reports were completed. I remind everyone that today's briefing is a formal process of the parliament and that parliamentary privilege applies to all evidence presented. Any person intentionally misleading the committee is committing a serious offence. I also advise that this briefing is being broadcast live via the Queensland parliament website. It will also be recorded and transcribed by Hansard. Once available, the transcript will be published on the committee's web page.

I now 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 Mr Ray Hopper MP, who is the deputy chair and member for Condamine; Dr Anthony Lynham MP, who is our new member for Stafford; Mr Steve Bennett MP, the member for Burnett; Mr Mark Boothman MP, the member for Albert; Mr Michael Latter MP, the member for Waterford; and Mr Neil Symes MP, the member for Lytton.

Briefing us today are Mr Bevan Brennan, who is the Assistant Director-General, State Schools, Operations, and Dr Roland Simons, the Executive Director, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting Branch. I welcome you both. Gentlemen, although this hearing is public, you are able to request through me as chair that any material or information you provide be kept private. You can also object to particular questions. Additionally, you may wish to take questions on notice if you do not have information at hand.

We have requested today's briefing as part of our review of attendance rates. We have indicated to the department in advance that we are interested in hearing about current student attendance rates, progress towards implementing strategies aiming to improve attendance rates as well as hearing more about strategies for particular population groups such as year 8 to 10 students, Indigenous students and students with a disability. We also identified an interest in whether the department had made any changes to the trigger for action in respect of student absences and about the use of legal action against parents for failing to send their children to school.

I should note that the performance audit that prompted our review and this department briefing focus on state schools, because state schools are the Auditor-General's and the department's audit and administrative areas of responsibility. Obviously, the broader question of student attendance goes to all school sectors, but the data that is under review relates specifically to state schools.

I will now hand over to you gentlemen to brief us accordingly. We may have additional questions, but perhaps we could save those until the end of your briefing. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask that you please state your names the first time you speak and you will also see the buttons for the microphone there. Thank you.

Mr Brennan: Thank you, Chair. For the purposes of Hansard, I tender apologies from Ms Patrea Walton, Deputy Director-General, State Schools. In my role I lead the department's policy and procedures for school attendance. I am, therefore, pleased to be able to brief the parliamentary Education and Innovation Committee to support your review of state school attendance. I also have with me today Dr Roland Simons, Acting Executive Director, Performance, Monitoring and Reporting. Roland is responsible for leading the collection and analysis of school and student data, including data related to student attendance. In line with the terms of reference provided to the department on 29 July 2014, I will provide information relevant to sections 1(a) to 1(d) of your terms of reference. I would then be happy to take questions that the committee may have about student attendance.

I now move to term of reference 1(a) relating to the final response by the Department of Education, Training and Employment to the Auditor-General's recommendations via the subsequent action plans and strategies identified. The 2012 Queensland Auditor-General's report No. 1, *Improving school attendance*, made six recommendations to the Department of Education, Training and Employment for improving state student attendance. In its response to the Auditor-General the department agreed to fully implement two of the recommendations and partly implement the other four recommendations. An action plan was developed and all actions that the department indicated that it would implement or partially implement were completed during 2012 or for the start of the 2013 school year. A summary of how each of the recommendations was implemented is provided in response to term of reference 1(b).

Term of reference 1(b) refers to the Department of Education, Training and Employment's progress on implementing the recommendations of both the Auditor-General and the Education and Innovation Committee in its report No. 7 and any other strategies that have been implemented to achieve higher attendance rates. I will address the department's response to each of the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report and then I will address the committee's report.

Recommendation No. 1 of the Auditor-General is that the Department of Education, Training and Employment—

Revise its guidance, procedures and systems to include:

- a clear definition of unsatisfactory attendance
- a consistent approach for schools to manage and track actions to follow up unexplained absences
- a consistent approach to manage and track interventions of unsatisfactory attendance.

The department's view is that attendance for all students should be 100 per cent unless they have a reasonable excuse such as illness. Establishing a definition threshold lower than 100 per cent for reportable absences may be viewed as a tolerance of absences up to this threshold. However, the OneSchool information management system now provides flags that draw attention to attendances of 95 per cent, 90 per cent and 85 per cent. This allows principals to focus their attention on unacceptable levels of student attendance.

The department accepts that principals and schools may find it useful to identify their own goals to assist in improving attendance. This would be a local decision. The department is aware that some schools publicise specific goals each year or term and report on progress towards the goal in school newsletters or on websites. With respect to more consistent approaches for schools, the *Roll marking in state schools* procedure and the *Managing student absences and enforcing enrolment and attendance at state schools* procedures were updated to provide greater consistency across schools in managing and tracking unexplained absences and unsatisfactory attendances. Updates to the roll marking in state schools procedure have provided clarity around use of particular codes, such as those for exemptions, natural disasters and religious observances and clearer guidance on the frequency of uploading attendance data to OneSchool and ensuring that relieving teachers have access to class rolls. Substantial additional resources for schools were also added to the Every Day Counts website in term 4, 2012.

Schools were informed and reminded of these changes through the weekly schools update newsletter and annual back to school update. The five-step approach for addressing absenteeism was also revised to provide greater clarity for schools and linked with both procedures. The five steps are: develop a positive school culture, communicate high expectations of attendance, record and follow up student absences, monitor student nonattendance and provide intervention and support. Additional information and ideas for schools were developed to assist in implementing each of these steps.

I now turn to the Auditor-General's recommendation No. 2, which recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment—

Increase the range of OneSchool reports to help schools identify and monitor students with attendance below a state-wide minimum standard of attendance.

I can report that OneSchool released a performance dashboard in the June-July school holidays in 2012, allowing school staff to better monitor and track student attendance. In September 2013, this attendance information was made available to classroom teachers at a class level so that they can better monitor and track student attendance in their own class. In January 2014, the ability of schools to track attendance across three bands and to set those bands was introduced into the class dashboard, which schools can change to contextualise to their own school.

I turn now to the Auditor-General's recommendation No. 3, which recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment—

Provide schools with access to a range of materials and evidence-based strategies to increase attendance and case manage chronically absent students.

As I previously mentioned, a range of additional materials have now been added to the Every Day Counts website. Those include video resources, ideas sheets, fact sheets, research, vignettes and case studies. This website is designed to support parents and school staff. The department is continuously reviewing and updating these materials and resources.

I now turn to the Auditor-General's recommendation 4, which recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment assess how effective the process to enforce the Act is in increasing attendance. Questions about the effectiveness of enforcement powers were included in the 2012 Queensland state school principals survey. Around 500 principals indicated that they had used at least one of the stages towards prosecution within the school year, such as issuing an initial warning notice. Of these, 240 principals agreed that processes for enforcing parental obligation had been effective in improving attendance. In their comments on this question, principals indicated that often issuing a formal warning notice was sufficient for improving attendance without having to proceed with an actual prosecution. In response to this feedback from principals, the department is currently considering how red tape can be cut from prosecution processes to make it easier for principals to take action where they deem it necessary. It should be noted that the department will continue discussions across the Queensland government and with the Australian government with respect to how we can work better together to use every lever possible to improve school attendance. This includes, where appropriate, enforcing parental obligations as outlined in the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006.

I now turn to the Auditor-General's recommendation 5, which recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment revise performance measures to include a focus on chronically absent students and publicly report progress against all student attendance performance measures. I can report that school annual reports available to the public have been updated to include a distribution of students by attendance rate. In addition, the OneSchool dashboard, which is now available to all schools, highlights students with patterns of high absenteeism.

I now turn to the final Auditor-General recommendation 6, which recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment improve the quality of the student attendance data by updating the data dictionary to cover all performance measures relating to attendance, logging changes made to the student attendance data at the database level and verifying changes made to the student attendance data outside of the source system. Example, in the collections system are also made to the source data system data. I can report that the data dictionary is updated annually and attendance measures have been included in this process. Changes made in the OneSchool database are now automatically logged in a validation table.

Having provided an overview of the response to the Auditor-General's report, I will now provide an overview of the department's implementation of the Education and Innovation Committee recommendations. Recommendation 1 of the Education and Innovation Committee's report was that the Minister for Education, Training and Employment advise the House on the government's acceptance or otherwise of, and the implementation plans relating to, the recommendations made by the Auditor-General in his report 1 of 2012, *Improving school attendance*. The minister responded to the Clerk of the Parliament in November 2012. An overview

of the department's actions has been provided today. As you will note, the department has undertaken a wide range of actions in response to the Auditor-General's report. Recommendation 2 of the Education and Innovation Committee's report was that the parliament note the committee's intent to review state school attendance rates in 2014. This was noted.

Recommendation 3 of the Education and Innovation Committee's report was that the department consider undertaking and publishing a comprehensive evaluation of the many initiatives and strategies underway that include a goal of improving student attendance rates in Queensland. The department's data analytics committee oversaw the preparation of a major research report on attendance that was published in 2013. The report, titled *Performance insights: school attendance*, included significant investigation of national and international research on the effectiveness of strategies to improve school attendance. A key finding was that there was little research into the effectiveness of attendance strategies. The report quotes research that analysed commonly used strategies to increase student attendance. The research concluded that there is some evidence to substantiate the positive impact of relationship building, especially with families; strong and clear attendance policies; truancy prevention and school intervention programs; and school staff who are trained, committed and supported. Interestingly, there is less conclusive evidence related to rewards and incentives for attendance, peer group counselling, probation officers devoted to truancy cases and financial sanctions against families. It should be noted that the evaluations conducted by the Australian government of the Cape York welfare reforms and the pilot of the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure trial have not yet provided any strong evidence of sustained improvement in school attendance as a result of these reforms. This point has to be noted with the caveat that these reforms have been for relatively short periods of time and reforms can take some time to yield a measurable effect.

The department is also committed to ongoing review of the effectiveness of strategies that have been undertaken across state schools in Queensland. The introduction of the OneSchool dashboard has provided capacity for schools to better monitor and track student attendance. This has allowed schools to more effectively evaluate the impact of attendance strategies being implemented at the local level. Throughout 2012 and 2013 the department used attendance data to identify a number of schools with significantly improved or high levels of attendance. Some of these schools were then consulted regarding the strategies they had in place for improving and maintaining attendance. As a result of these discussions interviews with key staff at six schools were filmed and are available for staff on the department's intranet portal. In addition, case studies on schools that had strong attendance records in 2012 or had achieved significant improvements were published or linked to the Every Day Counts material. Common themes across these schools were: good relationships with the community, following up absences immediately, clear communication of attendance expectations, individual case management and acknowledging and rewarding good or improved attendance. In 2014 the department has initiated the development of a survey of Queensland state school principals that will ask principals about their use of attendance improvement strategies and the effectiveness of these strategies. Responses will be matched with attendance data for individual schools. This survey is expected to be conducted in semester 2, 2014.

Recommendation 4 of the Education and Innovation Committee's report was that the Minister for Education, Training and Employment advise on any changes that might be made to evaluation and reporting processes for the Closing the Gap strategy as it relates to school attendance rates. Improving Indigenous students' school attendance is complex. For many of our Indigenous students, school attendance is sensitive to a wide range of social and economic factors, including parents' attitudes towards schools and education, health, family and cultural issues, access to transport, social events and extreme weather. In 2013 DETE released its strategy for closing the gap in education titled *Solid partners, solid futures: a partnership approach for excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood, education, training and employment from 2013 to 2016*.

Data shows a slight reduction in Indigenous students' attendance since 2012 from 84.4 per cent to 83.4 per cent. However, changes to data methodology in 2013 mean that comparisons cannot accurately be made across these years. It is considered that the changed methodology may have negatively affected attendance data for Indigenous students by up to 2.4 per cent. If the old methodology had been used in 2013 it is likely that a slight increase may have been recorded. DETE's most recent internal and unpublished analysis of Indigenous students' school attendance in term 1, 2014 compared with term 1, 2013 shows an improvement of 1.2 per cent. This is the

equivalent of an extra 30,000 school days attended by Queensland Indigenous students in term 1. While this is encouraging, it is too soon to draw conclusions about data and attendance trends for 2014.

I now turn to term of reference 1(c), which refers to the results to date of the strategies that have been implemented, including the current state-wide rates of student attendance. State-wide attendance has hovered in a range of 0.4 per cent, between 90.7 per cent and 91.1 per cent, during this five-year period and appeared to be down slightly to 90.8 per cent in 2013. As previously stated, it should be noted that a change of methodology in the calculation of attendance rates occurred in 2013. This change occurred as a result of all schools transitioning to the OneSchool student management system at the beginning of term 2, 2012 and assists in meeting national reporting obligations that will provide more nationally consistent data for 2014 and beyond.

Compared with the previous methodology, it is considered that the new methodology, while providing more accurate data, may have had a slight negative impact on the data. The department's data analytics committee's report I previously mentioned included a thorough investigation of school attendance data. It found that the majority of students attend school at least 90 per cent of the time. Regions with more rural and remote schools have a higher proportion of students with attendance rates below 85 per cent. Overall attendance rates are lower on Mondays and Fridays than other weekdays. Holiday and unauthorised absences predominate in the last week of each school term and are noticeably higher in the final week of semester.

Average student attendance declines over years 8, 9 and 10, with a sharper decline for Indigenous students. The lowest attendance rate is recorded in year 10 and is below 90 per cent, which is consistent with patterns in other states. For individual students, early school attendance is a reasonable predictor of likely later attendance and school size does not influence attendance rates. Interestingly, while different data collection means we cannot compare attendance between jurisdictions, all states seem to have fairly stable attendance over time, notwithstanding efforts to improve attendance. The Auditor-General's report and the department's response to it were clear that the onus for school attendance sits with parents. A key focus of our schools is educating families about the value of schooling and their child's future.

I now turn to term of reference 1(d) which refers to the monitoring and management of students who have greater potential for experiencing educational disadvantage, including students with a disability, students with behavioural difficulties or mental health issues, and students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Queensland state primary schools are required to mark rolls twice a day. Secondary schools are required to mark rolls every lesson. Absence information is then recorded in OneSchool. The introduction of the OneSchool dashboard has made it easier for schools to monitor the attendance of all students, including those at risk of educational disadvantage. High-quality teaching and strong student engagement are important for improving and maintaining the attendance of all students. Queensland state schools take a multifaceted approach that includes building a positive school environment, effective parent community engagement, strong teaching practices, addressing student and family mobility, productive behaviour management, and good communication. A number of state-wide strategies being implemented, including those under the DETE renewal plan, are expected to assist in improving outcomes for all students across Queensland, including those at risk of educational disadvantage. These include Great Teachers = Great Results which will enhance the quality of instruction for all state school students through improved teaching and learning, greater autonomy for schools and new approaches to school discipline. These actions are essential in lifting student attendance and engagement.

The revised principal selection process will enable community engagement in the selection of school principals. Every state school principal in Queensland now knows that they have a responsibility to monitor and improve the attendance, engagement and performance of every Indigenous student in their school. This is established as a priority in the state schools strategy and this message has been reinforced to principals at regional forums conducted across the state. The changed role of the department's assistant regional directors, called ARDs, will provide intervention and support to all schools. ARDs will have a coaching role, helping schools to improve performance. This includes supporting school reviews and leading school improvement intervention strategies. The ongoing implementation of the parent and community engagement framework is assisting schools to improve engagement with students, teachers, parents and carers, support staff and community and business groups. Finally, the upcoming establishment of the School Improvement Unit will provide external oversight and reporting on the performance of all state schools. Through this process, targeted intervention and support will be put in place to improve

school performance. As part of the school reviews that will be conducted, headline indicators have been developed in consultation with principals and regions to provide a snapshot of a school's data and performance that is fair and consistent and can be used to determine further review or intervention activities. Student attendance is one of those indicators.

I hope that I have provided a comprehensive overview of the work that has been undertaken by the department of education and training to improve school attendance. In conclusion, the department recognises the imperative to do better with respect to school attendance. While clear comparisons across Australia cannot yet be made due to different systems used to collect and record attendance data, the *Report on government services 2014* reveals that most states are on a par with respect to attendance rates. School attendance is an issue that is of concern to all governments in Australia and I have outlined the future work that Queensland will do with the Australian government to explore ways to lift attendance. I have also outlined the extensive work that is occurring in our state schools to build attendance. This has included close monitoring and early intervention, case management of families, attendance officers, attendance incentives and, most importantly, the delivery of high-quality learning experiences that engage students and encourage their school attendance. In brief, it is the business of every state school throughout Queensland to pay attention to attendance. Our goal is to have every student attending every day of school.

I have also provided an overview of what is happening at a systemic level to lift attendance. This has included enhancing the OneSchool information management system to improve data given to principals about their students' attendance; sending a clear message to principals that they have responsibility for lifting attendance; providing resources to support students and schools to improve student attendance; ongoing review and evaluation of the effect of attendance strategies; and ongoing monitoring of student attendance at a school level, a regional level and also for each disadvantaged group. We need to do better, and I hope that I have made it clear that every effort is being made to address this important issue. The reports of the Auditor-General and the Education and Innovation Committee have provided important catalysts for schools and for the department to reflect on practices and to identify potential to improve. We have renewed our effort and we will remain committed to the task. I thank the committee for taking time to consider our input to the terms of reference and we are now happy to take questions. Thank you.

CHAIR: Mr Brennan, thank you very much for that very comprehensive report. I think it is very impressive to see the strategy and actions that the department has put in place because, as you said, it is an ongoing issue and it is certainly very warming to see the department's proactive approach towards this. At the very beginning you mentioned red-tape reduction and particularly processes for principals to free up the actions they can take. We are certainly aware that school attendance is affected by a range of complex social issues that students experience. Does the department work with other departments to tackle these issues? Are there strategies that reflect a multifactorial approach or from the perspective of the principals would there be any processes being put in place so that those principals are actually able to access data from other agencies?

Mr Brennan: My belief around this would certainly be that we do liaise with other government departments and also I am confident that principals in their own schools have local liaisons with other government officers with a view to working together to try to improve attendance of students at schools.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Brennan.

Mr LATTER: Mr Brennan, just to follow on in that vein from the member for Burdekin, it has been brought to my attention that there seems to be a little bit of frustration in schools around the lack of information sharing between departments, particularly recognising some of those significant social concerns that some of our students face. I ask you if you could flesh out whether or not you are aware of any strategies that might be being employed in schools with regard to addressing those issues.

Mr Brennan: I will not purport to have a full knowledge of what individual schools are experiencing and in terms of the liaison that they have with other government departments. I am happy to take that question on notice and I am happy to report back to the committee in relation to a state-wide view of that, and I note your comment about the reported frustration.

Mr LATTER: Thank you, Mr Brennan. I am happy for you to take it on notice, but in fairness I guess I should say to you that, if at all possible, if there are successful strategies that are being employed by schools to address these sorts of concerns, I would be happy just to hear back on some of those and potentially liaise and discuss with some of those success stories. I do not expect you to go away and get a state-wide response for how we are faring in that space.

Mr Brennan: So if I understand, what you would like is a range of success strategies that are being used by schools across government agencies to work together to improve school attendance for students in their local area?

Mr LATTER: To address those issues of significant social impacts with specific regard to whether or not there are schools that are successfully engaging with other departmental officers in terms of information sharing to make sure that those students' issues are being addressed. Thank you.

Mr Brennan: Thank you very much. Whilst I am aware of a couple of schools and schools that we have paid close attention to because of their success, I would prefer to respond later after I have had an opportunity to have a broader look at that issue. Thank you.

Mr SYMES: Thank for your in-depth analysis. How does the Solid Partners Solid Futures strategy interface with the Closing the Gap Indigenous education strategy and the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan?

Mr Brennan: Could I ask you to be more specific for me, I am sorry?

Mr SYMES: My question is: how does the Solid Partners Solid Futures strategy interlock with the Closing the Gap Indigenous education strategy and the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan? How do they work in consultation with each other to get student attendances up in those remote areas?

Mr Brennan: I will just defer to my colleague. Thank you.

Dr Simons: I thank the member for the question. Solid Partners Solid Futures is the 2013 DETE strategy for closing the gap in education. This is a partnership approach for excellence with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood, education, training and employment, which spans 2013 to 2016. This strategy aims to build a supported and seamless pathway for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and the phrase is 'from crayon to career', which I am sure you have heard our minister mention before.

The strategy commits to a range of things; for example, to pilot a guarantee of academic success from prep to year 12 across a range of locations. This is a parent and school partnership approach to drive some of those expectations that Bevan mentioned earlier. Those expectations include expectations around attendance as well as performance within the school. Of that nexus between attendance and performance, one might say that attendance is the fundamental prerequisite for most of our expectations for our students. If you are not turning up for school, then obviously you cannot engage with the curriculum, you cannot engage with the teachers and, therefore, your performance is likely to suffer. So setting those expectations under this strategy is a very important element of that.

Whilst we have been driving that, Solid Partners Solid Futures again seeks to reignite or renew that focus and reinvigorate as we need to do on a regular basis to drive those expectations and to focus also on individual case management. That individual focus is again something that we have seen out of the data and out of the work that we have done in the performance insights report as well. So it very much ties into the remainder of our strategy within schooling.

We want to create those expectations for a range of stakeholders. For parents, we need to set that expectation. A lot of parents may carry varying degrees of expectation and getting some consistency in that is very important. For teaching and classroom staff, obviously, we need to message what those expectations are. For administrators like me in terms of making sure that the systems report in a consistent way, you have heard Bevan talk about the focus on 100 per cent attendance but also we have those markers that he has mentioned about the less than 85 per cent attendance, 90 per cent, 95 per cent attendance—so making sure that those things are clear in terms of expectations.

It is also very important that we direct these people to the necessary resources and materials, for example, the Every Day Counts website—integrating that material—and also looking at high levels of performance. One of the dangers here is to focus on low student attendance, low student performance, but it really is to drive what we need to see in Queensland, which is that drive into the upper end into excellence, the upper end of performance, if you like, which is an area where Queensland lags other states and territories, not just for Indigenous students but for all students. I really emphasise again the case management approach and look at each student within the context of that student's environment, the parents—as I mentioned before—the school but also the broader context, the broader community. Those are the ways that we are trying to re-message that.

Mr BENNETT: I go back to one of the five strategies that was mentioned, the positive culture. Could you explain what has been done to encourage a positive culture in schools? These positive strategies are one of the key elements of success.

Mr Brennan: I thank the member for the question. In terms of positive culture, there is no doubt that students wanting to attend school is the goal. Schools do a variety of things. As I mentioned in my report, some of the schools have incentive schemes for students to attend school. But I think the point that I made in my report was more particularly focused on the fact that, if students are engaged in their studies, if there is something at school that pulls the student to the school rather than pushes them to the school, then that is what schools are engaging in, that is the type of activities.

Clearly, that is different for the range of students. What we are seeing in schools now is that there is a greater awareness of that. Certainly, the program that was conducted whereby we did a visit to each region of Education Queensland in the state, it was certainly emphasised in those sessions that were conducted with principals throughout the state that it is essential that principals work in their local community and have a local solution to attendance issues within their own communities. I am confident that principals are taking up the challenge to ensure that there is something at school to attract individual students to the school. I just follow on from Roland's point. We understand that it is best solved as a local issue. Certainly, that is what principals have been encouraged to do—to own the attendance rate of their school and to do whatever it takes in that school to improve it with an emphasis on positive approaches rather than punitive.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Before I ask my question, that was probably the most comprehensive report that I have heard. Good work. Has the department undertaken any research into the legal enforcement processes provided in legislation, such as prosecuting parents who are repeat offenders, who are not interested in sending their children to school, or they simply have lost control?

Dr Simons: I thank the member for the question. It is a really good question. Unfortunately, we are limited in the number of cases that are prosecuted. For 2013, I believe that there were six cases prosecuted. It is just not enough in terms of the amount of data that is available to come up with a definitive conclusion in terms of what that says.

There is evidence from the research that we have conducted that it is the positive culture that seems to be associated. It is the schools that can provide those hygiene factors, such a feeling of a safe, nurturing environment, the antibullying strategies and campaigns and then, as Bevan said, it is that drawcard, that draw to the school, of engaging the students with the Great Teachers = Great Results strategies. So whilst I cannot answer the member directly, I can say that the evidence suggests that it is the positive engagement, it is the pull factor rather than that push factor that Bevan mentioned that seemed to result in more enduring attendance of students over time.

CHAIR: The performance insights report shows that it may be important to focus on students' attendance basically in the primary years before attendance patterns become set in place. Has the department established any particular focus or approach to primary schools and attendance?

Mr Brennan: The answer to the question is that the approach that the department has taken, whilst we are aware, as I said in my report, that early attendance patterns seem to be reflected in later attendance patterns, we have not focused on any individual year level. What we are doing is every day matters, every year level matters. So we have taken a very strong but broad approach. I do not think that we could say that we have taken a particular approach in primary, but what we have done is we have communicated with every principal throughout the state about the importance of school attendance and we are very particular that school attendance from the time the students start at the school is monitored and that we have procedures in place to ensure that bad habits do not start early.

I think that what we will see is that the product of our work in relation to attendance will be incremental so that, as each cohort makes its way through our schooling system, we will see an improvement in total attendance in all of our schools. To the best of my knowledge, there would not be a particular approach being taken in primary school but, in saying that, there is an absolute emphasis across all year levels in all schools that every day matters, every student matters and, certainly, every year level matters.

Mr LATTER: I know that you have heard this a number of times but I really commend you for your contribution today. It has been fantastic. I also commend the department for the measures that it has undertaken in response to the Auditor-General's recommendations. It was great hearing from you before with regard to the implementation of OneSchool and the functionalities available through

that—the dashboard and being able to track and monitor student attendance. Have there been any satisfaction surveys across the schools to determine whether or not OneSchool is being received well by the schools?

Dr Simons: I thank the member for the question. It is a good question. We run every year a school opinion survey. It generally focuses on the delivery of schooling with a range of questions that refer to the school and the delivery of schooling itself. We have not run any specific school-wide surveys regarding OneSchool, but we can see the take-up rates in terms of usage. We can track that from within the system itself.

It is clear to us that the increase in the use of the OneSchool dashboard, particularly around the attendance dashboard, highlights the value of it and the increasing value of it to our schools. What we can see from that system is that we can track to an individual student level, we can see across the calendar year where that student has attended, the reasons that they have not attended and you can drill up and drill down through that process. So the uptake of that additional functionality in OneSchool related to the attendance dashboard is increasing and it is one that suggests to us that it is being used on a daily basis. As these things are regular systems for development, we are taking feedback from schools in terms of what additional functionality they would like as well throughout the year.

CHAIR: Gentlemen, we have a lot more questions that we would love to put to you, but our time is coming to an end. So I am going to have to wind up the briefing. If the committee has any further questions, could we pass those through to the department?

Mr Brennan: Absolutely. We would be very happy to follow up on any issues that the committee would like to send our way.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that, Mr Brennan. As other members have said, it really was a very comprehensive overview that you gave us. It is also great to see what has been put in place. Naturally, we are all looking to the direction that this will lead. That brings to a close this briefing on Queensland state school student attendance rates. I must thank you both very much for your time this morning. Anybody who is interested in receiving updates about the work of the Education and Innovation Committee, including in due course our review of student attendance rates, can subscribe to the committee's email subscription list via the Queensland parliament's website. I now declare this briefing closed and thank you all very much for your attendance.

Committee adjourned at 10.30 am