

Class sizes in NSW government primary schools in 2012

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

How many students are in primary classrooms?

There are 18,052 primary classes in NSW government schools in 2012. On average, there are 24 students in each class. The state-wide average is a reduction of 2.9 students since 1997 and a reduction of 2.3 students since 2003, the year before the Class Size Reduction Program commenced.

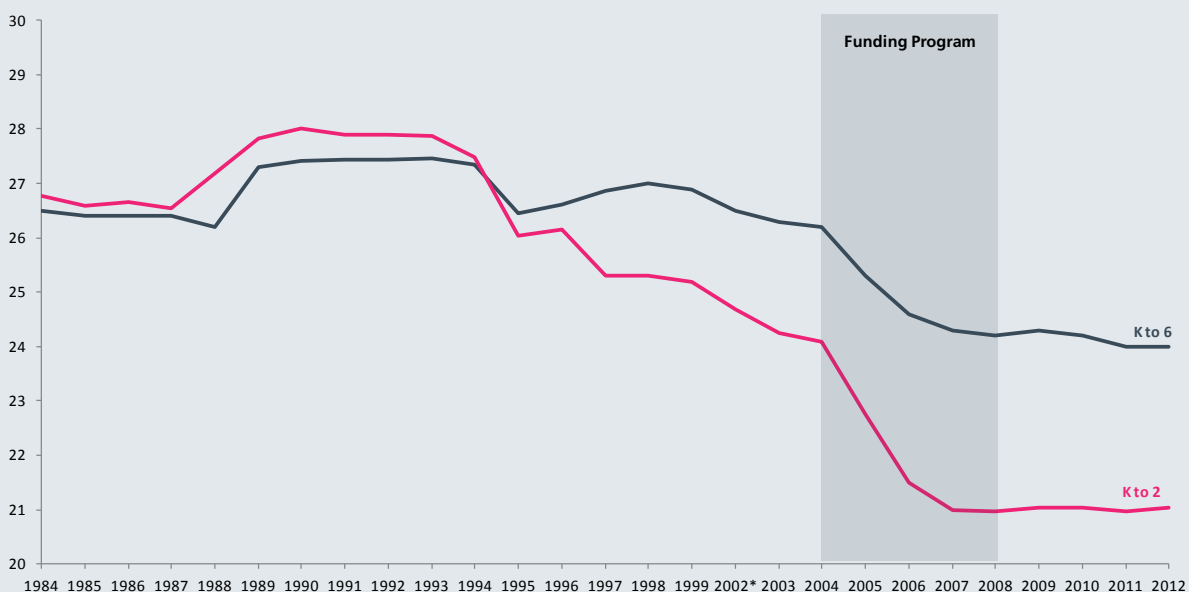
The NSW Government Class Size Reduction Program commenced in 2004, with additional funding provided over the first 4 years to build and install the additional classrooms needed to cater for smaller classes and to provide recurrent funding for more than 1,800 extra teaching positions.

By 2007 all classes with Kindergarten, Year 1 or Year 2 students were staffed to achieve the state target averages of 20 for Kindergarten students, 22 for Year 1 students and 24 for Year 2 students.

When the Class Size Reduction Program was introduced there were some concerns that reducing class sizes in years K – 2 might impact on class sizes in the upper years of primary schooling. This concern has not been realised. Class sizes in years 3 to 6 have also declined slightly since the program was introduced.

The class size audit shows that class sizes for all years fell after the beginning of the program in 2004. Since 2007 class sizes have remained steady.

Figure 1
Average class sizes K-2 and K-6 from 1984 to 2012



What size are primary classes in 2012?

- Kindergarten to Year 2 class sizes are smaller than classes in years 3 to 6.
- There was an average of 19.3 students in kindergarten classes in 2012. This is an average reduction of 4.8 students since 1997 and 3.6 students since 2003, the year before the Class Size Reduction Program began.
- Year 1 classes averaged 21.2 students in 2012, an average reduction of 4.3 students since 1997, and 3.3 students since 2003.
- Year 2 classes averaged 22.7 students in 2012, a reduction of 3.5 students since 1997, and 2.6 students since 2003.
- The K-6 average class size in 2012 is 24, which is lower by 2.3 students than in 2003, and lower by 2.9 students than in 1997.

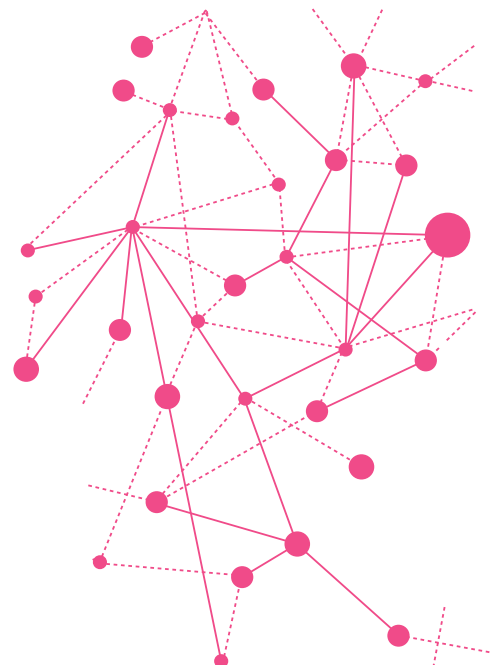


Figure 2
Class sizes in Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2

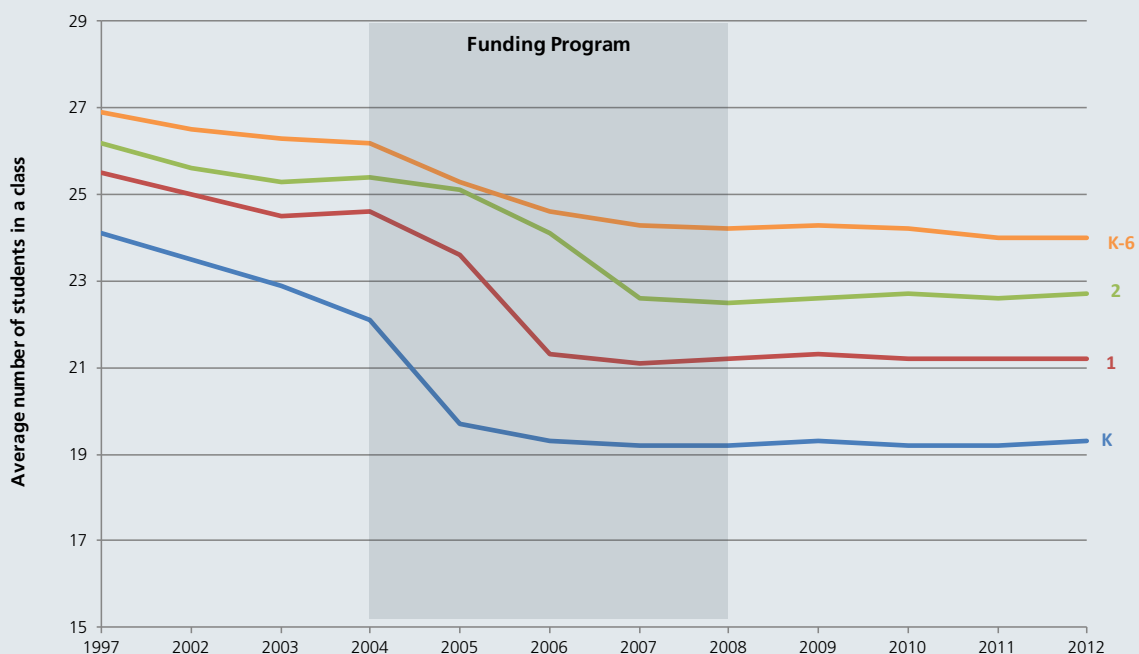


Table 1
Average primary class sizes by year: NSW public schools 1997 to 2012

Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	K-6
1997	24.1	25.5	26.2	26.6	26.8	26.8	26.8	26.9
2002	23.5	25	25.6	26.3	26.5	26.7	26.8	26.5
2003	22.9	24.5	25.3	26.2	26.5	26.8	26.8	26.3
2004	22.1	24.6	25.4	26.4	26.6	26.8	26.8	26.2
2005	19.7	23.6	25.1	26.1	26.4	26.6	26.7	25.3
2006	19.3	21.3	24.1	25.9	26.4	26.6	26.6	24.6
2007	19.2	21.1	22.6	25.7	26.2	26.5	26.5	24.3
2008	19.2	21.2	22.5	25.7	26.1	26.5	26.5	24.2
2009	19.3	21.3	22.6	25.8	26.2	26.5	26.5	24.3
2010	19.2	21.2	22.7	25.6	26.2	26.4	26.4	24.2
2011	19.2	21.2	22.6	25.7	26.1	26.4	26.3	24.0
2012	19.3	21.2	22.7	25.5	25.9	26.2	26.2	24.0

What is the effect of increasing enrolments?

Class sizes have remained steady regardless of enrolment increases in recent years.

- K-6 enrolments increased in 2012 by 4,767 students or 1.1% since 2011, following an increase of 0.9% between 2010 and 2011.
- Kindergarten enrolments increased by 2,274 students. This is an increase of 3.5% from 2011 to 2012, compared with 3.9% from 2010 to 2011.
- Year 1 enrolments increased by 2,417 students, an increase of 3.9% from 2011 to 2012, much higher than the 1.4% increase from 2010 to 2011. This reflects the increased enrolments in Kindergarten last year.
- Year 2 enrolments increased by 572 students in 2012, an increase of 0.9% compared to 1.7% from 2010 to 2011.

The number of Kindergarten to Year 6 classes has also continued to increase, by 240 from 2011.



Is class size affected by school type?

School size

The Average Class Sizes table (Table 2) shows that average class sizes vary with the size of the school and larger schools tend to have slightly higher average class sizes. Schools with fewer than 26 students enrolled have very small classes.

- At the completion of the rollout of the program in 2007, the average size of Kindergarten classes across all school classifications (P1-P6) was at or below 20 students.
- Between 2007 and 2012 there has been a slight increase in the average size of Kindergarten classes in P1 schools from 20.0 to 20.3 students.
- Kindergarten classes in schools with a P2 classification (451-700 primary enrolments) have maintained an average class size between 20.0 and 20.2 students over the period 2007 to 2012.
- Kindergarten classes in the smaller school classifications (P3-P6) have maintained an average below 20.0 since 2007. Class sizes in the smallest school group (P6) have fallen from 12.4 in 2007 to 10.9 students in 2012.

Country Area Program (CAP) Schools

The Country Area Program supports schools in addressing disadvantage associated with geographic isolation. CAP schools have lower class sizes.

Despite increases in enrolments in the schools on this program over the period from 2007 to 2012, average class size in CAP schools fell from 20.0 in 2007 to 18.3 students in 2012.

Central and Community Schools

Enrolments in Central and Community schools have fallen from 7,575 students in 2007 to 6,903 in 2012, however the number of primary classes has increased to 357 in 2012. Average class sizes have dropped in Years K to 2, and remain well below the targets.

Table 2
Average class sizes, 2012

School type	Primary Grade							No. of schools	Total enrolment	Number of classes	Average Class Size
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6				
All	19.3	21.2	22.7	25.5	25.9	26.2	26.2	1684	432542	18052	24.0
Priority Schools Funding Program	18.3	20.0	21.1	23.2	23.5	24.1	24.0	450	79898	3552	22.5
Country Area Program Schools	15.2	16.7	17.2	18.0	18.2	18.8	18.3	190	13996	765	18.3
Primary enrol > 700 (P1)	20.3	22.2	24.1	28.2	28.2	28.3	28.8	66	53282	2109	25.3
Primary enrol 451-700 (P2)	20.2	22.2	23.9	27.9	28.2	28.3	28.5	263	144781	5792	25.0
Primary enrol 301-450 (P3)	19.8	22.0	23.6	27.0	27.4	27.5	27.6	310	110843	4536	24.4
Primary enrol 160-300 (P4)	19.4	21.8	23.4	25.6	26.2	26.5	26.5	381	83699	3524	23.8
Primary enrol 26-159 (P5)	17.3	18.7	19.6	21.0	21.7	21.9	21.5	438	30611	1512	20.2
Primary enrol < 26 (P6)	12.8	13.1	13.1	13.2	13.4	13.4	13.3	160	2423	222	10.9
Central & Community Schools	16.4	18.3	19.6	20.3	21.1	21.4	20.8	66	6903	357	19.3

Are composite classes a different size?

Composite classes now make up 35% of all primary classes. This compares with 41% in 2004.

In 2012, the average class size of the 6,390 composite primary classes was 24.4 students. The average class size in regular classes was slightly lower, with an average of 23.7 to a class.

In 2004, when the Class Size Reduction Program commenced, the average size of composite classes was lower than regular classes (25.7 compared to 26.5).

Figure 3

This graph shows the average size difference between composite classes and regular classes in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions. The difference in size between composite and regular classes is wider in the 4 metropolitan regions (1.7) than in the 6 country regions (0.4)

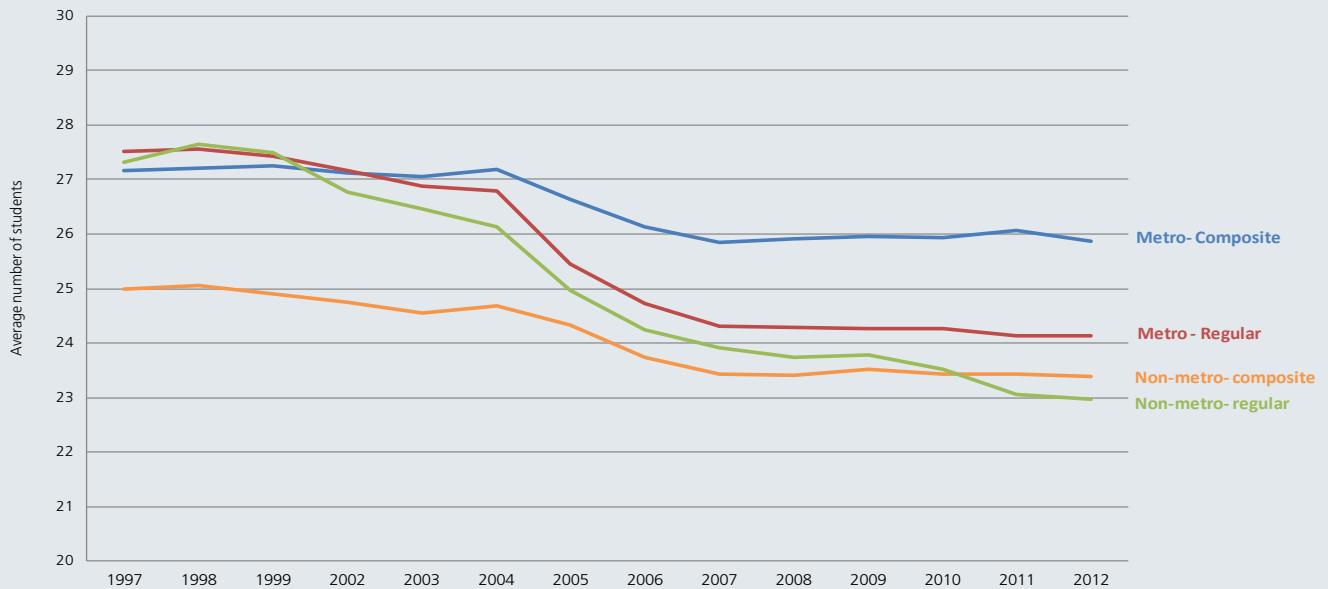
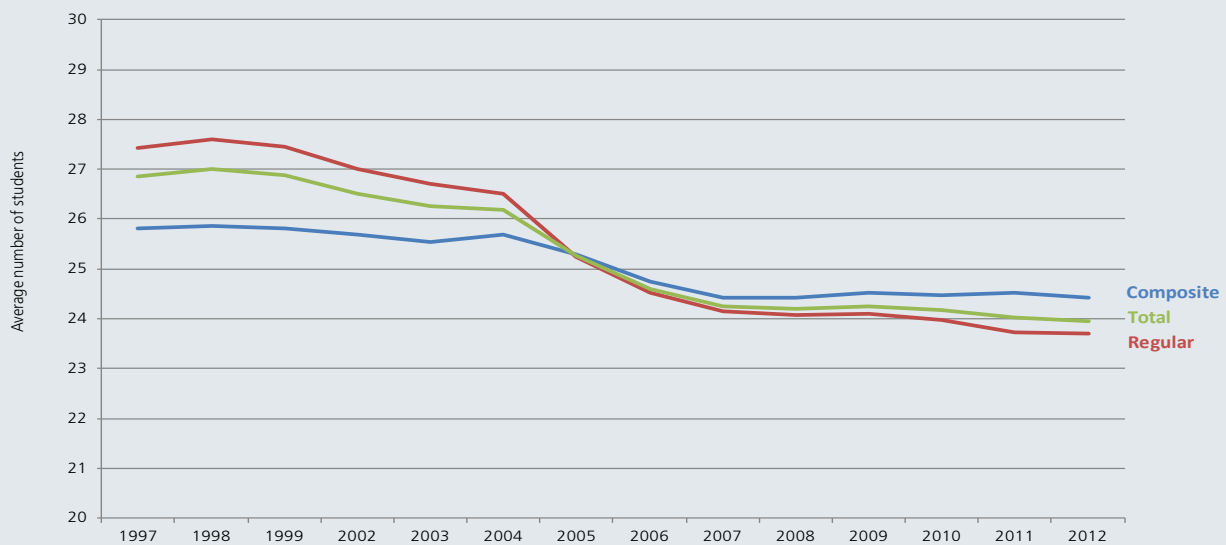


Figure 4

This graph indicates that in 2004, when the early primary years Class Size Reduction Program commenced, the average size of composite classes was lower than regular classes (25.7 compared to 26.5).



How do NSW class sizes compare?

There are no collections of comparable figures for state and territory class sizes in Australia. However the OECD annual report 2012 *Education at a Glance* provides data for the whole of Australia. These averages are based on dividing the number of primary children in Australia by the number of classes. The 2012 report which uses 2010 data states that the average class size in government primary schools in Australia is 23.2 and in 'non-government' primary schools is 24.9, with an overall primary class size in Australia of 23.7 students.

The international comparisons provided by the OECD place Australia as having the 12th highest primary class size of the 32 countries included in the report.

Smaller class sizes are often perceived as enabling a higher quality of education. Reducing class sizes for early years of schooling aims to provide students with:

- more personalised attention to teaching
- a reduction in classroom management problems
- better student-teacher relationships
- increased frequency and effectiveness of behaviour management
- more literacy and numeracy instruction.

The benefits of smaller classes are hotly debated. The OECD in the 2012 *Education at a Glance* edition states that the evidence of the impact of class size on student performance is mixed.

Class size does have a considerable impact on the level of current expenditure on schools.

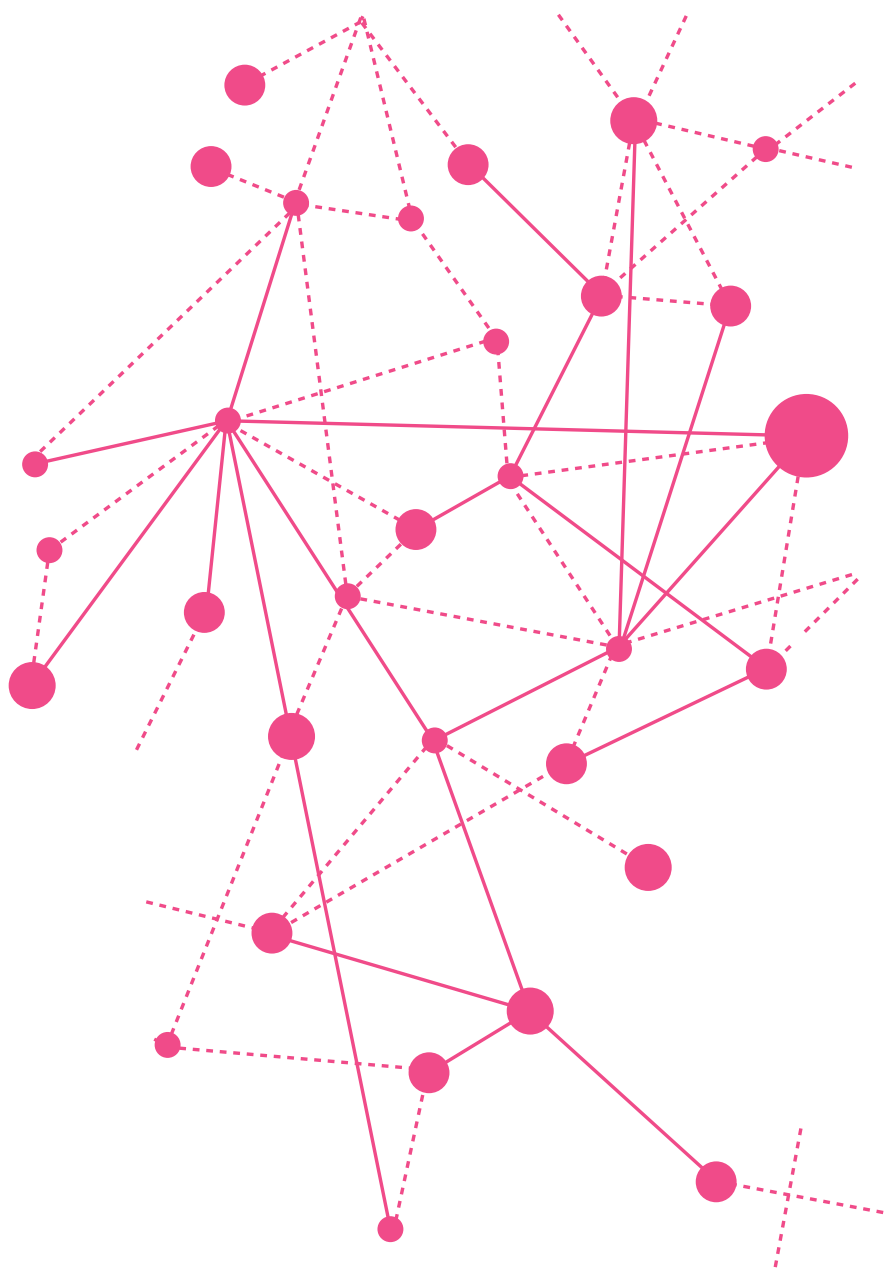
Figure 5

Average class size in primary education



Notes

- The audit of class sizes in NSW government primary schools is undertaken in March each year. The audit does not include schools for specific purposes, distance education centres or intensive English centres.
- Enrolments reported in this bulletin (Tables 1 and 2) are from the class size audit. They may differ from enrolment figures collected in August each year for the National School Statistics Collection and published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in *Schools Australia*.
- The average class size for all primary classes is obtained by dividing the total number of students in each grade by the total number of classes.
- The number of classes, average class sizes and enrolment numbers exclude support classes in primary and central schools.



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