

NSW public school student retention rates by statistical areas: 2017 to 2021

Introduction

This factsheet provides an overview of student apparent retention rates (ARR) at NSW government schools.

The term 'apparent' is used because the measurement is based on the total number of students in each year level compared to the number in an earlier year, rather than by tracking the retention of individual students.

All apparent retention rates in this factsheet are for full-time public schools' students.

Care should be taken in the interpretation of apparent retention rates, which can exceed 100%, because the method of calculation does not take into account a range of factors such as migration, interstate movements of students, transfers to and from non-government schools, part-time schooling, students repeating a year of schooling, or students pursuing other education and training pathways.

For the first time in 2020, support students enrolled in NSW government mainstream schools were reported to the Australian Bureau of Statistics by their underlying grade of enrolment. This is more consistent with national counting rules. Prior to 2020, these students were reported as "ungraded". Only students in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) are now reported as "ungraded".

This results in a rolling break in time-series for apparent retention rates because enrolments increased in 2020 due to the revised counting rule. For example, the Year 7 to 12 ARR for 2021 was calculated using the Year 7 2016 cohort count (excluding all ungraded students), and Year 12 2021 cohort count (including ungraded students in mainstream schools). 2025 will be the first year when ARR for Year 7 to 12 uses the same counting rules for both Year 7 and Year 12 data.

The tables in this factsheet present 2020 retention rates with both previous and revised counting rules and 2021 retention rates with revised counting rules. 2021 rates are not directly comparable with previous years.

Year 7 to 10

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate in 2021 was 103.1%, 3 percentage points lower than in 2020.
- Apparent retention rates in 2021 were 100% or more in all Sydney SA4 groups. Two areas outside of Sydney also had an ARR above 100%, South East NSW (102.8%), and Central Coast, Newcastle (100.7%) (refer to explanatory notes).
- The SA4 group with the highest ARR was Sydney-South West (109.6%), with the second highest being in Sydney-South (108.6%).

Table 1 – Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2017 to 2021

SA4 Groups	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)
Sydney-North	107.3	105.9	105.9	105.3	106.8	102.1
Sydney-Inner	114.0	110.6	111.5	106.9	109.0	106.9
Sydney-South	108.4	106.8	107.6	106.9	109.8	108.6
Sydney-South West	108.8	108.6	109.2	108.0	114.4	109.6
Sydney-West	106.0	104.7	104.5	104.1	109.3	106.5
Sydney-North West	103.5	101.6	102.6	102.6	105.8	102.6
North East NSW	102.0	104.2	100.4	99.0	102.7	98.9
North West NSW	95.8	96.6	94.5	96.9	102.6	99.4
South West NSW	97.3	95.9	95.1	93.1	97.0	94.2
South East NSW	103.5	102.4	100.2	99.1	105.1	102.8
Central Coast, Newcastle	99.9	98.3	100.0	98.0	101.9	100.7
NSW	104.0	103.2	102.8	101.9	106.1	103.1

Year 10 to 12

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2021 was 71.5%, 1.8 percentage points lower than in 2020.
- Only two areas in Sydney had an ARR under 80% in 2021, Sydney-South West, which increased from 77.7% in 2020 to 78.3% in 2021, and Sydney-West, which decreased from 80.1% in 2020 to 79.9% in 2021.
- Sydney-North (89.6%) had the highest ARR in NSW, with Sydney-Inner (83.8%) having the second highest.
- The highest ARR outside of Sydney was South East NSW (61.5%). Central Coast, Newcastle (60.3%) was the only other area outside of Sydney with an ARR above 60%.

Table 2 – Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2017 to 2021

SA4 Groups	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)
Sydney-North	92.1	89.3	89.6	89.5	90.5	89.6
Sydney-Inner	84.0	83.7	84.5	83.9	85.4	83.8
Sydney-South	81.7	78.3	79.7	80.1	81.7	80.7
Sydney-South West	76.7	76.5	74.8	75.0	77.7	78.3
Sydney-West	78.9	76.9	77.7	78.3	80.1	79.9
Sydney-North West	81.8	78.6	79.4	80.8	82.5	80.1
North East NSW	63.8	62.6	58.7	59.0	60.7	57.1
North West NSW	56.5	55.6	54.7	53.3	55.8	54.5
South West NSW	62.8	57.8	58.3	57.5	59.8	56.9
South East NSW	63.9	63.4	59.5	62.4	65.5	61.5
Central Coast, Newcastle	63.1	62.4	61.4	62.8	64.8	60.3
NSW	73.0	71.3	70.6	71.3	73.3	71.5

Year 7 to 12

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2021 was 73.5%, a decrease of 2.1 percentage points from 75.6% in 2020.
- ARR for all SA4 groups decreased compared to 2020, except for Sydney-South West, where the rate increased by 1.1 percentage points, from 84.4% in 2020 to 85.5% in 2021.
- Sydney-North (94.9%) was the SA4 group with the highest ARR in NSW in 2021.
- Similar to the Year 7 to 10 and Year 10 to 12 ARRs, the highest ARR outside of Sydney was South East NSW, with an ARR of 61.6%, followed by Central Coast, Newcastle (60.4%).

Table 3 – Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2017 to 2021

SA4 groups	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)
Sydney-North	100.3	97.6	96.1	94.7	95.8	94.9
Sydney-Inner	98.1	96.8	96.4	92.8	94.4	93.5
Sydney-South	89.0	86.7	86.4	85.6	87.2	86.8
Sydney-South West	82.5	82.4	81.4	81.5	84.4	85.5
Sydney-West	82.3	81.4	82.4	82.0	83.8	83.5
Sydney-North West	85.0	83.3	82.1	82.2	83.9	82.1
North East NSW	64.8	63.3	59.9	61.5	63.2	57.3
North West NSW	54.6	53.9	52.4	51.5	53.9	51.4
South West NSW	60.4	55.5	56.7	55.1	57.3	54.1
South East NSW	64.5	65.5	61.6	63.9	67.1	61.6
Central Coast, Newcastle	62.2	61.4	61.3	61.8	63.7	60.4
NSW	75.6	74.4	73.4	73.6	75.6	73.5

Source: Department of Education (DoE), Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), Mid-year census, 2017 to 2021.

Explanatory notes

1. The census of students is conducted on the first Friday of August each year.
2. Reporting on apparent retention rates (ARRs) based on small numbers of students can lead to unreliable ARR estimates. The areas reported in the above tables combine ABS SA4 areas to ensure the underlying number of students is sufficiently large to generate reliable estimates.
3. ARRs can exceed 100 per cent due to factors including student migration from interstate and overseas and between school sectors.
4. Only full-time students are counted in the calculation of full-time apparent retention.
5. Prior to 2020, students in mainstream support classes were reported as “ungraded” and therefore were not counted in the calculation of ARRs.
6. Sydney-Inner includes enrolments from Sydney Distance Education High School.
7. Norfolk Island Central School is not included in this factsheet, but since 2016 the school’s enrolments have been included in the ABS Schools Australia publication. This may lead to a slight difference in reported figures from 2016.
8. Data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). ASGS Statistical Area 4s (SA4) have been combined into 11 groups for reporting of department data.

SA4 group	SA4 name
Sydney-North	Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby, Sydney - Northern Beaches, Sydney - Ryde
Sydney-Inner	Sydney - City and Inner South, Sydney - Eastern Suburbs, Sydney - Inner West
Sydney-South	Sydney - Inner South West, Sydney - Sutherland
Sydney-South West	Sydney - Outer South West, Sydney - South West
Sydney-West	Sydney - Blacktown, Sydney - Parramatta
Sydney-North West	Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury, Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains
North East NSW	Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Mid North Coast, Richmond - Tweed
North West NSW	Far West and Orana, Hunter Valley exc Newcastle, New England and North West
South West NSW	Central West, Murray, Riverina
South East NSW	Capital Region, Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven
Central Coast, Newcastle	Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie