EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

REPORT No.7 ON THE

REVIEW OF AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT 1: 2012 – IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

On 23 August 2012, the Education and Innovation Committee tabled Report No.7 in relation to the *Review Of Auditor-General's Report 1: 2012 – Improving Student Attendance.*

The Queensland Government response to recommendations made by the Committee is provided below.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 – the Committee recommends 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: 2012 – Improving student attendance.

Government Response – the recommendation is supported. The Department of Education, Training and Employment has acknowledged each of the recommendations made by the Auditor-General, with some recommendations reflecting minor changes to practice and other recommendations requiring more detailed analysis and costing of the proposed work. The Department's response to each of the recommendations along with commentary of the actions the Department is taking to address each of these is at **Attachment 1**.

Recommendation 2 – the Committee recommends that the Parliament note the Committee's intent to review state school attendance rates in 2014.

Government response – the recommendation is noted. In response to the Committee's second recommendation, the Government notes that the Committee will review state school attendance rates again in 2014. The Government would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the *Auditor-General's Strategic Audit Plan 2012-2015* which outlines an intention to also undertake a follow-up performance audit for *Report 1: 2012 – Improving student attendance in 2014-15.* It would be important for the Committee to consider the timing of any review it intended and how it could link with the planned timing of the Queensland Audit Office follow-up audit.

Recommendation 3 – the Committee recommends 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.

Government response – the recommendation is supported. To support its ongoing work in this area of schooling and to reflect the Committee's third recommendation, the Department of Education, Training and Employment will continue to analyse, monitor and evaluate strategies and initiatives related to student attendance.

Recommendation 4 – the Committee recommends 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.

Government response – the recommendation is supported. The Committee's fourth recommendation in relation to Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is timely. This area of student outcomes remains one of the Department of Education, Training and Employment's highest priorities and the Minister for Education, Training and Employment has invited leaders in Indigenous education to meet in December 2012 to discuss the challenges and to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for Queensland Indigenous students. The day will initiate a process of consultation culminating in a new Indigenous education strategy during 2013.

Auditor-General's Report to Parliament No. 1 for 2012 — Improving Student Attendance

Department of Education, Training and Employment Implementation Status of Recommendations

Auditor General's Recommendation 1
It is recommended 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.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department agreed to revise its guidance and procedures with regard to definitions, attendance monitoring and tracking tools and processes available to schools.

It is important to acknowledge that the simplistic notion of setting an arbitrary threshold at which non-attendance becomes unsatisfactory is not advised, as it is considered contrary to current legislation and policy position. In addition, setting an arbitrary threshold for all schools may mean some schools with lower attendance rates will be burdened by unnecessary red tape requiring prescribed actions for all students falling below a statewide threshold.

The current approach enables schools and their communities to determine expectations of attendance and to follow-up in an appropriate manner, on a case-by-case basis. The Department therefore, is not intending to set such a threshold but has instead expanded on the distribution of attendance rates publicly reported as part of the School Annual Report process.

Furthermore, the Department has updated its Roll Marking and Managing Student Absences procedures and modified the suggested approach for schools to use to address student absenteeism. This will provide schools with practical ideas for developing positive school environments, communicating high expectations for attendance, recording and following-up absences, monitoring non-attendance and providing intervention and support.

Auditor General's Recommendation 2
It is 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.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department has concerns regarding the simplistic nature of setting an arbitrary threshold and will explore this further in terms of reporting rather than classifying.

The Department is dedicated to assisting schools to become more familiar with existing functionality of the OneSchool system through the full rollout to all state schools in 2012. New reporting functionality has been made available to all schools to support monitoring and tracking of student attendance which includes detailed reporting of student attendance

through a performance dashboard. This also goes a significant way to addressing the threshold issue in Recommendation 1.

Auditor General's Recommendation 3
It is 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.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department already promotes the importance of maximising school attendance via its Everyday Counts website (http://education.qld.gov.au/everydaycounts/) which provides information, templates, communication materials, and case studies to assist schools in improving student attendance. The Department has updated this website to include additional ideas for schools to consider when reviewing attendance strategies, links to useful resources, fact sheets to assist parents in overcoming attendance issues with their children, case studies about schools that have successfully improved attendance though innovative practices and research findings on attendance. The website will be updated continually as new materials are developed.

Regular communications regarding the importance of school attendance are provided in communications with schools, parents and the community including the online Schools Update Bulletin, school Bulletin boards, draft items for schools to use in their newsletters, and social media.

Auditor General's Recommendation 4
It is recommended that the Department of Education, Training and Employment assess how effective the process to enforce the *Education (General Provision) Act 2006* (Act) is in increasing attendance.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department will conduct further assessment of the effectiveness of the process to enforce the Act in increasing attendance through its annual survey of schools.

A review of the procedure to clarify processes and improve the efficiency of prosecution recommendations to the Director-General is also currently underway.

To further streamline the tracking and reporting of prosecution cases, a function in the OneSchool application will be built under each student's record to enable schools and regions to record details of individual cases. Tick boxes (or similar) will be included for each stage of the prosecution process (First notice sent, warning notice, general briefing note for Director-General sent to region and Director-General consent). This function will also assist in assessing the effectiveness of enforcement at each state of the process. The Department also included questions in its 2012 School Opinion Survey – Principal Survey regarding the effectiveness of enforcement powers on student attendance.

Auditor General's Recommendation 5
It is 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.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department currently makes information about school attendance available under nationally agreed protocols via the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority My School website (www.myschool.edu.au/) and National Report on Schooling.

The Department has also worked with schools and the community to expand on the distributions of attendance rates reported as part of the school annual report process. Finally, the OneSchool attendance dashboard, released to schools in June 2012, enables further drill-down capacity to review and track patterns of attendance.

Auditor General's Recommendation 6
It is 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 (e.g. in the Collections System) are also made to the source system data.

Department of Education, Training and Employment Response
The Department's data dictionary is updated annually with attendance to be included in the 2012 process.

Specific references to the collection system are now largely obsolete as collections are now done through the Department's OneSchool system. With all remaining schools transitioning to OneSchool in 2012, a validation process precedes the collection period and schools make changes to the source data system. This approach reduces the number of adjustments necessary to the collected data, although these are still possible and are recorded in an adjustments table to ensure proper documentation and transparency.