

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Government School Student Attendance 2017 (Semester 1)

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Research indicates a strong link between attendance and student achievement. Recording and monitoring student attendance is an important requirement as part of the school's duty of care to all students in the school.

NSW government schools' attendance rates

Since 2006 the average attendance rate in NSW government schools has varied between 92.0 per cent and 92.9 per cent, with a small rise in attendance rates observed from 2012 to 2014. However, between 2014 and 2015 the attendance rate decreased, following a change to the recording of approved extended family holidays which required them to be recorded as absences rather than exemption from attendance. From 2015 to 2017 attendance rates have remained roughly at the same level, at 92.2 per cent in 2015 and 2016 and 92.1 per cent in 2017.

Attendance rates can be impacted by a number of factors such as sickness and weather events.



Key findings:

- Attendance rates were generally high for primary students. The average rate was 93.9 per cent in 2017, 4.4 percentage points higher than the average rate for secondary students.
- Across years of schooling, attendance rates decreased at a much slower rate in primary years (drop of 1 percentage point from Kindergarten to Year 6), than in secondary years (drop of 5 percentage points from Year 7 to Year 10).
- There was more variability in average attendance rates across secondary schools than primary schools. Median secondary (non-selective) school attendance rates ranged from 86.2 per cent in North West NSW to 93.5 per cent in North Sydney.
- There remains a sizable gap of 7.1 percentage points in average attendance rates between schools in major metropolitan cities and those in remote / very remote areas, though this gap has somewhat narrowed since 2015.
- The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates has decreased from 7.1 percentage points in 2011 to 6.4 percentage points in 2017.
- The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates in primary years was 4.1 percentage points. In the secondary years, this gap was more than double at 10.1 percentage points.
- Aboriginal students' attendance rate at remote / very remote schools increased 4.3 percentage points since 2006.

Attendance rates by student level of education

Attendance rates for primary students have been consistently higher than for secondary students. In the last eleven years, the gap between primary students' and secondary students' attendance rates was on average 4.5 percentage points. Figure 1 and Table 1 present attendance rates for all students in NSW government schools by level of education.

Between 2015 and 2017 the attendance rates for primary and secondary students remained constant at 93.9 per cent and 89.5 per cent respectively, when the data is presented with one decimal place. However, both primary and secondary attendance rates fell slightly (0.07 to 0.05 percentage points) between 2016 and 2017. This does not show in Table 1 due to rounding, but accounts for the fall in overall students' attendance by 0.1 percentage point.

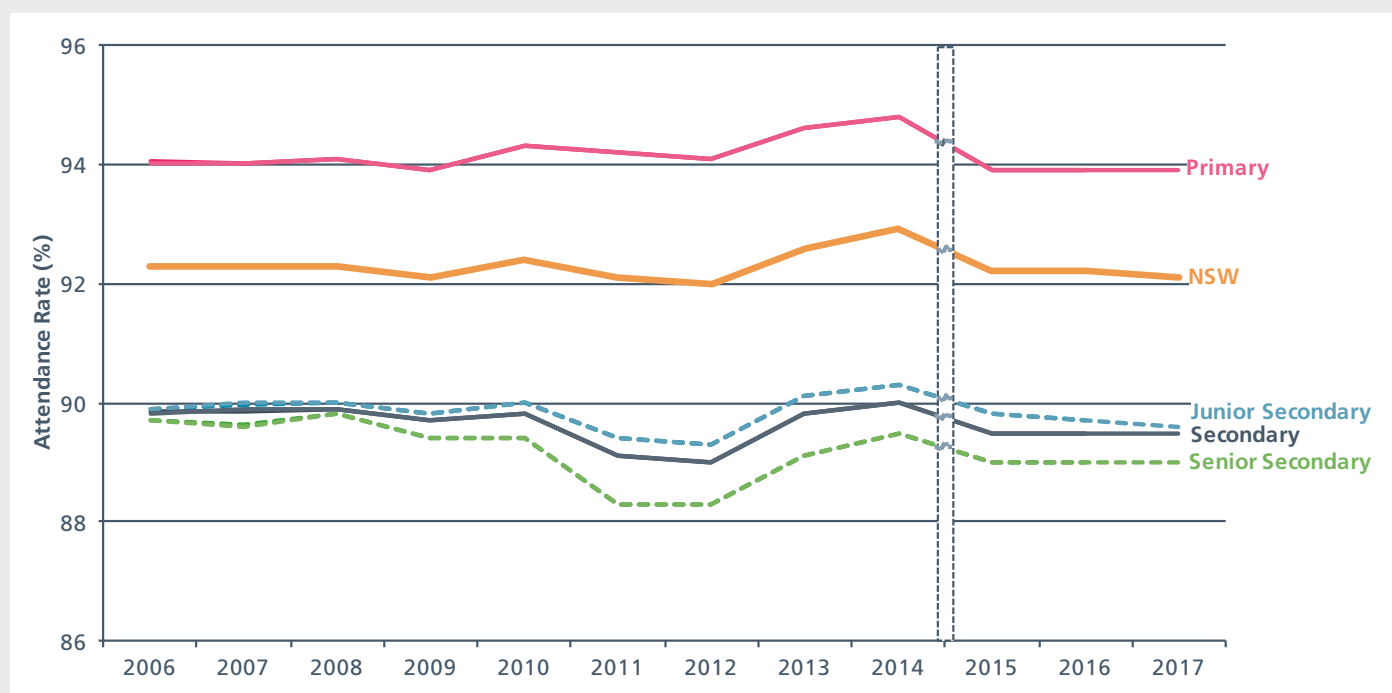
In 2017 secondary students' attendance rate was 0.3 percentage points below the level recorded in 2006.

However, in 2011 and 2012 the attendance rate for this group of students declined to 89.1 per cent and 89.0 per cent respectively, the lowest levels in over ten years. 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 students are likely to have low attendance rates.

Junior secondary students' attendance rate decreased between 2015 and 2017. In 2017 the attendance rate for these students was 89.6 per cent, roughly the same rate as in 2016. Nevertheless, junior secondary students' attendance rate remained above senior secondary students' attendance rate, and in 2017 the gap was 0.6 percentage points. The attendance rate for senior secondary students was at the same level between 2015 and 2017 (89.0 per cent).

Figure 1

Students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools



Note: The chart includes a bar to denote a break in series between 2014 and 2015, as a result of the change to the recording of family holidays that came into effect in January 2015.

Table 1

Students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools

School Level	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Primary	94.0	94.0	94.1	93.9	94.3	94.2	94.1	94.6	94.8	93.9	93.9	93.9
Secondary	89.8	89.9	89.9	89.7	89.8	89.1	89.0	89.8	90.0	89.5	89.5	89.5
Junior Secondary	89.9	90.0	90.0	89.8	90.0	89.4	89.3	90.1	90.3	89.8	89.7	89.6
Senior Secondary	89.7	89.6	89.8	89.4	89.4	88.3	88.3	89.1	89.5	89.0	89.0	89.0
NSW	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.1	92.4	92.1	92.0	92.6	92.9	92.2	92.2	92.1

Attendance rates by remoteness

In NSW, schools in major cities recorded the highest average attendance rate over the last ten years, followed by regional schools and lastly by remote / very remote schools.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show attendance rates by remoteness. In 2017 the attendance rate at schools in major cities was 92.7 per cent, marginally lower than in 2016.

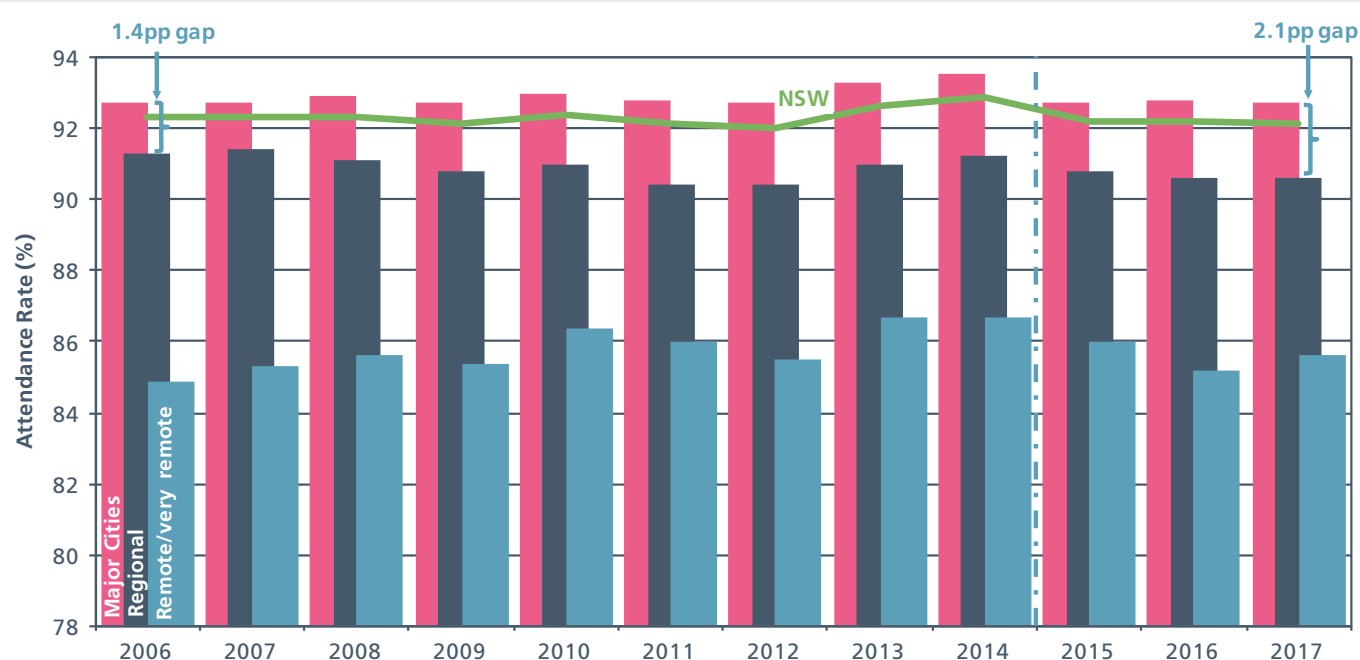
In contrast, the average attendance rate at regional schools remained stable in 2017, at 90.6 per cent. This resulted in a slightly smaller gap in attendance rates between schools in major cities and in regional areas at 2.1 percentage points (2.2 percentage points in 2016).

Attendance at schools in remote / very remote NSW increased by 0.4 percentage points, from 85.2 per cent in 2016 to 85.6 per cent in 2017. However, this followed a drop in attendance rates from 2015 to 2016. It is important to note that only 0.5 per cent of students are enrolled at remote / very remote schools, which contributes to greater variability in attendance rates.

Between 2016 and 2017, the gap in attendance rates between remote / very remote and major cities schools decreased from 7.6 percentage points to 7.1 percentage points, lower than the gap observed in 2006 (7.8 percentage points).

Figure 2

Students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools



Note: The chart includes a line to denote a break in series between 2014 and 2015, as a result of the change to the recording of family holidays that came into effect in January 2015.

Table 2

Students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools

Remoteness	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Major Cities	92.7	92.7	92.9	92.7	93.0	92.8	92.7	93.3	93.5	92.7	92.8	92.7
Regional	91.3	91.4	91.1	90.8	91.0	90.4	90.4	91.0	91.2	90.8	90.6	90.6
Remote/Very Remote	84.9	85.3	85.6	85.4	86.4	86.0	85.5	86.7	86.7	86.0	85.2	85.6
NSW	92.3	92.3	92.3	92.1	92.4	92.1	92.0	92.6	92.9	92.2	92.2	92.1

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, 7.4 per cent per cent of all students in NSW government schools identified as Aboriginal in 2016 and 2017.

Table 3 shows that the average attendance rate for Aboriginal students was 86.2 per cent in 2017, 0.2 percentage points higher than in 2016, while the attendance rate for non-Aboriginal students marginally decreased in the last year.

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates narrowed between 2016 and 2017, from 6.7 percentage points to 6.4 percentage points.

Table 4 shows that the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates in primary years was 4.1 percentage points in the last two years. In the secondary years, this gap was more than double, although it decreased from 10.5 percentage points in 2016 to 10.1 percentage points in 2017.

Table 3

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2015-17: NSW government schools

Remoteness level	Aboriginal students			non-Aboriginal students			All students		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Major Cities	87.1	87.1	87.1	93.0	93.1	93.0	92.7	92.8	92.7
Regional	85.5	85.5	85.7	91.7	91.4	91.5	90.8	90.6	90.6
Remote/Very Remote	81.2	80.5	81.1	91.3	90.5	90.7	86.0	85.2	85.6
NSW	86.1	86.0	86.2	92.7	92.7	92.6	92.2	92.2	92.1

Table 4

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2015-17: NSW government schools

School level	Aboriginal students			non-Aboriginal students			All students		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Primary	90.3	90.1	90.1	94.2	94.2	94.2	93.9	93.9	93.9
Secondary	79.7	79.8	80.1	90.3	90.3	90.2	89.5	89.5	89.5
<i>Junior Secondary</i>	80.2	80.4	80.6	90.6	90.5	90.5	89.8	89.7	89.6
<i>Senior Secondary</i>	78.5	78.1	78.6	89.6	89.7	89.7	89.0	89.0	89.0

Aboriginal students' attendance rates

Figure 3 illustrates the attendance rates for Aboriginal students by remoteness from 2006 to 2017. 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.

Since 2015, the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in major cities has remained constant at 87.1 per cent, close to the attendance rate observed from 2008 to 2010 and 0.3 percentage points higher than the 2006 rate.

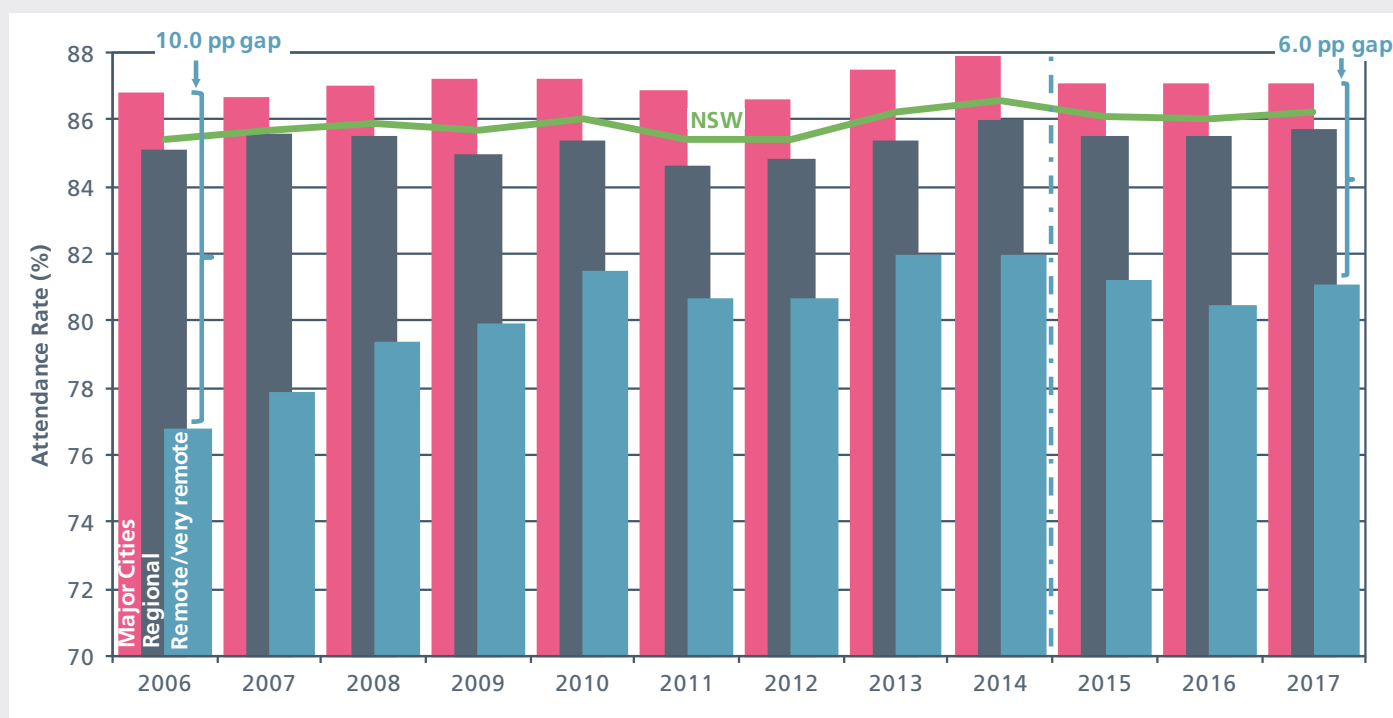
In 2017 more than 50 per cent of all Aboriginal students in NSW government schools were enrolled at regional schools. Table 3 shows the Aboriginal attendance rate at these schools was 85.7 per cent in 2017, a 0.2 percentage points increase from 2016.

At remote / very remote schools the Aboriginal students' attendance rate was 81.1 per cent in 2017, a 0.6 percentage points increase from 2016 and similar to the attendance rate in 2015. This represents a 4.3 percentage points increase from the rate of 76.8 per cent in 2006.

The gap between Aboriginal attendance rates at remote / very remote and major cities schools narrowed between 2006 and 2017. In 2006 the difference was 10.0 percentage points and by 2017 the gap had narrowed to 6.0 percentage points, due to the increase in the Aboriginal students' attendance rate at remote / very remote schools.

Figure 3

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by remoteness, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools



Note: The chart includes a line to denote a break in series between 2014 and 2015, as a result of the change to the recording of family holidays that came into effect in January 2015.

Figure 4 and Table 5 show attendance rates for Aboriginal students by level of education. Aboriginal primary students' attendance rate remained stable at 90.1 per cent from 2016 to 2017, after two years of consecutive decrease (90.9 per cent and 90.3 per cent attendance rates in 2014 and 2015 respectively). In 2017 the attendance rate for Aboriginal secondary students, on the other hand, increased by 0.3 percentage points to 80.1 per cent.

However, secondary Aboriginal students' attendance rates remained ten percentage points lower than primary Aboriginal students' attendance rate. This gap has widened since 2006, when the difference between primary and secondary Aboriginal students' attendance rate was 8.5 percentage points. This was mainly due to the increase in the attendance rate for primary students, from 88.7 per cent in 2006 to 90.1 per cent in 2017.

In 2017, Aboriginal secondary students' attendance rate was only 0.1 percentage points lower than in 2006 (80.2 per cent).

Aboriginal senior secondary students' attendance rates increased from 78.1 per cent in 2016 to 78.6 per cent in 2017, recording the same level as in 2013. However, the attendance rate for this group of students has declined 3.7 percentage points since 2006, from 82.3 per cent, especially between 2008 and 2012. This is likely to be the result of raising the school leaving age.

Junior secondary students' attendance rate increased by 0.2 percentage points, from 80.4 per cent in 2016 to 80.6 per cent in 2017. The attendance rate for these students has increased by 0.8 percentage points since 2006.

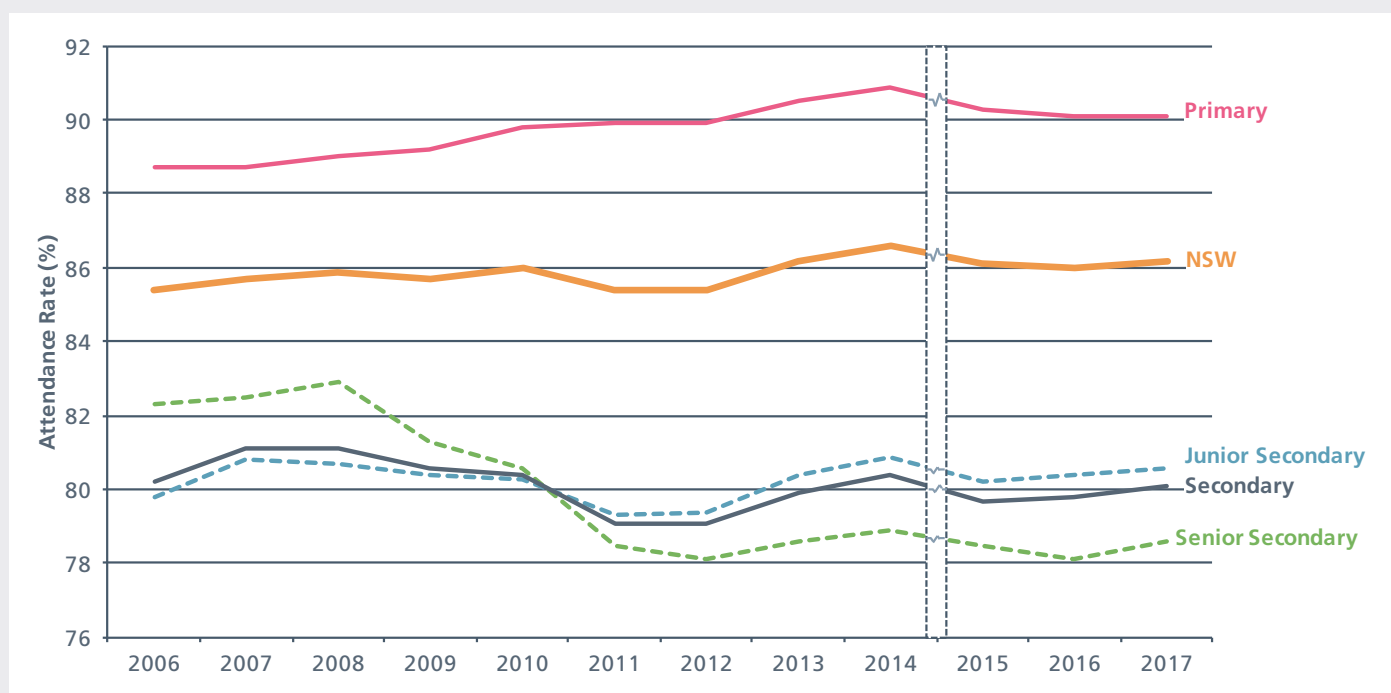
Table 5

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools

School Level	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Primary	88.7	88.7	89.0	89.2	89.8	89.9	89.9	90.5	90.9	90.3	90.1	90.1
Secondary	80.2	81.1	81.1	80.6	80.4	79.1	79.1	79.9	80.4	79.7	79.8	80.1
Junior Secondary	79.8	80.8	80.7	80.4	80.3	79.3	79.4	80.4	80.9	80.2	80.4	80.6
Senior Secondary	82.3	82.5	82.9	81.3	80.6	78.5	78.1	78.6	78.9	78.5	78.1	78.6
NSW	85.4	85.7	85.9	85.7	86.0	85.4	85.4	86.2	86.6	86.1	86.0	86.2

Figure 4

Aboriginal students' attendance rates by education level, Semester 1, 2006-17: NSW government schools



Note: The chart includes a bar to denote a break in series between 2014 and 2015, as a result of the change to the recording of family holidays that came into effect in January 2015.

Attendance rates by scholastic year and gender

Figure 5 shows the attendance rates by scholastic year and gender in 2017 for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The horizontal axis shows the scholastic year from Kindergarten to Year 12.

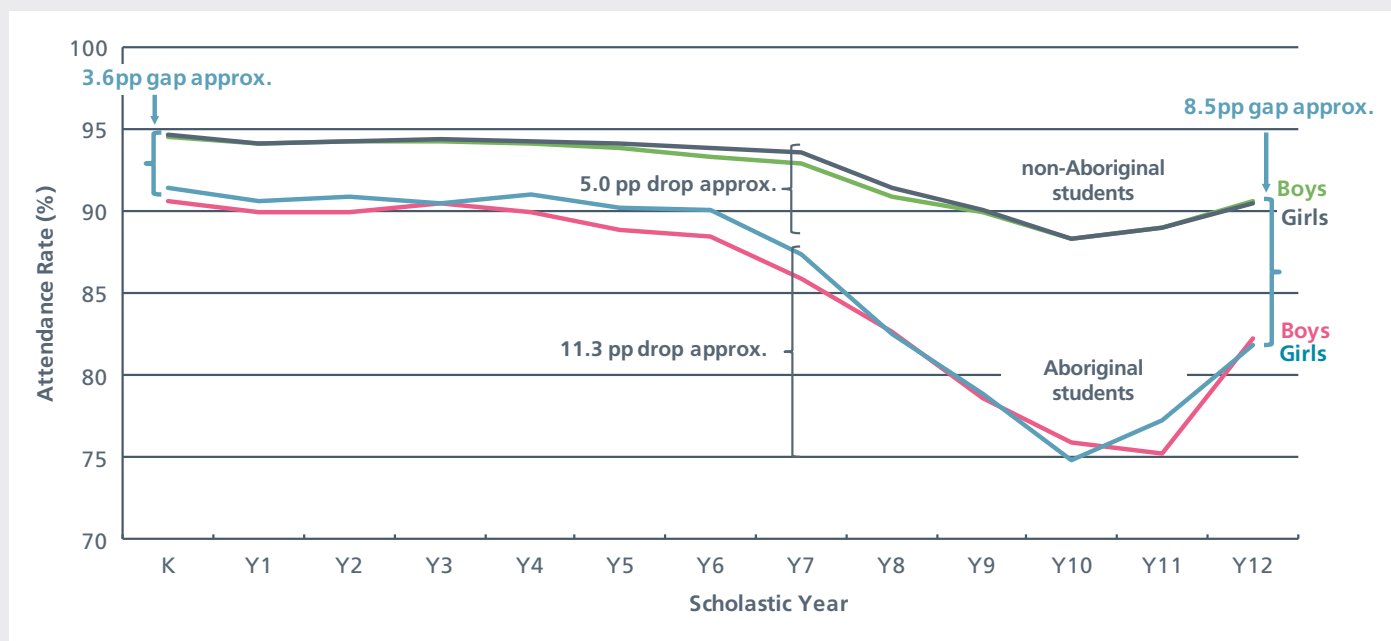
Non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates in primary years were very similar, with Year 6 students' attendance rate 1.0 percentage point lower than Kindergarten students. The attendance rate for students in Year 7 was 93.3 per cent, only slightly lower than for students in the last year of primary school (93.6 per cent). During junior secondary years the difference in attendance rates between school years was more significant. Year 10 non-Aboriginal students' attendance rate was 88.3 per cent, 5.0 percentage points lower than Year 7 students, and the lowest attendance rate in all school years. Although

Year 11 and 12 students' attendance rates were higher than Year 10 students, the attendance rate for Year 12 students was still 4.1 percentage points lower than Kindergarten students and 2.8 percentage points lower than Year 7 students.

For non-Aboriginal students, the attendance rates for boys and girls were similar throughout all school years. From Kindergarten to Year 4 there was very little difference in attendance rates between genders. However, from Year 5 to Year 8 the boys' attendance rate was approximately 0.5 percentage points lower than the girls' attendance rate. In the later grades, Years 9 to 12, the attendance rates of boys and girls converged, with the boys' attendance rates being slightly higher than girls in Year 12.

Figure 5

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' attendance rates, by scholastic year and gender, Semester 1, 2017: NSW government schools



Aboriginal students' attendance rates overall followed a similar pattern to non-Aboriginal students in primary years. The attendance rates for Year 6 Aboriginal students was 1.7 percentage points lower than Kindergarten Aboriginal students. However, the difference between the attendance rate for students in their last year of primary school and students in their first year of secondary school was 2.6 percentage points, a much greater drop than for non-Aboriginal students (0.3 percentage points). In junior secondary years the difference in Aboriginal students' attendance rates was pronounced. Year 7 students' attendance rate was more than 11 percentage points higher than Year 10 students, more than double the difference for non-Aboriginal students. Year 12 Aboriginal students' attendance rate was 9.0 percentage points lower than Kindergarten students and 4.7 percentage points lower than Year 7 students.

In primary years, Aboriginal boys' attendance rates were consistently lower than girls' attendance rates in 2017, except in Year 3 where the rates were the same, 90.5 per cent. This pattern continued in Year 7. In Year 8 and 9 boys and girls attendance rates converged, with an average difference of only 0.1 percentage points. However, in Year 10 Aboriginal boys' attendance rate was 1.0 percentage point higher than girls. Year 12 Aboriginal girls and boys attendance rates were 82.3 per cent and 81.9 per cent respectively.

Distribution of attendance rates in non-selective schools by statistical area 4 grouping

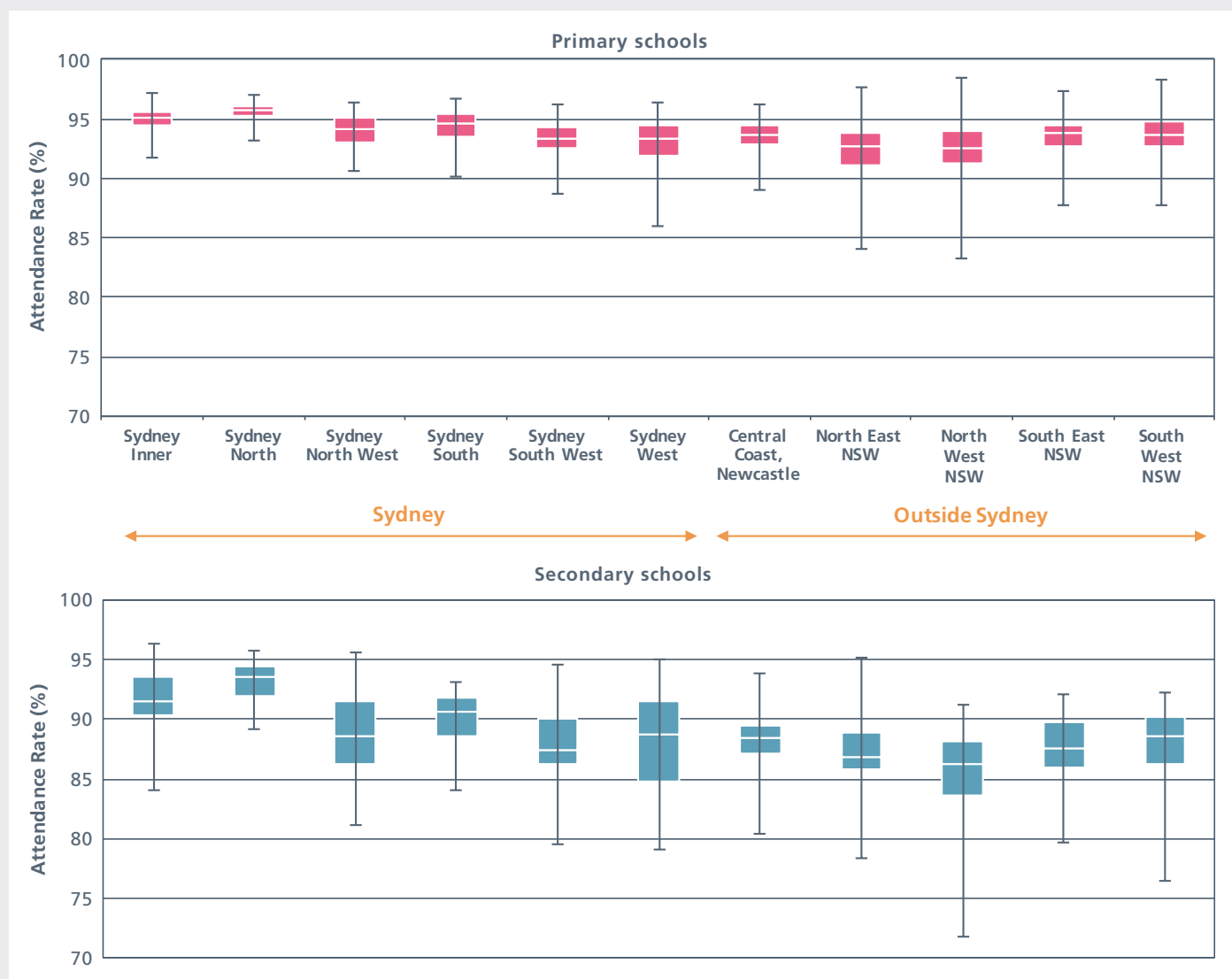
Presenting average attendance rates may mask the differences in attendance rates across different schools. In fact, attendance varies with the location of the school, the school size and various other factors.

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of attendance rates across non-selective NSW government schools by statistical area 4 grouping. The box-and-whisker graph is a convenient way of comparing different groups. The lower whisker (the grey line) represents the bottom 25 per cent of attendance rates, the box represents the middle 50 per cent and the upper whisker the top 25 per cent. The box length gives an indication of each group's variability and the line across the box shows the median value. Long whiskers, relative to the box length, shows that there is a large proportion of extreme values in the group.

For example, primary school attendance rates in Sydney Inner ranged between 91.7 per cent and 97.2 per cent (the minimum and maximum values shown by the lines), with 50 per cent of these schools recording attendance rates ranging from 94.4 per cent and 95.6 per cent (represented by the box). One quarter of Sydney Inner schools reported attendance rates for primary students between 95.6 per cent and 97.2 per cent (the upper whisker), while the other 25 per cent of schools had attendance rates varying from 91.7 per cent and 94.4 per cent (the lower whisker). The median attendance rate at Sydney Inner schools was 95.1 per cent (the white line dividing the box).

Figure 6

Distribution of attendance rates for non-selective schools by statistical area 4 grouping, Semester 1, 2017: NSW government schools



- Notes: – Extreme outliers were excluded from this analysis. They are defined as all schools whose attendance rate fell more than 3 times the interquartile range (or the size of the box) above the top of the box or below the bottom of the box.
- For this analysis, selective schools were excluded. These schools draw students from outside the local areas and tend to have high rates of students' attendance.
- Primary schools include primary components of Central/Community schools and secondary schools include secondary components of Central/Community schools.

Considering the position and size of the boxes, average attendance rates were generally high for primary schools, with most schools having attendance rates above 90 per cent. Schools in the Sydney area had primary students' attendance rates ranging from 85.9 per cent in Sydney West to 97.2 per cent in Sydney Inner, with over 75 per cent of schools in Sydney North recording attendance rates for primary students above 95 per cent. On the other hand, schools in Sydney West, with attendance rates between 85.9 per cent and 96.4 per cent, registered the largest variability in primary students' attendance rates in Sydney.

More than 75 per cent of schools located outside Sydney had attendance rates for primary students below 95 per cent. Schools in North West NSW, with rates between 83.3 per cent and 98.4 per cent, had the largest variability in attendance

rates for primary students (represented by the bigger box and the longer whiskers). This group includes some very small schools that, due to their size, can have extreme attendance rates in a calendar year.

For secondary schools, the average attendance rates across NSW varied more than for primary schools, as shown by the larger boxes and the longer whiskers, with rates ranging between 71.8 per cent in North West NSW and 96.4 in Sydney Inner. The variability of attendance rates within each area is also significant. Over 75 per cent of schools in Sydney North and Sydney Inner had secondary students' attendance rates above 90 percent. Within Sydney, schools in Sydney West recorded the largest variability of secondary students' attendance rates, varying between 79.1 per cent and 95.1 per cent.

The majority of schools outside Sydney had secondary attendance rates under 90 per cent, with 75 per cent of schools in North West NSW recording attendance rates of secondary students below 88.2 per cent.

Comparison of school attendance rate and mobility rate

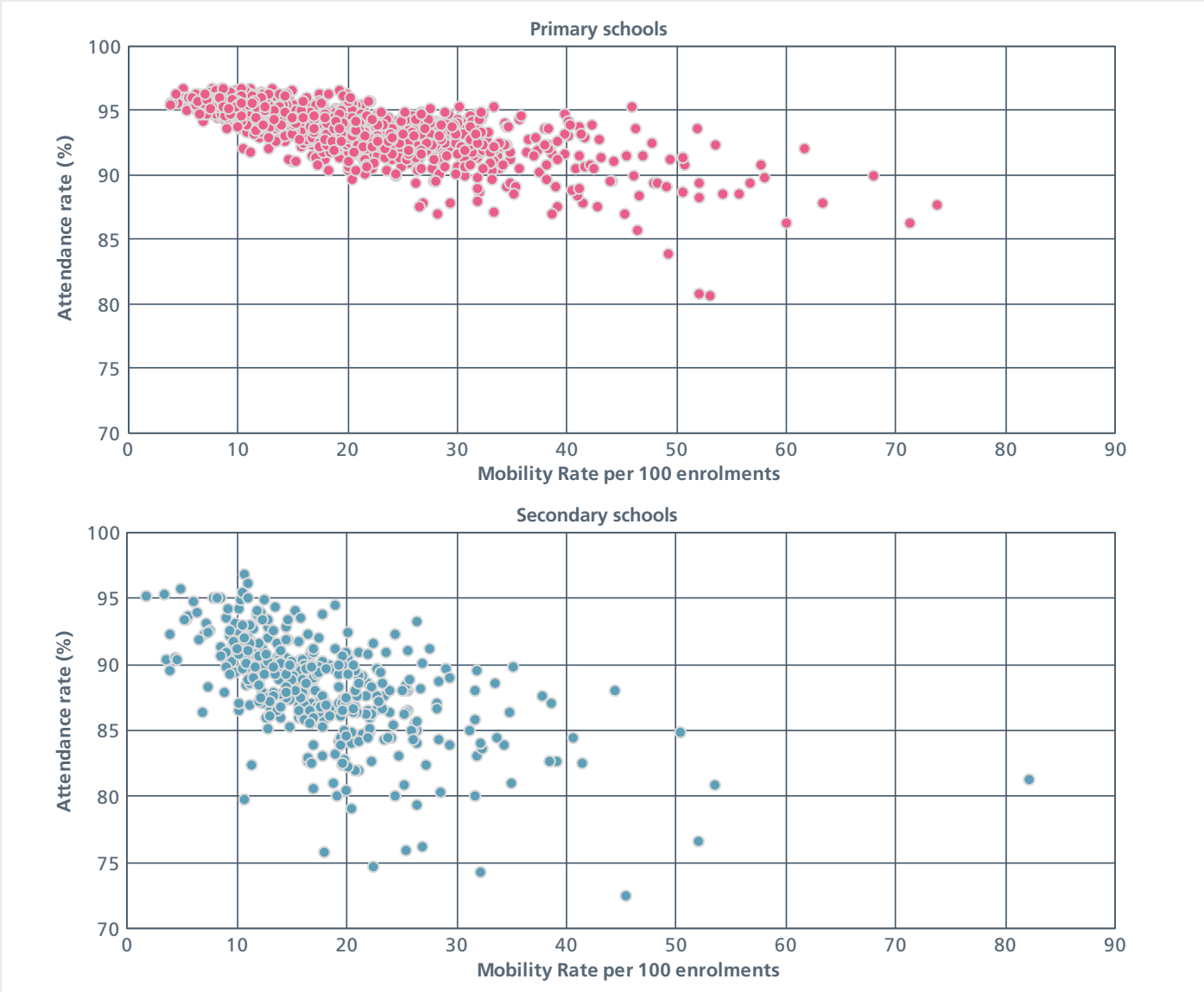
Research indicates a relationship between school mobility (annual student turnover in a school), school attendance rates and school disadvantage. Additionally, there is evidence that mobility impacts negatively on student engagement, attendance and behaviour. Schools with above average levels of student mobility have been reported as having lower attendance rates.

Figure 7 shows the relationship between the average school attendance rate in Semester 1, in the last three years and school mobility (annualised mobility rate per 100 enrolments, see “Notes” for more details of this measure).

The attendance rate and the mobility rate in primary schools have a strong correlation. Primary schools with higher mobility rates overall tend to have lower attendance rates. The majority of primary schools (86 per cent) with attendance rates above 95 per cent had an annual mobility rate under 15 student movements per 100 enrolments. On the other hand, more than half the primary schools with attendance rates below 95 per cent and all schools with attendance rates below 90 per cent registered mobility rates above 20 student movements per 100 enrolments.

For secondary schools, it is also evident that schools with higher levels of student mobility have lower attendance rates. All schools with attendance rates above 95 per cent had mobility rates under 15. The majority of secondary schools with attendance rates below 95 per cent (61 per cent) and below 90 per cent (76 per cent) observed mobility rates above 15 per 100 enrolments. 79 per cent of schools with attendance rates under 80 per cent had mobility rates above 20.

Figure 7
School mobility and attendance rates: NSW government schools



Notes: – For this analysis, selective schools and schools with fewer than 50 students were excluded.
– Primary students in Central/Community schools were included in the primary schools group and secondary students in Central/Community schools in the secondary schools group.

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 Special 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)).

In NSW government schools, attendance is calculated as:

$$\text{Attendance Rate} = \left(1 - \frac{\text{absences}}{\text{enrolled days}} \right) \times 100$$

Where:

- Absences equals 'all full day absences for the period in question'
- Enrolled days equals 'enrolments multiplied by days open'
- Enrolments equals 'all students enrolled at any time during the period'
- Days open equals 'any day that the school was open for teaching during the period'
- Period equals 'Semester 1 comprised of Term 1 and Term 2'

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

Source: Statistics Unit, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. Semester 1 data extracted from the corporate data cubes in October 2017.

National standards for student attendance data reporting

The standards were agreed to by education authorities in October 2012. NSW government schools do not yet comply fully with the national standards as partial day absences are not included in attendance rate calculations.

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.

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.

Mobility

The schools' mobility rate was calculated as the number of non-structural moves (structural moves include moves that are expected to occur e.g. when students move from primary to secondary schools) into and out of a school over a period of time divided by the average enrolment base for that school at the same period. To smooth the large volatility in this rate, particularly in smaller schools, the mobility rate was calculated using data over the last three years (from 2014 to 2016), and then annualised. For ease of interpretation, these rates were multiplied by 100.

Further information about the mobility of students in NSW government schools is available on the CESE website at: <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/does-changing-school-matter>

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.

National and international research substantiates a link between attendance and student achievement, although numerous interrelated factors influence attendance and achievement in complex ways (Report on Gov't Services 2016, Chapter 4, 4.13).

'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.

Enrolment and attendance are specified as performance indicators within the National Education Agreement and as Key Performance Measures in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia approved by the Education Council.

Reasons for absences

Students may be absent from school for a number of reasons, including sickness, suspension, truancy or a range of explained absences. 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.

Due to system limitations the analysis by absence reason is not yet available, therefore all these categories are included in this bulletin.