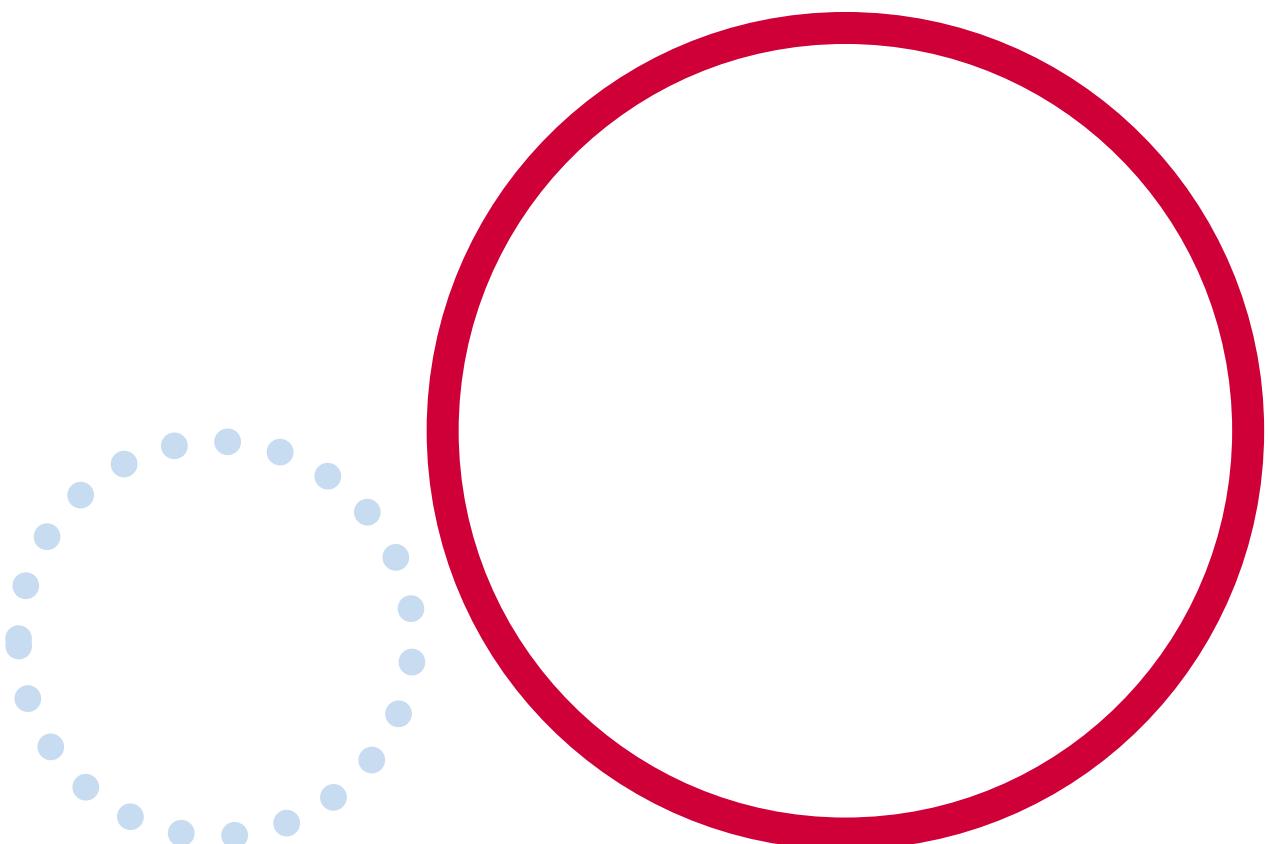
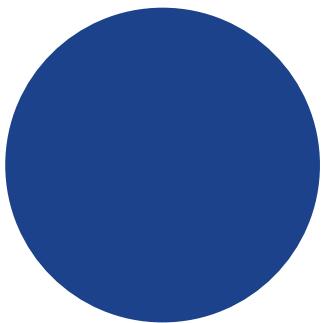


2021 Semester 1 student attendance factsheet



Introduction

This factsheet is an overview of student attendance in NSW government schools in Semester 1 2021. It provides attendance figures from Kindergarten to Year 12 and includes measures such as the attendance rate, the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time (known as the **attendance level**) as well as analysis of absence reasons.

In 2021 attendance figures were calculated differently to align with the third edition of ACARA's 'National Standards for Student Attendance Data and Reporting'. These calculation changes include:

- no rounding when determining whether a student's attendance rate meets the 90% threshold for attendance level calculations
- including the final week of Term 2
- treating partial absences over 120 minutes as a half day absence (instead of their actual value, calculated as a proportion of a nominal 6-hour day).

Furthermore, the department implemented an automated attendance feed (AAF) system in Semester 1 2021. AAF transfers data automatically from third-party attendance management systems to the department's centralised data warehouse every night. Previously, schools needed to manually load data from their third-party system into the department's student management system. The AAF has significantly improved data quality in 2021, which has affected data comparability with previous years.

The attendance figures provided in this factsheet may differ slightly from the school and system attendance targets reported elsewhere, including in Scout. Attendance targets were developed with 2018 baseline results and used the previous calculation methodology. Please refer to the 'Official ACARA methodology compared to the previous methodology' section for more information on these differences.

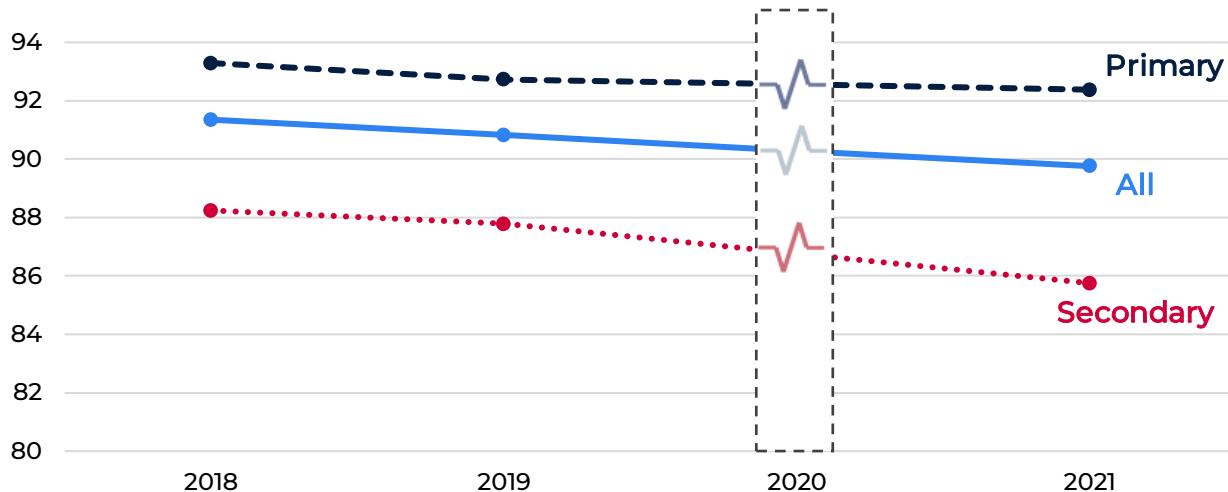
Although there were no state-wide or regional lockdowns in NSW during Semester 1 2021, COVID-19 continued to affect student attendance. Analysis of attendance codes showed a change in the structure of absence reasons in 2021, presented later in this factsheet. For more information on how COVID-19 impacted student attendance in 2020, please refer to our previous factsheet [Effects of COVID-19 on attendance during Semester 1 2020](#). Due to the impact of COVID-19 on 2020 data, 2021 student attendance data is mainly compared with 2019 data in this factsheet.

Summary of attendance rates

Overall the NSW government attendance rate decreased by 1 percentage point from 90.8% in 2019 to 89.8% in 2021. Secondary attendance rates fell by 2 percentage points from 87.8% to 85.8%, while primary rates fell by only 0.3 percentage points, from 92.7% to 92.4%.

Figures 1 and 2 show attendance rates in Semester 1 from 2018 to 2021 by education level. 2020 figures were a break in series due to the impact of COVID-19 and this data was therefore excluded.

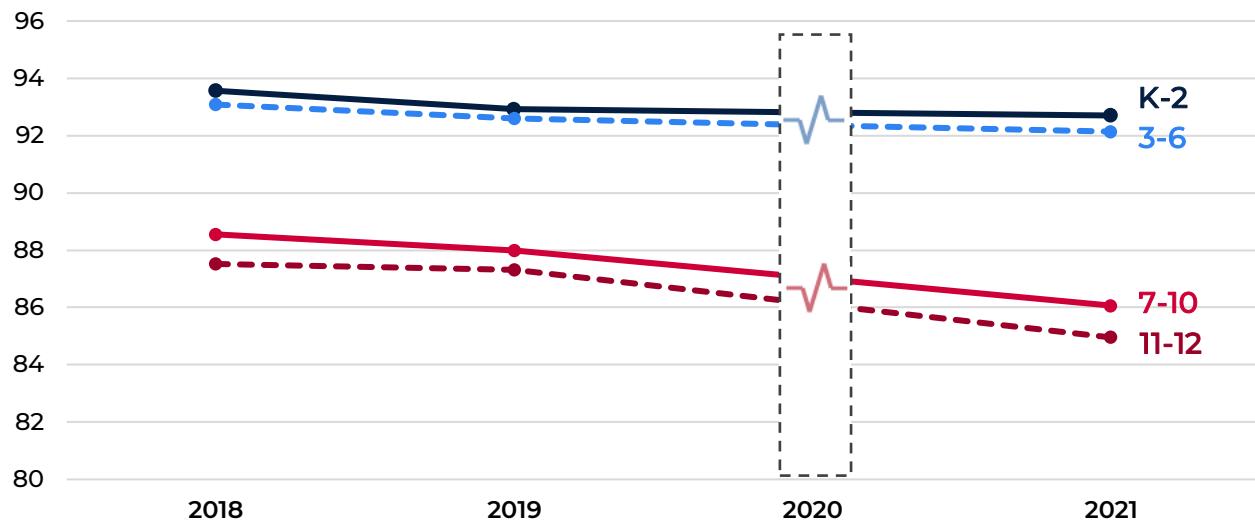
Figure 1: Semester 1 2018-2021 attendance rate (%) by education level



At the education sub-level, Kindergarten to Year 2 attendance fell by 0.2 percentage points from 92.9% in 2019 to 92.7% in 2021, while Year 3 to Year 6 fell by 0.5 percentage points from 92.6% to 92.1%.

Year 7 to Year 10 attendance fell by 1.9 percentage points from 88% to 86.1% and attendance for Year 11 and 12 students declined by 2.3 percentage points from 87.3% to 85%.

Figure 2: Semester 1 2018-2021 attendance rate (%) by education sub-level



Public reporting includes both the attendance rate and the proportion of students attending 90% or more of the time (the attendance level). The attendance level is a more volatile measure because many students attend around 90% of the time, so small changes in attendance can move a student from below 90% to 90% or more. In Semester 1 2021 the attendance level was 67.3%, 3.1 percentage points lower than in Semester 1 2020 (70.4%).

Attendance by Aboriginal status

Between Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance rates for Aboriginal students decreased more than attendance rates for non-Aboriginal students.

Table 1 shows that attendance for Aboriginal primary students fell by 1.8 percentage points from 88.4% to 86.6%. The average attendance rate for secondary Aboriginal students fell by 4.6 percentage points from 76.6% in 2019 to 72.0% in 2021.

Table 1: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance rate by education sub-level and Aboriginal status

Education Level	Attendance rate (%) S1 by education sub-level			Non-Aboriginal students		
	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change
Kindergarten to Year 2	88.9	87.1	-1.8	93.3	93.2	0.0
Years 3 to 6	88.1	86.1	-1.9	93.0	92.7	-0.3
Primary	88.4	86.6	-1.9	93.1	92.9	-0.2
Years 7 to 10	77.2	73.0	-4.2	89.0	87.4	-1.6
Years 11 to 12	74.4	68.6	-5.9	88.2	86.2	-2.0
Secondary	76.6	72.0	-4.6	88.8	87.1	-1.7
All	83.8	80.7	-3.1	91.4	90.6	-0.8

The proportion of primary students attending 90% or more of the time (the primary attendance level) for Aboriginal primary students declined by 6.6 percentage points from 58.7% to 52.1%. The gap in attendance level for primary students widened from 19.1 percentage points in 2019 to 25.1 percentage points in 2021.

Similarly, the attendance level for secondary Aboriginal students fell by 7.6 percentage points from 35.5% to 27.9%. While the decline for non-Aboriginal secondary students was broadly comparable at 5.5 percentage points, the proportion of non-Aboriginal secondary students attending 90% of the time was higher, at 57.9% in 2021. Therefore, the gap in attendance level for secondary students widened from 28 percentage points in 2019 to 30 percentage points in 2021.

Table 2: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance level by education sub-level and Aboriginal status

Education Level	Attendance level (%) S1 by education level			Non-Aboriginal students		
	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change
Kindergarten to Year 2	60.3	53.8	-6.5	78.6	78.8	0.2
Years 3 to 6	57.4	50.7	-6.6	77.1	76.1	-1.0
Primary	58.7	52.1	-6.6	77.8	77.2	-0.5
Years 7 to 10	36.1	28.6	-7.4	63.7	58.1	-5.6
Years 11 to 12	33.7	25.5	-8.1	62.8	57.4	-5.4
Secondary	35.5	27.9	-7.6	63.5	57.9	-5.5
All	49.5	42.3	-7.2	72.2	69.6	-2.6

Attendance gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students

Between Semester 1 2019 and 2021 some cohorts of students experienced a larger decrease in **attendance rates** than other students. Figure 3 shows that the attendance rate gap between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students increased from 7.7 percentage points (83.8% for Aboriginal students and 91.4% for non-Aboriginal students) to 9.9 percentage points (80.7% for Aboriginal students and 90.6% for non-Aboriginal students) from Semester 1 2019 to 2021.

Figure 4 shows the **attendance level** gap increased from 22.7 percentage points (49.5% for Aboriginal students and 72.2% for non-Aboriginal students) in 2019 to 27.3 percentage points (42.3% for Aboriginal students and 69.6% for non-Aboriginal students) in 2021.

Figure 3: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 gap in attendance rate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students

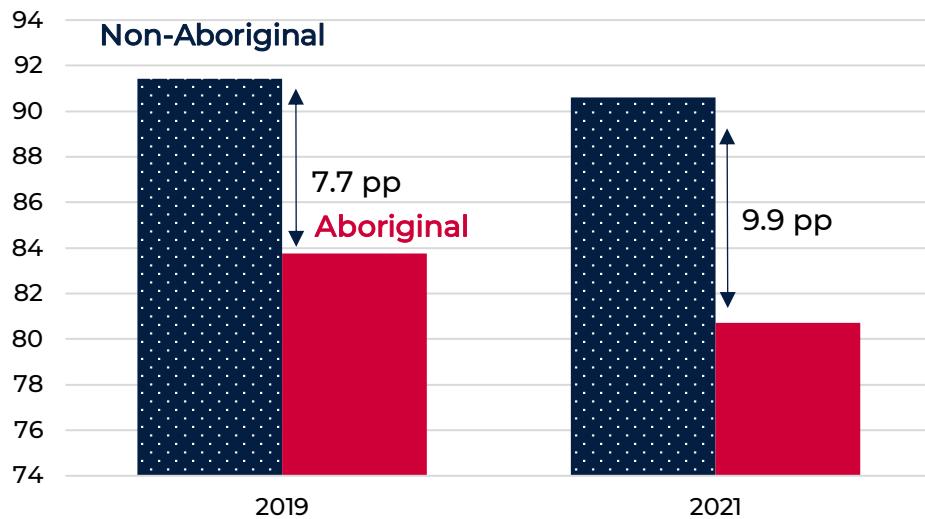
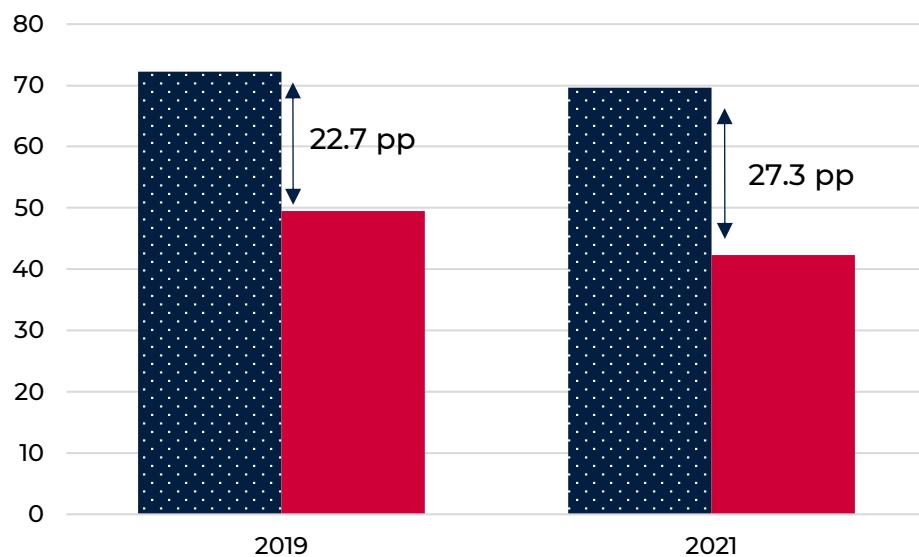


Figure 4: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 gap in attendance level between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students

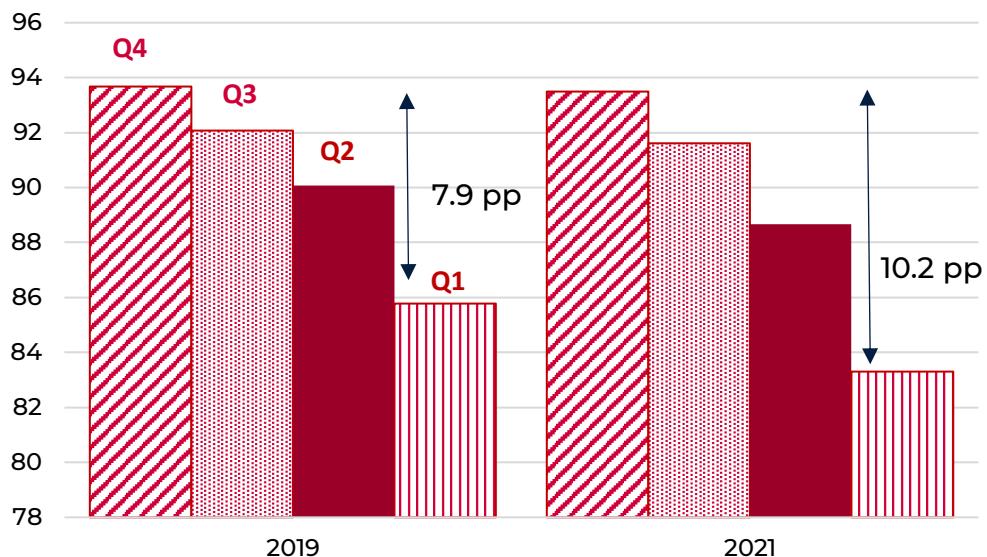


Attendance gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students

Attendance rates also decreased more for students from lower socio-educational advantage (SEA) backgrounds relative to students from higher socio-educational advantage backgrounds. Figure 5 shows that in 2019, students in the lowest quarter (Q1) had an attendance rate 7.9 percentage

points lower than students in the highest SEA quarter (Q4). In 2019 the attendance rate for Q1 students was 85.8%, while the attendance rate for Q4 students was 93.7%. In 2021, this gap increased to 10.2 percentage points as SEA Q1 student attendance fell by 2.5 percentage points to 83.3% while SEA Q4 student attendance fell by only 0.2 percentage points to 93.5%.

Figure 5: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance rate gap by students' SEA quarter



Similarly, the gap between students attending schools in regional/remote areas and major city areas for both the attendance rate and attendance level increased between Semester 1 2019 and 2021. Figure 6 shows that the attendance rate gap between major city schools and remote schools increased from 8.3 percentage points (83.2% for remote, compared to 91.5% for major city schools) to 12.4 percentage points (78.4% for remote schools, compared to 90.8% for major city schools). Also, the attendance rate gap between major city schools and regional schools increased from 2.5 percentage points to 4.2 percentage points as the attendance rate for regional schools fell by 2.4 percentage points from 89% to 86.6%.

Figure 7 shows that the attendance level gap also widened noticeably, from 23 percentage points (49.6% for remote schools, compared to 72.6% for major city schools) to 29.8 percentage points (41.1% for remote schools, compared to 70.9% for major city schools).

Figure 6: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance rate change by geolocation

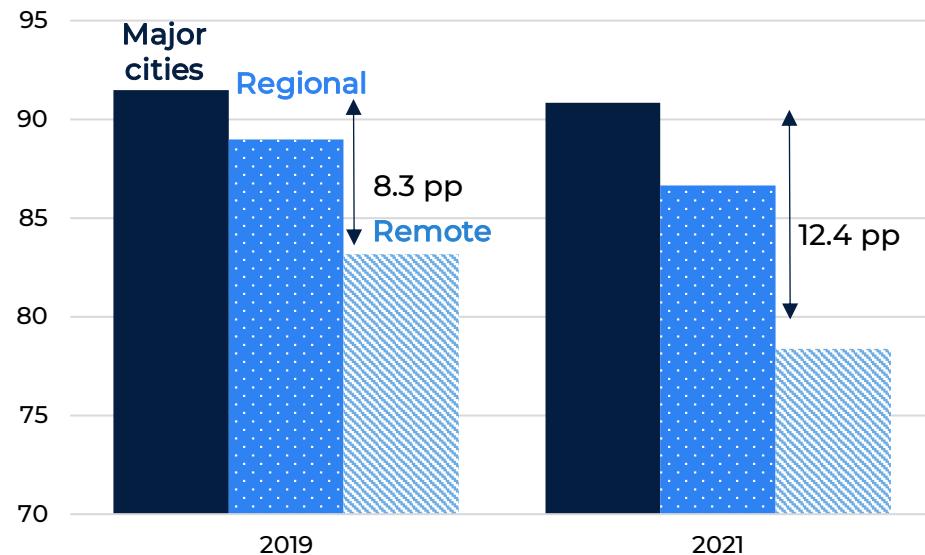
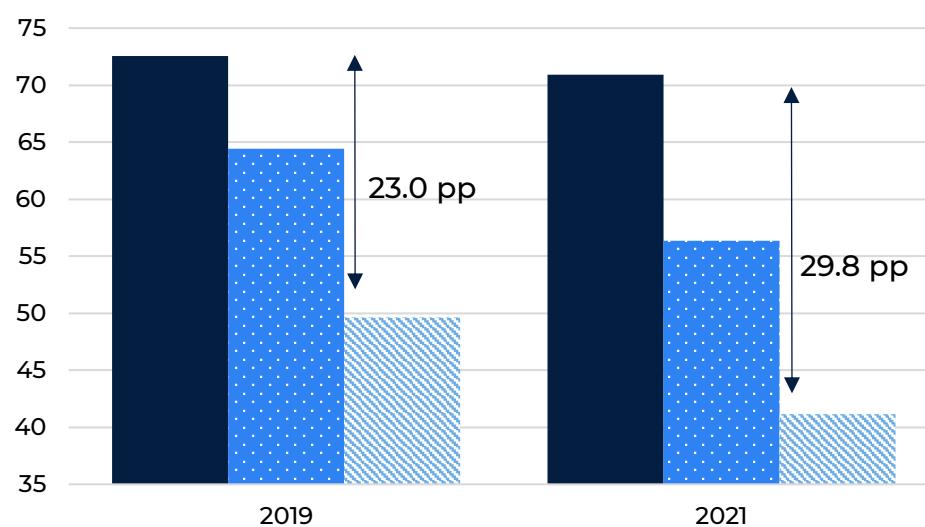


Figure 7: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 attendance level change by geolocation



Analysis by absence reasons

When parents and carers provide an explanation for absence, schools record the explanation in an electronic system using standard codes. Analysis of attendance codes provided additional insight into the reasons for student absences. Attendance codes were split into 4 categories for this analysis: leave, sickness, unexplained/unjustified absences and suspensions. Please refer to section 2 of the explanatory notes for more information on attendance codes and absence reasons.

Figures 8 and 9 compare absence codes between Semester 1 2019 and 2021, both in terms of total absence days as well as absence days per 1,000 enrolled days. Total figures can be misleading as they do not account for the different number of school days open in Semester 1 2019 and 2021 as well as enrolment changes between the two time periods. The alternate **per 1,000 enrolled days** measure provides a consistent basis for comparison. Note, this analysis is based on whole day absences only and does not include part-day absences.

For primary students, the total number of absence days remained reasonably steady for Semester 1, increasing from approximately 3,268,000 days in 2019 to 3,299,000 in 2021; however, the composition of the reason codes differed. During this period the number of leave days decreased by around 30% from 678,000 days to 470,000 days, while the number of sick days increased from 1,194,000 days to 1,498,000 days.

Using the per 1,000 enrolled days measure, the number of leave days decreased from 14.4 days to 10.4 days and the number of sick days increased from 25.4 days to 33.1 days. These changes are most likely explained by the impact of COVID-19, including students being required to stay at home until COVID-19 tests are completed and also students being unable to go on holidays as often due to closed interstate and international borders. Use of suspension and unexplained/unjustified reason codes remained steady per 1,000 enrolled days.

Figure 8: Primary absences by reason, Semester 1 2019 and 2021, total and per 1,000 enrolled days

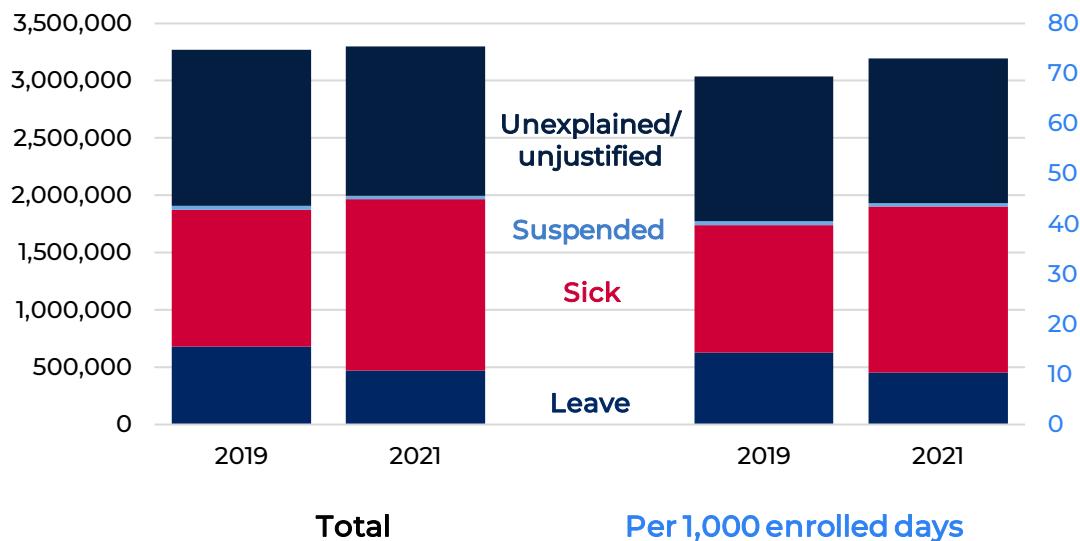


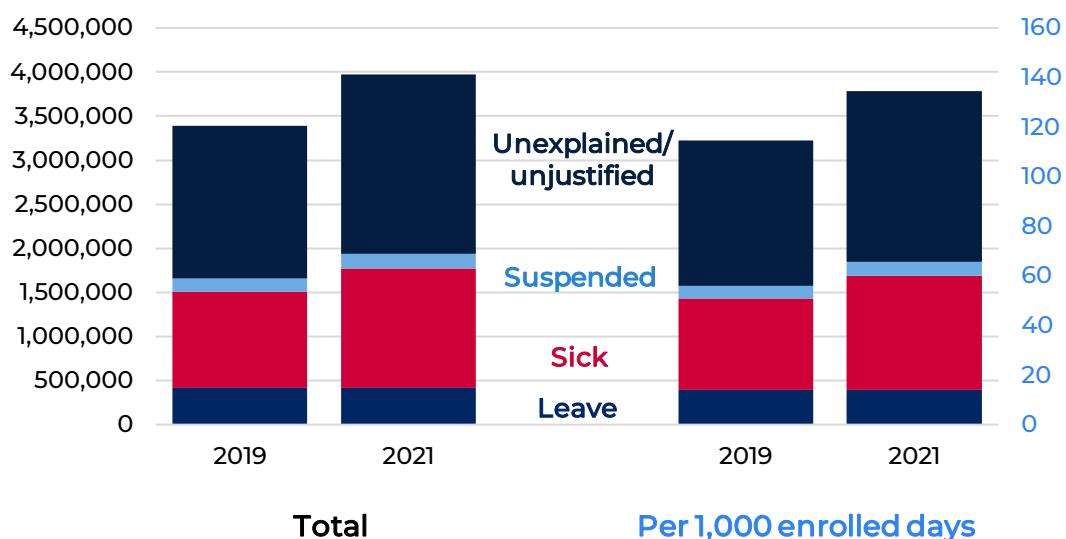
Table 3 shows that leave days per 1,000 enrolled days decreased significantly for primary students in major city schools from 14.3 days to 8.8 days. By contrast leave days per 1,000 enrolled days increased slightly for primary students in regional and remote areas. Sickness days per 1,000 enrolled days increased by at least 25% across all three location categories.

Table 3: Semester 1 2019 and 2021 primary leave and sickness absence codes per 1,000 enrolled days by major cities, regional and remote schools

Year	Major cities		Regional		Remote	
	Leave	Sick	Leave	Sick	Leave	Sick
2019	14.3	24.8	14.7	27.0	23.3	32.4
2021	8.8	31.4	15.1	38.4	26.1	44.9

For secondary students (as shown in figure 9), the number of total absence days increased from 3,392,000 days to 3,970,000 days, while the number of absences per 1,000 enrolled days increased from 114.6 days to 134.5 days. Unlike primary students, the number of leave days per 1,000 days did not decrease and was stable at 14 days (compared with 14.1 days in 2019). Sickness days per 1,000 enrolled days however did increase, from 36.7 days to 45.9 days. In addition, days lost due to suspension increased slightly from 5.1 days to 5.6 days and unexplained/unjustified absences increased from 58.7 days to 68.9 days.

Figure 9: Secondary absences by reason, Semester 1 2019 and 2021, total and per 1,000 enrolled days



Official ACARA methodology compared to the previous methodology

Note that these figures differ to the numbers in earlier sections which include students in all year levels, while this section only includes students in Years 1 to 10.

Table 4: Difference in 2021 attendance rate and level between official ACARA methodology and previous methodology¹

Education level	Attendance rate			Attendance level		
	Official	Previous	Difference	Official	Previous	Difference
Years 1 to 6	92.4%	92.6%	-0.3 pp	74.9%	77.9%	-3.0 pp
Years 7 to 10	86.2%	86.8%	-0.6 pp	55.3%	59.6%	-4.3 pp
Years 1 to 10	90.1%	90.3%	-0.2 pp	67.8%	70.8%	-3.0 pp

¹ Attendance rates for Years 1 to 10 include primary ungraded and junior secondary ungraded students, whereas Years 1 to 6 and Years 7 to 10 do not include ungraded students in the calculations. This is consistent with national reporting of student attendance data.

In 2021 NSW Department of Education changed the methodology used to calculate student attendance in order to align with version 3 of ACARA's National Standards.

This change in calculation methodology partly explained the overall decrease in attendance in 2021. Using ACARA reporting standards (i.e. excluding Kindergarten, Year 11 and Year 12), the attendance rate was:

- **Years 1 to 10:** 0.2 percentage points lower (90.1% for official methodology, compared to 92.3% for previous methodology) using the official methodology as compared to the previous methodology;
- **Years 1 to 6:** 0.3 percentage points (92.4% for official methodology, compared to 92.6% for previous methodology);
- **Years 7 to 10:** 0.6 percentage points lower (86.2% for official methodology, compared to 86.8% for previous methodology).

With the attendance level:

- **Years 1 to 10** was 2.9 percentage points lower (67.8% for official methodology, compared to 70.8% for previous methodology);
- **Years 1 to 6** was 3.0 percentage points lower (74.9% for official methodology, compared to 77.9% for previous methodology);
- **Years 7 to 10** was 4.3 percentage points lower (55.3% for official methodology, compared to 59.6% for previous methodology) respectively.

These figures show that moving towards the official ACARA methodology has resulted in lower attendance, and impacts secondary students more.

Conclusion

In summary, Semester 1 2021 student attendance rates have decreased in NSW government schools, particularly for secondary students; however, this needs to be viewed in context of the following factors:

- moving towards the official ACARA methodology for student attendance data and reporting
- implementation of the Automated Attendance Feed
- impact of COVID-19 resulting in increased sickness days.

Although attendance rates have generally fallen, attendance for some cohorts fell more than others. Aboriginal students, students in the lowest FOEI quarter as well as students attending schools located in regional locations had relatively large decreases in attendance. There was minimal change to attendance for non-Aboriginal students and students attending schools in major city locations.

Definitions

Government school systems in Australia measure attendance rates throughout the first Semester, which includes Term 1 and Term 2. This is the time period of data collection as specified in National Education Agreements between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. Attendance data from NSW Schools for Specific Purposes' attendance data was collected for the first time in 2020.

Nationally, the attendance rate is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student days attended by full-time students in Years 1 to 10 in Semester 1 as a percentage of the 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 to 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)).

National student attendance data for Years 1 to 10 is published annually on the National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR) data portal. The data portal includes more information on the Measurement Framework for Schooling Australia and Key Performance Measures previously mentioned. 2020 attendance data was not published due to the impact of COVID-19 on student attendance.

This factsheet includes information on Kindergarten, Year 11 and Year 12, which is additional to the scholastic year groupings described above.

Locations in this factsheet are determined according to Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) – 2016 Remoteness Structure. This standard outlines five possible location areas: major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. This factsheet at times combines inner regional and outer regional into one regional location and combines remote and very remote into one remote location.

Socio-Educational Advantage (SEA) quarters represent a scale of relative socio-educational disadvantage ('bottom quarter' or Q1) through to relative socio-educational advantage ('top quarter' or Q4). These quarters were calculated by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) using parental occupation and education data.

Explanatory notes

1. National standards for student attendance data reporting

Since 2018 NSW government schools have reported attendance data in accordance with the National Standards published on the [ACARA website](#).

ACARA published the '[Third Edition of National Standards for Student Attendance Data Reporting](#)' in July 2020. As a result, in 2021 the following changes to attendance calculations were made:

- no rounding to determine whether a student's attendance rate meets the 90% threshold for attendance level calculations
- including the final week of term 2
- treating partial absences over 120 minutes as a half day absence instead of their actual value, that is, as a proportion of a 6-hour day.

2. 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 factors including the level of sickness in the community and natural events such as floods.