

Government school student attendance 2018 (semester 1)

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Research indicates a strong link between attendance and student achievement. Monitoring student attendance is an important requirement of a school’s duty of care to all students.

NSW government schools’ attendance rates

Between 2008 and 2018, the average attendance rate in NSW government schools has varied between 91.4% and 92.9%, with a small rise in attendance rates observed from 2012 to 2014.

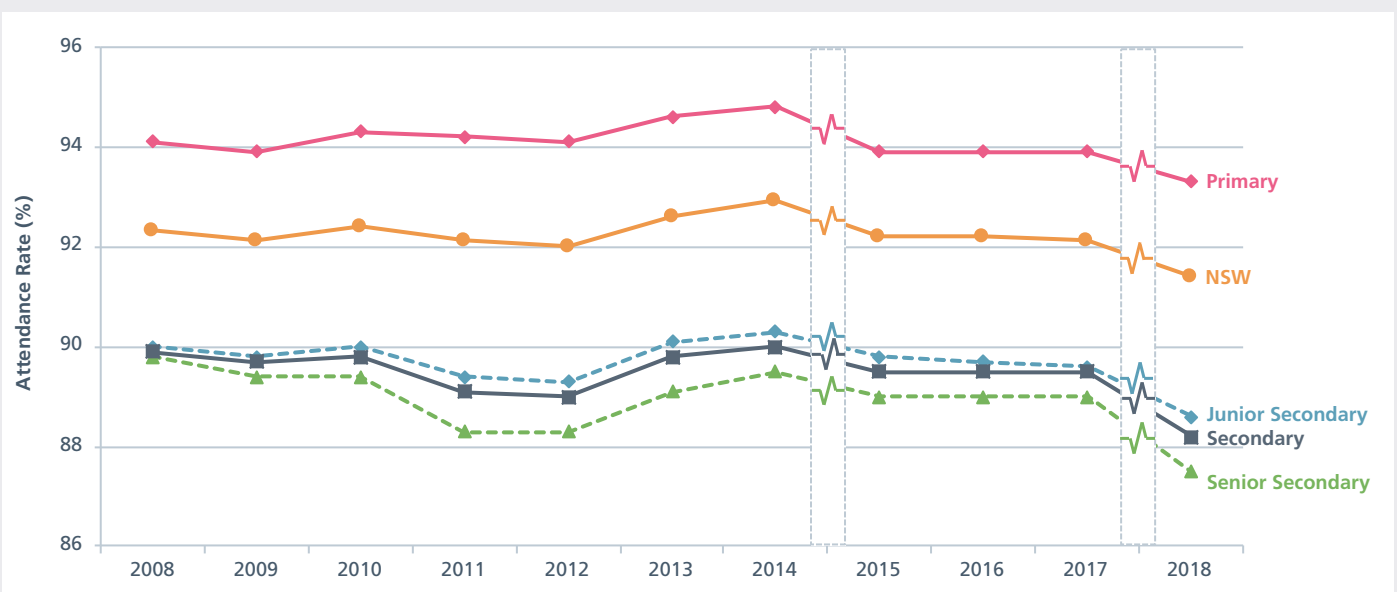
However, the method of calculating attendance rates has changed twice in the last five years. From 2015 onwards, approved extended family holidays were recorded as absences rather than exemption from attendance, which led to a fall in attendance rates between 2014 and 2015. As part of the process of making NSW government schools’ attendance rates

consistent with the 'National standards for student attendance data reporting', for the first time in 2018, NSW included partial absences and accounted for student mobility in the attendance rate calculations. Charts and tables in this bulletin include breaks in series when these changes occurred (see pages 12-13 for more information).

From 2015 to 2017 attendance rates remained largely unchanged, at 92.2% in 2015 and 2016 and 92.1% in 2017. In 2018, attendance rates decreased to 91.4%, mainly as a result of the change in reporting.

Figure 1

Students’ attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools



Due to changes in the calculation methods, 2018 data is not directly comparable to previous years.

Attendance rates by student level of education

Figure 1 and Table 1 show that attendance rates for primary students were consistently higher than for secondary students. In the last eleven years, the gap between primary students' and secondary students' attendance rates averaged 4.6 percentage points.

Between 2015 and 2017 the attendance rates for **primary students** remained constant at 93.9%. However, in 2018, attendance rates fell to 93.3%.

In 2018 primary students' attendance rate was 0.8 percentage points lower than in 2008.

From 2015 to 2017 the attendance rates for **secondary students** remained constant at 89.5%. However, in 2018, attendance rates fell to 88.2%.

In 2018 secondary students' attendance rate was 1.7 percentage points below the level recorded in 2008. In addition to falls in attendance rates due to changes in the calculation method over the period, secondary students' attendance fell by 0.7 percentage points in 2011. This was probably a result of raising the school leaving age at the beginning of 2010. Students must now remain enrolled at school until age 17, unless they have gained work or enrolled in other study, when previously they could leave school before the end of Year 10. Some of these Year 10, Year 11 or Year 12 students are likely to have low attendance rates.

Junior secondary students' attendance rate peaked at 90.3% in 2014 before falling by 0.5 percentage points in 2015 and by a full percentage point between 2017 and 2018. Nevertheless, junior secondary students' attendance rate remained consistently above senior secondary students' attendance rate, and in 2018 the gap was 1.1 percentage points.

Table 1

Students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools

School level	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Primary	94.1	93.9	94.3	94.2	94.1	94.6	94.8	93.9	93.9	93.9	93.3
Secondary	89.9	89.7	89.8	89.1	89.0	89.8	90.0	89.5	89.5	89.5	88.2
Junior Secondary	90.0	89.8	90.0	89.4	89.3	90.1	90.3	89.8	89.7	89.6	88.6
Senior Secondary	89.8	89.4	89.4	88.3	88.3	89.1	89.5	89.0	89.0	89.0	87.5
NSW	92.3	92.1	92.4	92.1	92.0	92.6	92.9	92.2	92.2	92.1	91.4

Attendance rates by remoteness

The average attendance for schools in major cities was above the NSW average over the last ten years, followed by regional schools and lastly by remote / very remote schools.

Figure 2 and Table 2 show attendance rates by remoteness. In 2018 the attendance rate at **schools in major cities** was 92.1%, 0.6 percentage points lower than in 2017.

The average attendance rate at **regional schools** dropped by 1.2 percentage points to 89.4% in 2018. This resulted in a widening of the gap in attendance rates between schools in major cities and in regional areas to 2.7 percentage points compared with 2.1 percentage points in 2017.

Attendance at **schools in remote / very remote NSW** decreased by 1.7 percentage points, from 85.6% in 2017 to 83.9% in 2018. Between 2017 and 2018, the gap in attendance rates between remote / very remote and major cities schools increased from 7.1 percentage points to 8.2 percentage points. It is important to note that only 0.5% of students are enrolled at remote / very remote schools, which contributes to greater variability in attendance rates.

Figure 2

Students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools

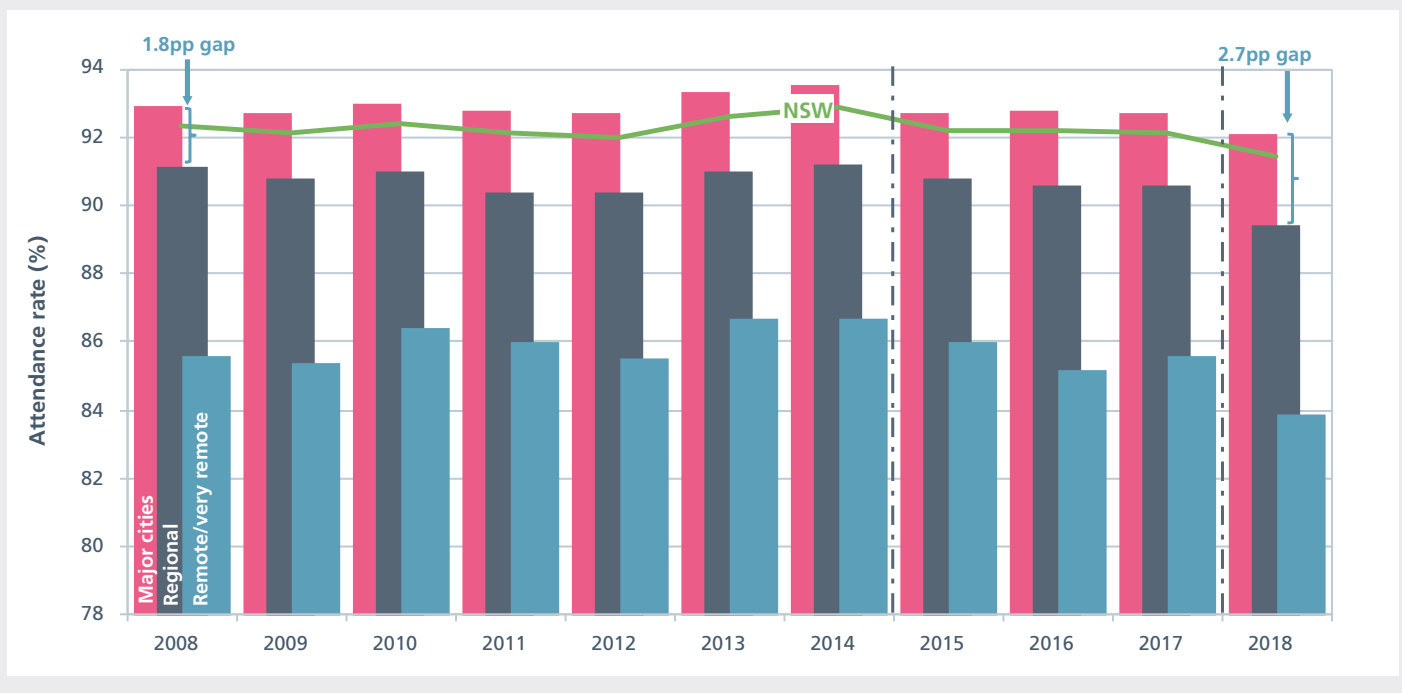


Table 2

Students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools

Remoteness	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Major cities	92.9	92.7	93.0	92.8	92.7	93.3	93.5	92.7	92.8	92.7	92.1
Regional	91.1	90.8	91.0	90.4	90.4	91.0	91.2	90.8	90.6	90.6	89.4
Remote/very remote	85.6	85.4	86.4	86.0	85.5	86.7	86.7	86.0	85.2	85.6	83.9
NSW	92.3	92.1	92.4	92.1	92.0	92.6	92.9	92.2	92.2	92.1	91.4

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates

In November 2013 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a range of measures to improve Aboriginal school attendance. This included new initiatives and monitoring of attendance rates, with the aim of closing the gap in attendance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

On average, 7.6% of all students in NSW government schools identified as Aboriginal in 2017 and 2018.

Table 3 shows that the average attendance rate for Aboriginal students was 84.4% in 2018, 1.8 percentage points lower than in 2017, while the attendance rate for non-Aboriginal students decreased by 0.7 percentage points in the last year (from 92.6% to 91.9%).

As a result the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates widened between 2017 and 2018, from 6.4 percentage points to 7.5 percentage points.

Table 3 shows that the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates in primary years was 4.6 percentage points in 2018, up from a gap of 4.1 percentage points in 2016 and 2017. In the secondary years, the gap was twice as large, and it increased from 10.1 percentage points in 2017 to 11.9 percentage points in 2018.

Table 3

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2016-18: NSW government schools

School level	Aboriginal students			non-Aboriginal students			All students		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Primary	90.1	90.1	89.0	94.2	94.2	93.6	93.9	93.9	93.3
Secondary	79.8	80.1	77.3	90.3	90.2	89.2	89.5	89.5	88.2
Junior Secondary	80.4	80.6	78.0	90.5	90.5	89.5	89.7	89.6	88.6
Senior Secondary	78.1	78.6	74.9	89.7	89.7	88.4	89.0	89.0	87.5
NSW	86.0	86.2	84.4	92.7	92.6	91.9	92.2	92.1	91.4

Table 4

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2016-18: NSW government schools

Remoteness level	Aboriginal students			non-Aboriginal students			All students		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Major cities	87.1	87.1	85.6	93.1	93.0	92.4	92.8	92.7	92.1
Regional	85.5	85.7	83.8	91.4	91.5	90.5	90.6	90.6	89.4
Remote/very remote	80.5	81.1	78.1	90.5	90.7	89.8	85.2	85.6	83.9
NSW	86.0	86.2	84.4	92.7	92.6	91.9	92.2	92.1	91.4

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by student level of education

Table 5 and Figure 3 show attendance rates for Aboriginal students by level of education.

Aboriginal primary students' attendance rate decreased by 1.1 percentage points from 90.1% in 2017 to 89% in 2018. This followed five consecutive years of attendance rates above 90%.

In 2018, the attendance rate for **Aboriginal secondary students** decreased by 2.8 percentage points to 77.3%, 11.7 percentage points lower than primary Aboriginal students. This is the largest gap recorded in the last decade between primary and secondary Aboriginal students' attendance rates.

Aboriginal senior secondary students' attendance rates have fallen by eight percentage points since 2008. The decline in attendance from 2008 to 2012 is likely to be the result of raising the school leaving age. In 2018, the attendance rate fell below 75% for the first time in 10 years.

Junior secondary students' attendance rates were around 80% for the past 10 years. In 2018, the attendance rate for these students decreased by 2.6 percentage points to 78% from 80.6% in 2017.

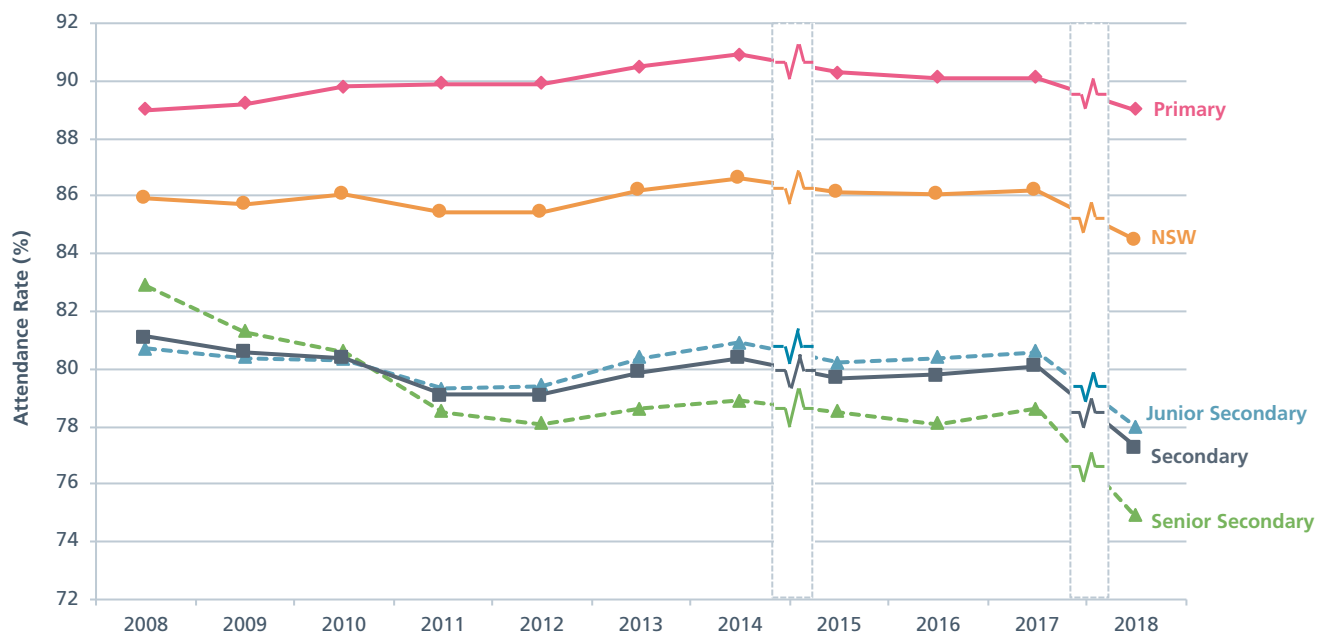
Table 5

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools

School level	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Primary	89.0	89.2	89.8	89.9	89.9	90.5	90.9	90.3	90.1	90.1	89.0
Secondary	81.1	80.6	80.4	79.1	79.1	79.9	80.4	79.7	79.8	80.1	77.3
Junior Secondary	80.7	80.4	80.3	79.3	79.4	80.4	80.9	80.2	80.4	80.6	78.0
Senior Secondary	82.9	81.3	80.6	78.5	78.1	78.6	78.9	78.5	78.1	78.6	74.9
NSW	85.9	85.7	86.0	85.4	85.4	86.2	86.6	86.1	86.0	86.2	84.4

Figure 3

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools



Aboriginal students' attendance rates by remoteness

Figure 4 illustrates the attendance rates for Aboriginal students by remoteness from 2008 to 2018. Consistent with the attendance rates for all students in NSW government schools (Figure 2), the highest Aboriginal students' attendance rates were recorded at schools in major cities, followed by regional and then remote / very remote schools.

Between 2015 and 2017, the average attendance rate for **Aboriginal students in schools in major cities** remained constant at 87.1%, before falling to 85.6% in 2018.

In 2018 more than 53% of all Aboriginal students in NSW government schools were enrolled at **regional schools**. Table 4 shows that the Aboriginal attendance rate at these schools was 83.8% in 2018, 1.9 percentage points lower than in 2017.

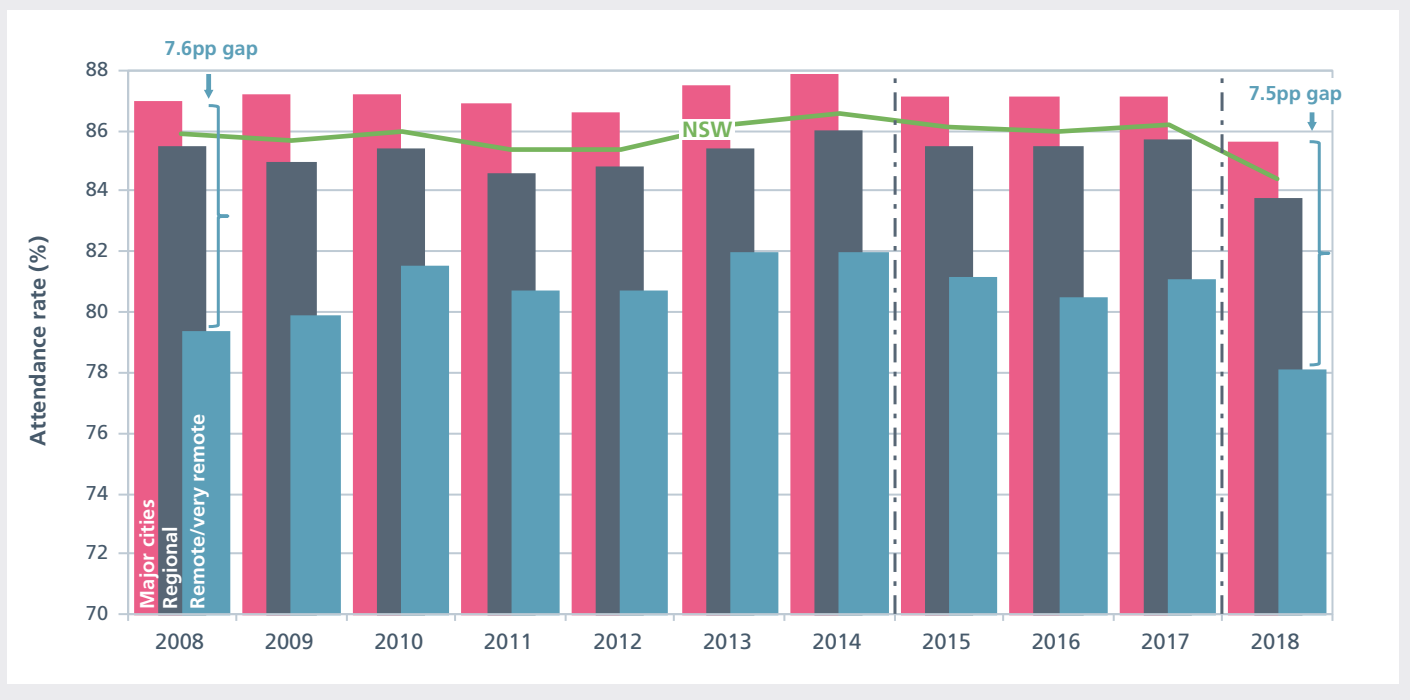
At **remote/very remote schools** the Aboriginal students' attendance rate was 78.1% in 2018, a 3 percentage point decrease from 2017.

As a result of implementing national standards, Aboriginal students' attendance in all areas was at the lowest rate since 2008.

The gap between Aboriginal attendance rates at remote / very remote and major cities schools in 2008 was 7.6 percentage points. This gap narrowed to 5.5 percentage points in 2013 before widening to 7.5 percentage points in 2018.

Figure 4

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2008-18: NSW government schools



School level attendance rate and proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time

For the first time in 2018 NSW government schools were able to report a new attendance national measure introduced in 2015, the “proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time”.

Presenting the average attendance rate does not show a complete picture of how the students' attendance rates are distributed within each school.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the school attendance rate and the proportion of their students attending 90% or more. Overall, as expected, the higher the proportion of students attending at least 90% of the time, the higher the school's attendance rate. Around 7% of schools had less than half of their students attending 90% or more. Most of these schools had an attendance rate which was less than 90% in Semester 1 2018.

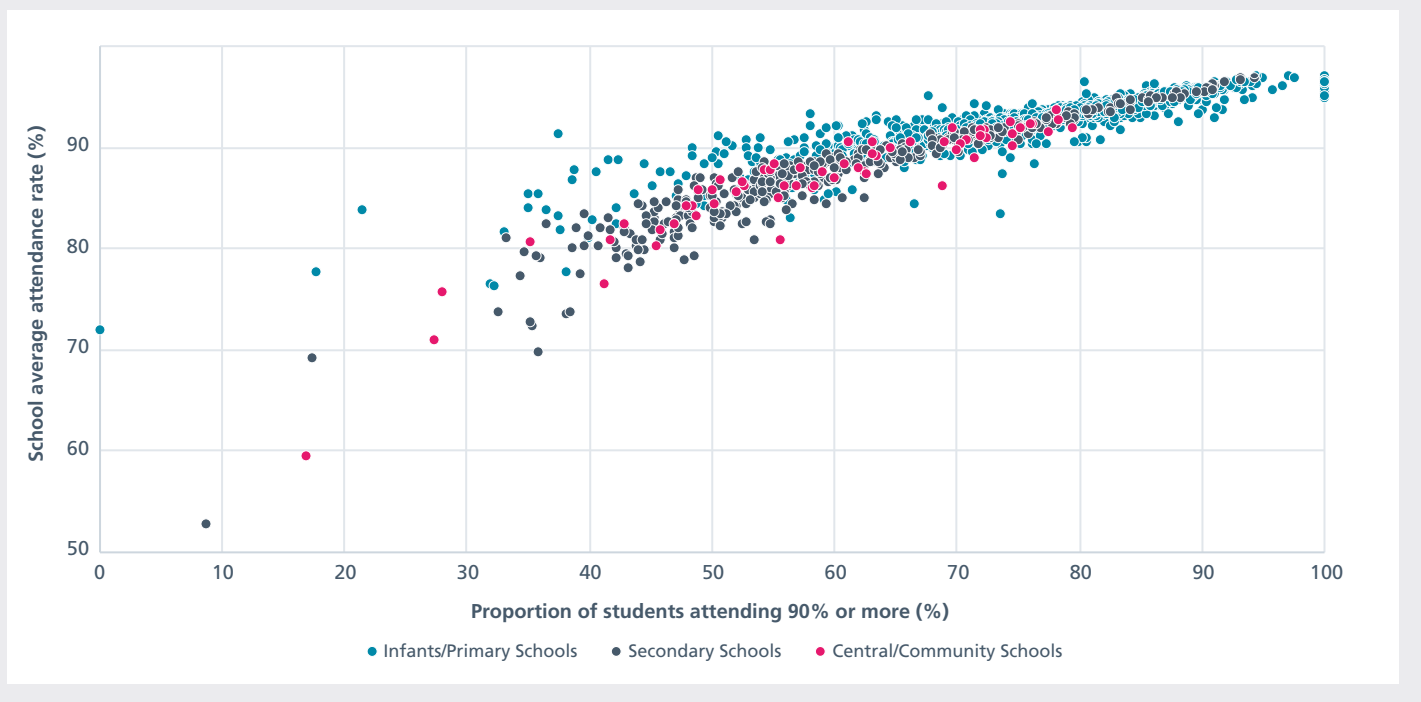
The majority of infants and primary schools, shown as blue dots in the chart, had an attendance rate of over 90% in Semester 1, 2018. Of this group of schools, the majority had over 70% of their students attending 90% or more of the time. Only 2.4% of infants and primary schools had less than half of their students attending at least 90% of the time.

Most secondary schools (black dots) had attendance rates between 80 and 90%, and around half of these schools had between 50 and 70% of their students meeting the 90% threshold. Around 22% of secondary schools had less than half of their students attending 90% or more of the time in Semester 1 2018.

There are 64 Central / Community schools in NSW as illustrated by the pink dots in Figure 5. Most Central / Community schools had attendance rates between 80 to 90%. In Semester 1, 2018, around 78% of Central / Community schools had more than half of their students attending 90% or more of the time.

Figure 5

School level attendance rate and proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government



Distribution of students' attendance

Figure 6 and Table 6 show the distribution of individual students' attendance for primary, junior secondary and senior secondary students in Semester 1 2018.

Although the publicly reported attendance level is 90% or more, many students have close to perfect attendance. The table shows that 28.8% of all students attended 98% or more of the time and 73.4% of all students attended at least 90% of the time. By comparison 14.8 percent of Aboriginal students attended 98% of the time and 52.2% attended at least 90% of the time.

These proportions changed for each level of education, with the percentage of students attending 90% of the time higher for primary students compared to secondary students.

Almost 80% of primary students attended school more than 90% of the time, with one third attending nearly all days (98% or more attendance). For Aboriginal primary students, over 60% attended 90% or more in Semester 1 2018. The proportion of primary students attending school less than 50% of the time was small (1.4% for Aboriginal students and 0.3% for non-Aboriginal students).

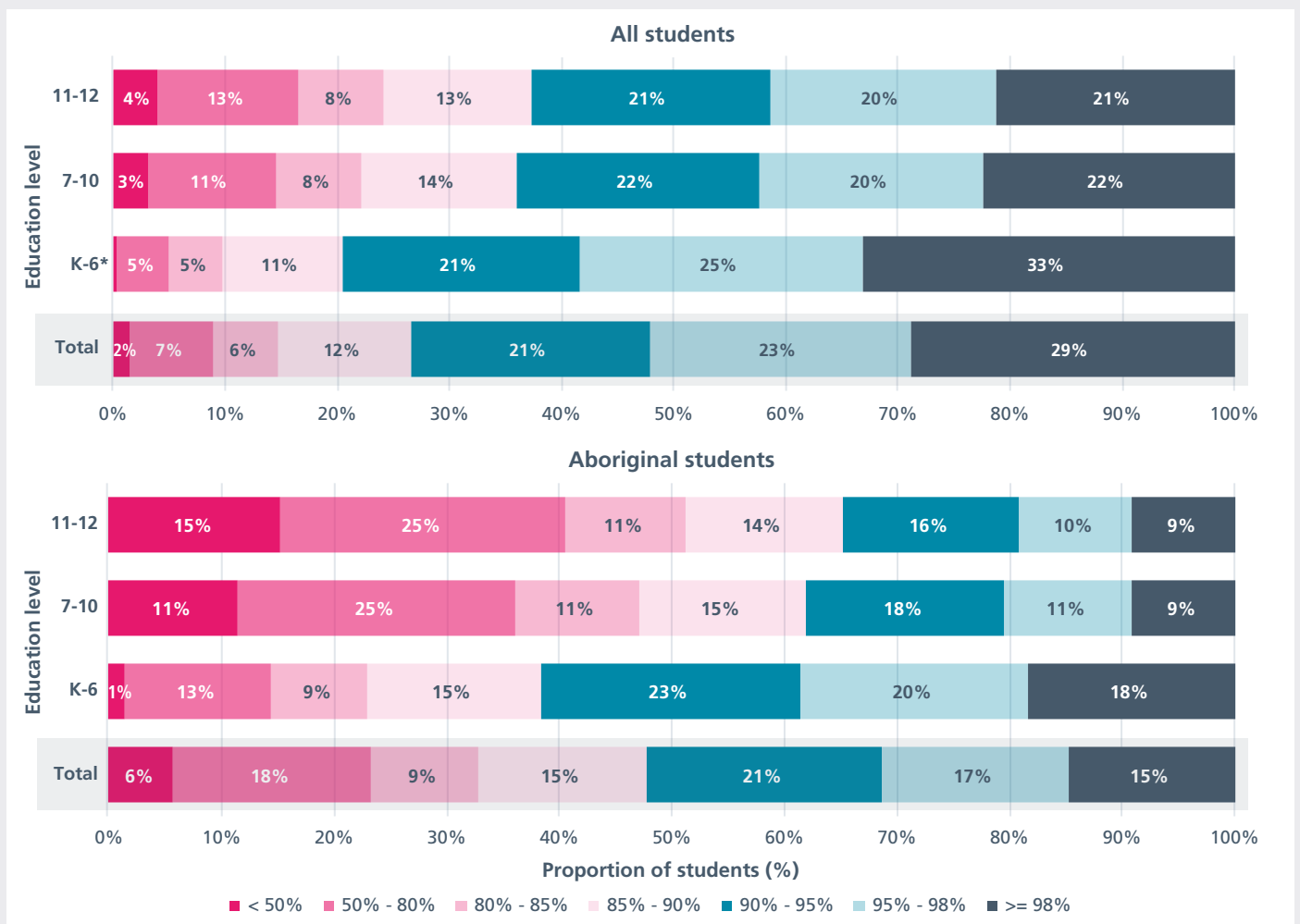
Senior secondary students had a comparatively higher proportion of students attending between 50% and 80%. There was a lower percentage of students with high attendance rates compared to primary students, with only one in five attending 98% or more in this cohort.

Aboriginal senior secondary students showed a similar pattern, with one in four of this cohort attending school between 50% and 80% of the time.

Junior secondary students' attendance distribution was similar to the senior secondary students' distribution, with a lower proportion attending less than 50% of the time (3.1% for junior secondary students compared to 4.0% for senior secondary). Additionally, the proportion of junior secondary students that attended at least 98% of the time was 22.4%, 1.1 percentage points higher than the proportion of senior secondary students.

Figure 6

Distribution of students' attendance, by education level and Aboriginality, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government schools



* The proportion of K-6 students with an attendance of less than 50% was 0.4%.

Table 6

Distribution of students' attendance, by education level and Aboriginality, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government schools

Attendance rate	Aboriginal students				non-Aboriginal students				All students			
	K-6	7-10	11-12	Total	K-6	7-10	11-12	Total	K-6	7-10	11-12	Total
< 50%	1.4	11.5	15.3	5.7	0.3	2.3	3.3	1.2	0.4	3.1	4.0	1.5
50% - 80%	13.0	24.6	25.3	17.6	4.0	10.3	11.7	6.6	4.7	11.5	12.5	7.4
80% - 85%	8.5	10.9	10.6	9.4	4.4	7.3	7.4	5.5	4.7	7.6	7.6	5.8
85% - 90%	15.4	15.0	14.0	15.1	10.4	13.8	13.1	11.6	10.8	13.9	13.1	11.9
90% - 95%	23.1	17.5	15.7	20.8	20.9	22.1	21.7	21.3	21.1	21.7	21.4	21.3
95% - 98%	20.2	11.4	10.1	16.6	25.8	20.7	20.8	23.8	25.3	19.9	20.1	23.3
>= 98%	18.4	9.1	9.1	14.8	34.3	23.6	22.1	30.0	33.1	22.4	21.3	28.8

Distribution of students' attendance by scholastic year

Figure 7 shows the Semester 1 2018 attendance rates and proportion of students that attended less than 90%, between 90% and 98% and more than 98% of the time by scholastic year.

Except for Year 10, the highest student attendance in each scholastic year was between 90% and 98%. This attendance level was achieved by over 45% of primary students but only by 40 to 42% of secondary students.

From Year 8 the proportion of students attending less than 90% overtakes the proportion of students with attendance of 98% or more. Over 40% of Year 10 students attended school less than 90% of the time and only one in five Year 10 students attended at least 98%. The average attendance rate for Year 10 students was 86.1%, lower than any other year group.

For Aboriginal students, the proportion of students attending 90% or less overtakes those attending between 90% and 98% of the time from Year 6. This proportion peaks in Year 10, with over two thirds of Aboriginal students attending less than 90% of the time (Figure 8).

Figure 7

Attendance rate and proportion of students with <90%, 90%-98% and >=98% attendance, by scholastic year, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government

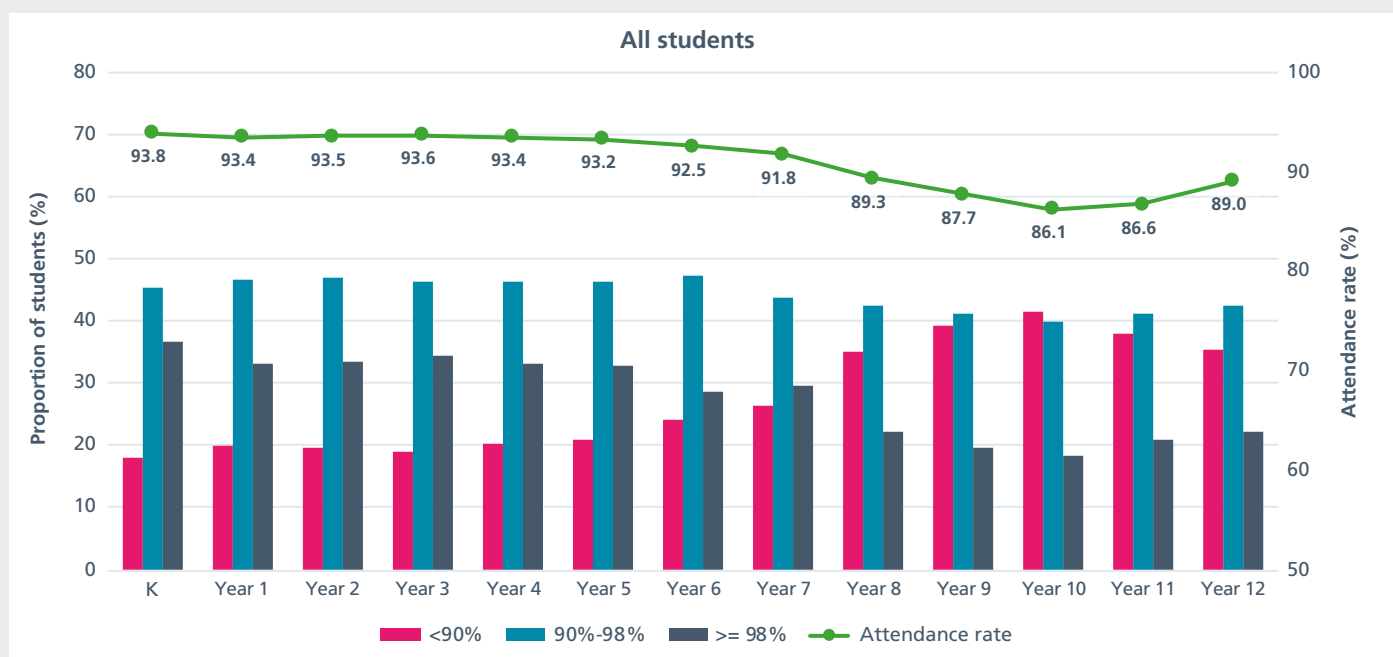
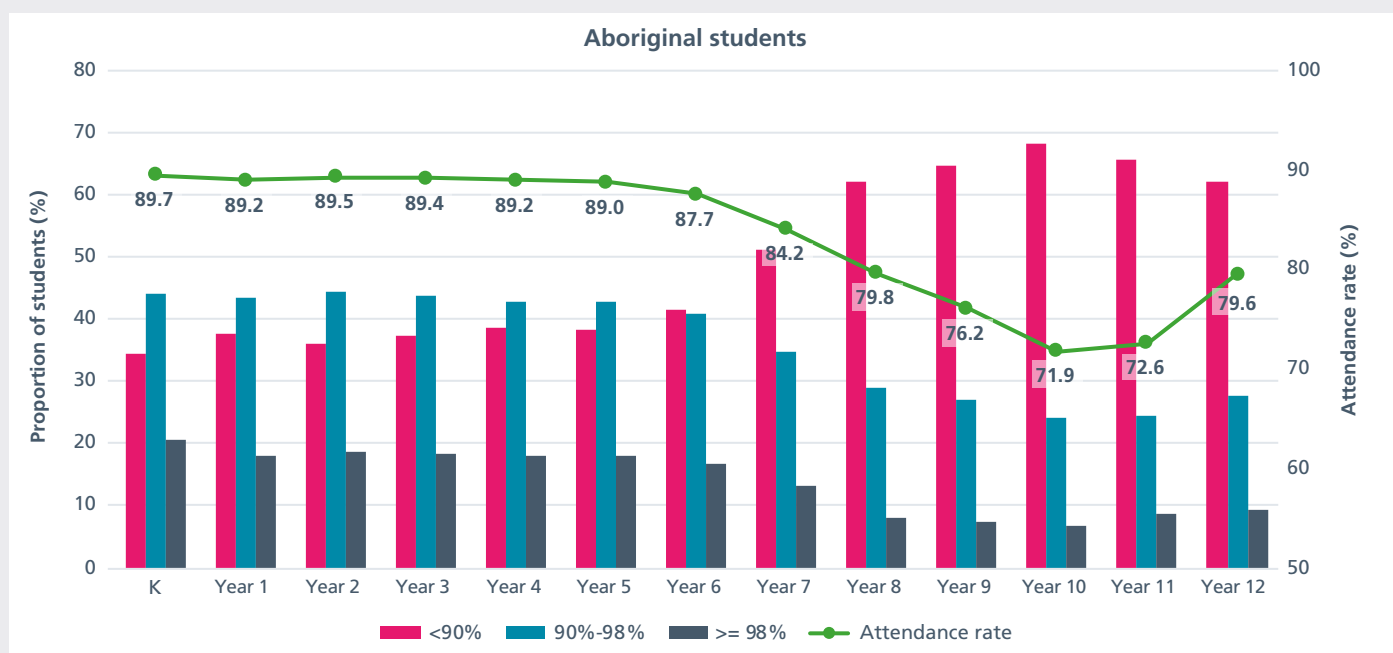


Figure 8

Attendance rate and proportion of Aboriginal students with <90%, 90%-98% and >=98% attendance, by scholastic year, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government schools



Distribution of students' attendance by remoteness

More than half of students attended school at least 90% of the time, regardless of the school location. However, more students in remote / very remote areas have lower attendance than students in major cities.

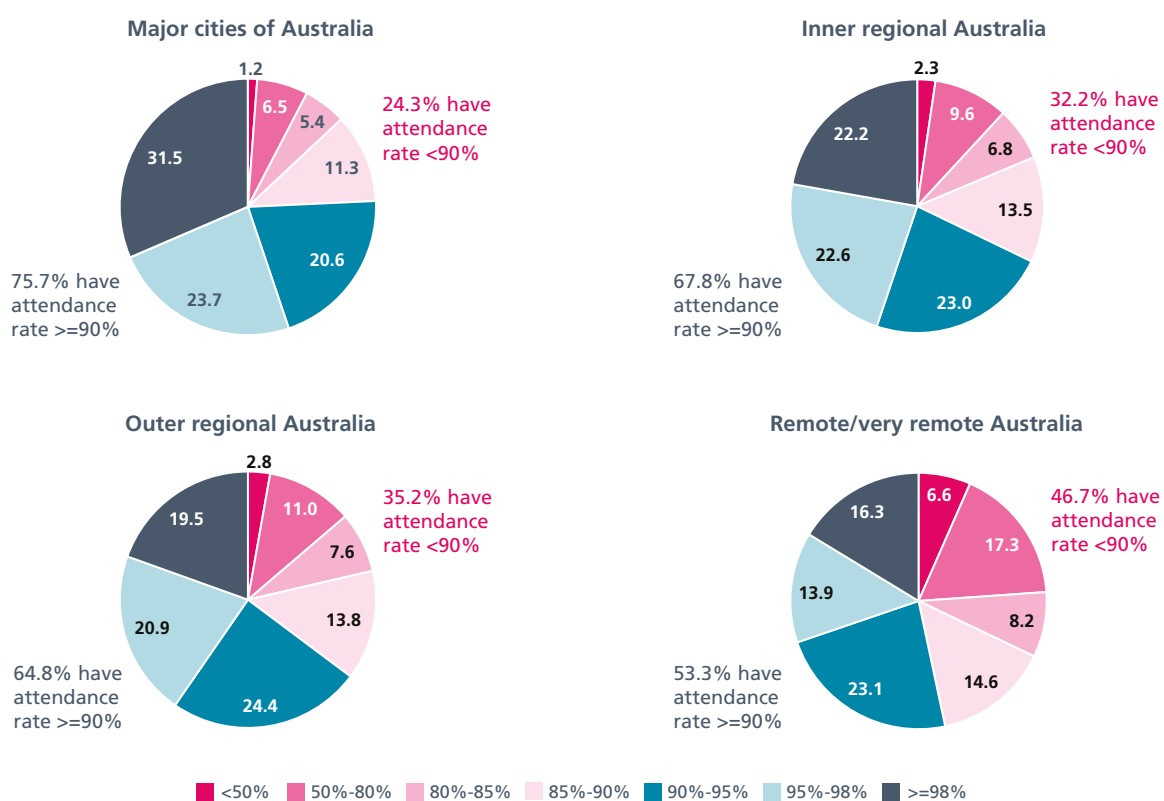
Nearly half of students in **remote/very remote areas** attended school less than 90% of the time, with 6.6% attending less than half of the time, the highest proportion compared to other areas.

By comparison, around three quarters of students in **major cities** had an attendance of 90% or more, with one in three attending school almost every day, the highest proportion compared to other areas.

The distribution of students' attendance in **inner regional and outer regional schools** were similar, with around two thirds of students attending school 90% or more of the time.

Figure 9

Distribution of students' attendance, by remoteness, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government schools



Proportion of students attending 90% or more by remoteness and Aboriginality

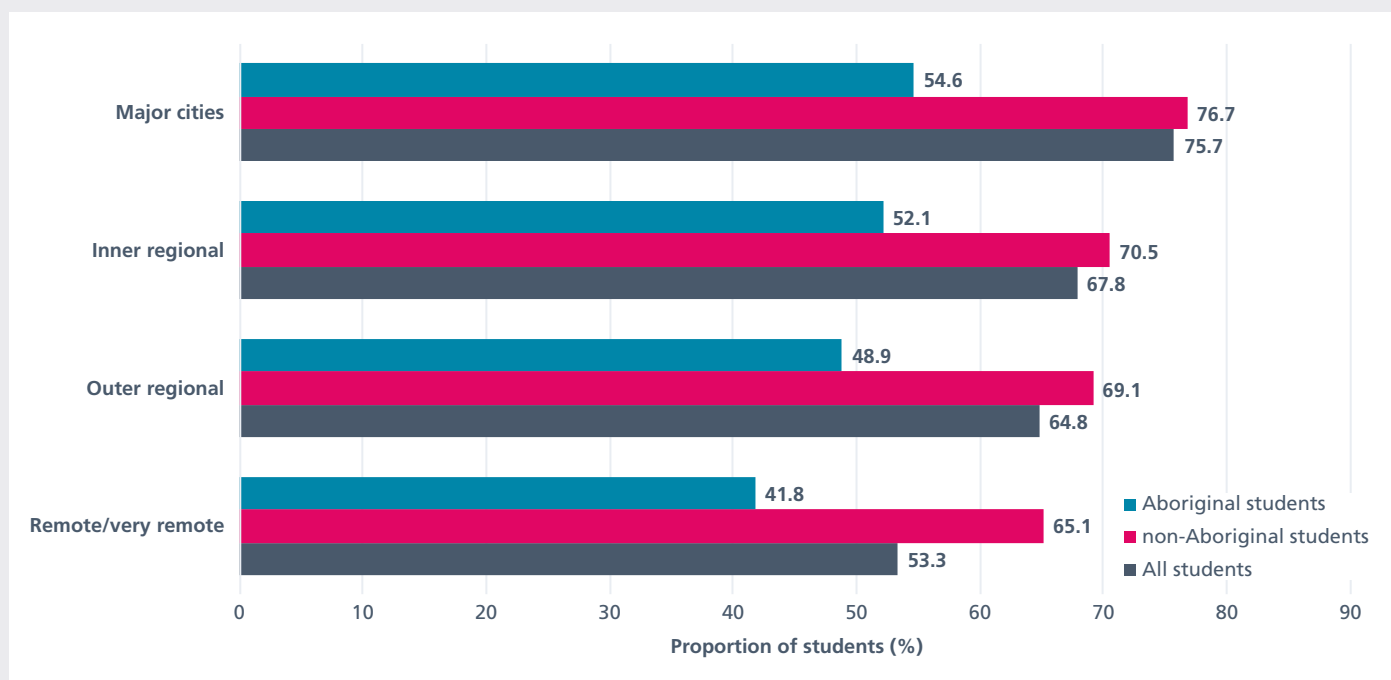
Figure 10 shows the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time by remoteness and Aboriginality. The chart shows that attendance declined with increasing remoteness for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students attending school 90% or more of the time was highest in remote/very remote NSW, with a difference of 23.3 percentage points, followed by major cities at 22.1 percentage points.

The gap was lowest in inner regional NSW schools at 18.4 percentage points.

Figure 10

Proportion of students with an attendance of 90% or more, by remoteness and Aboriginality, Semester 1, 2018: NSW government schools



Impact of National standards on NSW government schools' attendance rates

In 2012 Education ministers from all jurisdictions signed the 'National standards for student attendance data reporting'. This was to allow consistent and comparable reporting of attendance rates for students from Year 1 to Year 10 across Australia.

There were three main changes required for NSW to become compliant with the national standards:

- record extended family holidays as absences rather than exemption from attendance – implemented in January 2015;

- include partial absences over two hours in the calculation;
- improve calculation of enrolled days to take account of student movements between schools.

At the end of 2017, a centralised student administration system was fully rolled out to all NSW government schools, giving the department access to student-level attendance data for all schools. 2018 is the first year when attendance data complies with the national standards.

Table 7 and Figure 11 quantify the impact of the two changes to the calculation method introduced in 2018.

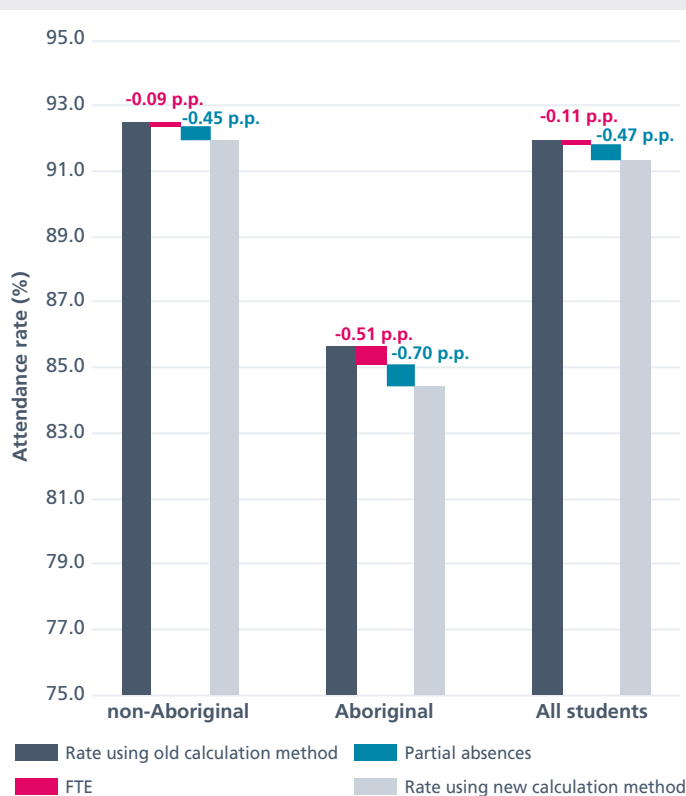
Table 7

Impact of implementing National Standards, Semester 1 2018: NSW government schools

	Attendance rate change 2017 to 2018 (p.p.)	Directly attributable to national standards (p.p.)
All NSW government schools	-0.80	-0.58
Aboriginal students	-1.73	-1.21
Non-Aboriginal students	-0.71	-0.54
Primary students (K to Y6)	-0.56	-0.35
Secondary students (Y7 to Y12)	-1.21	-0.99
Schools in major cities	-0.66	-0.49
Schools in remote / very remote areas	-1.73	-1.33

Figure 11

Impact of implementing National Standards, by Aboriginality, Semester 1 2018: NSW government schools



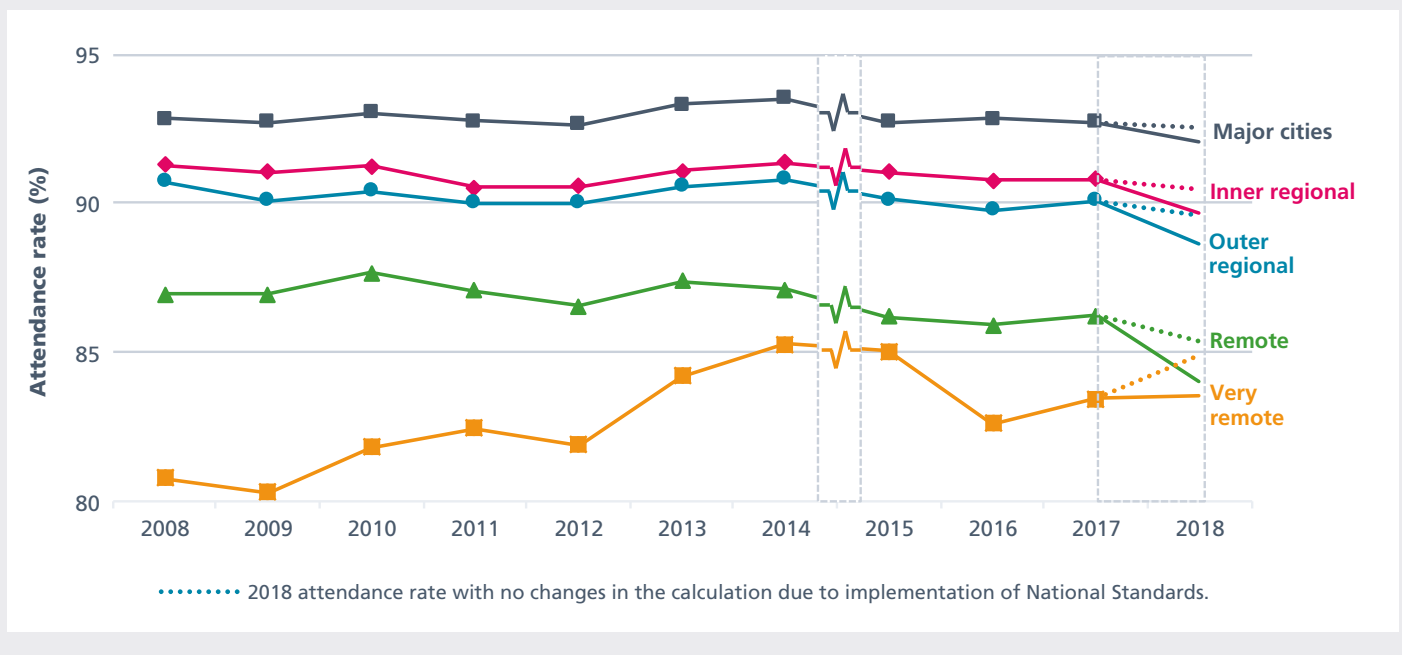
The overall impact of implementing National Standards is estimated to be minus 0.58 percentage points for all students in NSW government schools. This decrease can be disaggregated into minus 0.11 percentage points resulting from using full-time equivalent enrolments and minus 0.47 percentage points from including partial absences.

For Aboriginal students the overall impact was minus 1.21 percentage points compared with minus 0.54 percentage points for non-Aboriginal students. In both cases, the largest impact came from the introduction of partial absences.

It is important to note that access to student-level information allowed the department to introduce new data checks during the attendance data collection. For example, the new process identified days when student attendance and absences data had not loaded correctly to the centralised data store. These checks resulted in data quality improvements. Although it is difficult to measure this impact, it had an influence on the 2018 Semester 1 attendance rates.

Figure 12

Impact of implementing National Standards, by Remoteness, Semester 1 2008-2018: NSW government schools



Semester 1 2018 attendance rates were lower than in any year since 2008, regardless of school remoteness. However if the attendance rate calculation had not changed, attendance rates would have been steady in most areas (see dashed line in Figure 12).

The exception is for government schools in very remote areas, where the attendance rate rose slightly compared to 2017. This increase would have been significant if the attendance rate calculation had not changed.

This increase is explained by the inclusion of Norfolk Island Central School (NICS) for the first time. There are only 15 schools in very remote areas and NICS accounts for around 25% of all enrolments in very remote areas. NICS has an above average attendance rate compared to other schools in very remote areas. The average attendance rate for schools in very remote areas in Semester 1 2018, excluding NICS, was 80.3% compared with 83.6% with this school included.

Figure 13

School level impact of implementing National Standards, Semester 1 2018: NSW government schools



Figure 13 plots the difference in school level attendance using the new calculation method compared to the old method. At a school level the impact of the national standards was varied. Of the 2,061 schools in the data collection, 14 had no change in their attendance rates in Semester 1 2018. 1,741 schools had an impact of up to one percentage point while only around 15% of schools (306 schools) had a reduction of one percentage point or more.

The median change was minus 0.4 percentage points and the largest change was minus 7.4 percentage points as a result of implementing the national standards.

Why collect attendance data?

Students' attendance is recorded by schools for various reasons such as meeting legislative requirements to determine the whereabouts of each student on each school day. While there is a legal obligation for schools to record attendance and absences, there is also a parental obligation to ensure their children attend school.

Higher or increasing rates of attendance are desirable. Poor attendance has been related to poor student outcomes, particularly once patterns of non-attendance are established. (Report on Government Services 2019, Chapter 4, 4.10).

'Attendance' is used as a key indicator of governments' objective to develop fully the talent and capacities of young people through equitable access to education and learning.

Attendance is specified as an outcome within the National School Reform Agreement and as Key Performance Measures in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia approved by the Education Council.

Notes

Government school systems in Australia measure attendance rates throughout the first semester (Terms 1 and 2). This is the time period specified for data collection in National Education Agreements between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. Schools for Specific Purposes' attendance data is not currently collected.

Nationally, the attendance rate is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student days attended by full-time students in Years 1–10 in Semester 1 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended in Semester 1 (Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia - Key Performance Measure 1(b)).

The attendance level is defined as the proportion of full time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90% (Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia - Key Performance Measure 1(c)).

Ongoing data quality improvements can result in changes to the business rules in reports and affect the comparability of data with previous years.

Reasons for absences

Students may be absent from school for a number of reasons, including sickness, suspension, truancy or a range of other reasons. For example:

- misadventure or unforeseen event
- participation in special events not related to the school
- domestic necessity such as serious illness of an immediate family member
- attendance at funerals
- travel in Australia and overseas
- recognised religious festivals or ceremonial occasions
- other absences not explained by parents, or the principal does not accept the explanation offered for the absence.

In particular communities, attendance rates can be affected by a number of factors including the level of sickness in the community and natural events such as floods.

Absence reason is only available in a centralised system for 2018. All these categories are included in the attendance data reported in this bulletin. Reporting of attendance data by absence reason will be included in future bulletins.

Remoteness

Location refers to the region where a school is situated. There are five possible locations: Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote. The Inner Regional and Outer Regional categories, and the Remote and Very Remote categories have been combined in this bulletin. The locations mentioned in this bulletin are determined according to the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) – 2011 Remoteness Structure.

National standards for student attendance data reporting

The standards were agreed to by education authorities in October 2012. Between 2012 and 2017, NSW government schools did not comply fully with the national standards. From 2018, NSW government schools were able to report attendance data in accordance with the national standards with the inclusion of partial day absences and student mobility in the attendance rate calculations. Hence, 2018 is indicated as a break in series in tables and charts in this publication.

Family holidays

From 2015, as part of the implementation of the 'National standards for student attendance data reporting', holidays taken by students during school term time are now included as absences, when previously they could be exempt from attending school.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Throughout this report the term 'Aboriginal' is used to describe the many nations, language groups and clans in NSW, including those from the Torres Strait. The preference for the term 'Aboriginal' over 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in NSW recognises that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW. This is not consistent with the national approach in which 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is the accepted term (ABS, 2014).