

Halls Creek Attendance Planning – Commissioned Inquiry		
Findings	Recommendations	Department of Education actions
<p>Finding 1 The Inquiry found there was no indication of planning initiated by the regional office at the time it was confirmed in early 2020 that the Ombudsman’s Recommendation must be implemented. This resulted in regional office staff lacking guidance, direction, and oversight, undertaking the work in a significantly compressed timeframe. Further, staff had no frame of reference through which to clarify areas of confusion or uncertainty.</p> <p>Finding 2 The absence of a documented plan to guide and monitor the implementation, progress and success of the project created a significant risk. The regional office’s reluctance to engage with system supports such as SWS compromised the likelihood of acceptable standards for attendance planning being met.</p> <p>Finding 5 Inadequate levels of strategic planning structures, operational processes, robust record keeping and the complete absence of a governance ethos for office management in 2020, rendered the regional office vulnerable to judgements of mismanagement.</p>	<p>Recommendation 1 For all projects of this scale and importance, the regional office and Statewide Services work together to provide necessary support for the successful completion of the project. This may include consideration of appointing an expert panel to co-design, with the regional office and school leaders, the scope and quality control methodologies to ensure the timely and successful completion of the project.</p> <p>Recommendation 2 For all projects of this scale and/or priority effective communication and collaboration between Statewide Services and regional offices is necessary. Together they should instigate discrete planning that incorporates robust adherence to the objectives and agreed parameters and identifies assumptions and risks to ensure there is a point of reference against which to track and report on project progress.</p> <p>Recommendation 5 Future initiatives of the scale and importance of this body of work to be managed through the disciplines reflected in a Project Management Planning methodology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a system-level project management office to provide expertise in project management with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensuring governance processes and procedures implemented are consistent with the Department’s accountability framework and promote accountability for delivery of the projects’ outcomes ○ contributing to the development and implementation of policies and plans that are responsive to emerging trends and issues in relation to the projects’ key deliverables ○ liaising, consulting and negotiating with senior management to ensure key project deliverables are agreed. ○ monitoring and assessing project critical issues and risks affecting the projects and developing strategies to ensure timelines for the projects are met.

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<p>Finding 3</p> <p>Insufficient attention given to establishing checks and balances to ensure consistency of detail in the SAPs, appears to have exacerbated school and community issues, and added further confusion regarding the processes necessary to ensure timely and effective follow up for students and families. School community planning needs to be undertaken in the spirit of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' Aboriginal families. This approach will enable effective two-way communication and in effect, a co-design approach.</p>	<p>Recommendation 3</p> <p>Initiate an examination of all existing procedures and processes relating to student attendance and engagement for remote schools and those with high proportions of Aboriginal students. All engagements with families of this kind, to apply a trauma informed practice approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department has recently revised its attendance policy. This came into effect in Semester 2, 2021. • Changes included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ emphasising a culturally responsive approach to attendance through explicit links to the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework ○ student attendance approaches relevant to the individual school context ○ early intervention and support to restore attendance ○ developing a positive attendance culture and promoting student attendance ○ providing engaging environments to support student learning ○ building a shared responsibility for attendance between schools, students, parents and the broader community ○ engaging community-initiated approaches • Statewide Services will support Directors of Education (Regional) to help schools understand the updated policy and to be aware that engagement with families where sharing personal family information to a person not known to them can be trauma-inducing. • The Department will pilot the community-led actions of the 10 Point Attendance Plan in the identified communities.
<p>Finding 4</p> <p>Whole-school strategic development and planning at Halls Creek District High School requires urgent attention to be completed to enable targeted attention to be given to school priorities, including student attendance. While steps are being taken to support the school's planning development, consideration should be given to providing targeted support and guidance to strengthen the school's leadership and planning processes.</p>	<p>Recommendation 4</p> <p>To build a robust and sustainable Business Plan, provide support to the leadership team with a clear priority to achieve strategic, structural and systems clarity that meet contemporary governance standards for school planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Education (Kimberley) to explore options to complement existing programs of support, focussing on a school systems and structures improvement approach. • The principal to develop a whole-school attendance strategy.

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<p>Finding 6</p> <p>Inconsistency with attendance plan format and system attendance planning nomenclature, led to vagueness and confusion between ‘documented plans’, ‘individual student attendance plans’ and details required for either. With these matters not resolved before the project commenced, any prospect of standards moderation and quality control for sign-off of the plans was improbable.</p> <p>As a result, the Inquiry found there were limited quality control measures applied to the standard of student information recorded; the level of detail provided relating to selected attendance strategies; inconsistency of staff and parental signatures and lack of dating of the plans from one to the next.</p>	<p>Recommendation 6</p> <p>For a project of this magnitude, urgent consideration be given to the department’s attendance strategy team to develop a set of Online Training Modules for preparing effective student attendance plans. More intuitive templates to assist schools to customise attendance plans and approaches in line with the local school context would improve the consistency and impact at both the regional and system levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statewide Services to develop online training modules in the effective preparation of student attendance plans to ensure an emphasis for planning in remote schools and those schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students. • Statewide Services to develop and publish a student attendance plan template to assist schools in the planning process. • Consider collaboration with the Leadership Institute for preparation of online modules.
<p>Finding 7</p> <p>Reported improvements in student attendance were made using individual student attendance data. This, combined with a human error of transposition of the data created the mistaken belief that there had been significant improvement in whole-school student attendance when in fact this was not the case.</p>	<p>Recommendation 7</p> <p>Consider the training necessary for those preparing attendance plans, and related data analysis, to ensure there is a full understanding of what represents statistically verifiable improvement in school attendance rates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and System Performance to provide the necessary training in the effective use of attendance data to drive evidence-based decisions. • Consider collaboration with the Leadership Institute for preparation of online modules.

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<p>Finding 8</p> <p>The value of engaging with families in a culturally respectful manner can be significantly strengthened when local language is used. As Kriol is widely used across the local community, using it to engage with families has been described as a potential first step to respectfully connecting with those who are comfortable in speaking Kriol.</p>	<p>Recommendation 8</p> <p>When meeting families, the school and regional office should engage the expertise of the AIEOs on the best way to deliver a culturally responsive communication and collaboration strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student attendance planning at Halls Creek to explore culturally responsive approaches that take into consideration families where English is not their first language. • Employment of two Aboriginal Engagement Coordinators to promote attendance and support engagement with families.
<p>Finding 9</p> <p>Frequent comments were made about the importance for the whole community of Halls Creek to be involved for the sake of their children's future. This appears to have given rise to a belief that 'now' might be the time to take important steps towards achieving greater community unity on how to engage positively with the school.</p>	<p>Recommendation 9</p> <p>Explore options to work with community leaders, parents, carers and allied agencies to strengthen school/community relations. Consider the value of community meetings at the school in combination with the school adopting a pro-active strategy to focus on ways to improve visibility, presence and trust by involving the AIEOs, reaching out to community groups and employers and involving community Elders and members in respectful, culturally mindful engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Education (Kimberley) and principal at Halls Creek District High School to map relevant Aboriginal Elders and corporations to engage in strengthening community relations. • The Director of Education (Kimberley) and principal at Halls Creek District High School to work with the School Based Aboriginal Advisory Group and Aboriginal Elders to plan culturally appropriate meetings to initiate respectful conversations about improving attendance. • The Director of Education (Kimberley) and principal at Halls Creek District High School to progress the attendance strategy in collaboration with the School Based Aboriginal Advisory Group and Aboriginal Elders.