



PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

6 November 2025

Attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland

Report 5: 2025–26

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The Honourable P Weir MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

6 November 2025

This report is prepared under Part 3 Division 3 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*.



Rachel Vagg
Auditor-General



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Acknowledgement

The Queensland Audit Office acknowledges the Traditional and Cultural Custodians of the lands, waters, and seas of Queensland. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We use the term 'First Nations peoples' in this report. We respect First Nations peoples choices to describe their cultural identity using other terms, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particular peoples, or by using traditional place names.



Report summary

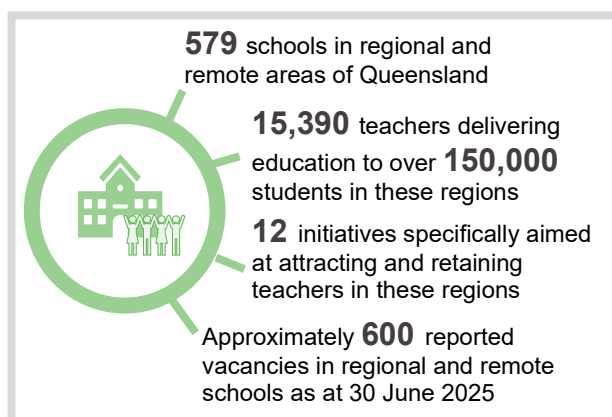
This report examines whether the Department of Education's strategies are effective in attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland.



What is important to know about this audit?

- Teacher attraction and retention is a complex issue which is underpinned by a national and global teacher shortage.
- Attracting teachers to regional and remote areas has always been a challenge due to factors such as isolation and access to services. This is true across Australia, but it is more pronounced in Queensland because its population is so geographically dispersed.
- The Department of Education (the department) is responsible for setting its overall strategy to attract and retain teachers in its schools.
- Queensland's 1,266 state schools are centrally funded, but they operate with a high degree of autonomy in setting their overall staffing needs. This is important to ensure each school meets the needs of the local community. But it also creates challenges for the department's workforce modelling, as each school has different needs and workforce profiles.

Figure 1: 2025 key facts



Note: Teacher numbers are based on quarter 1, 2025 data from Queensland Government's Minimum Obligatory Human Resource Information (MOHRI). Student numbers are based on the department's enrolment count on the 8th day of school in 2025. Source: Queensland Audit Office, using information from the Department of Education.



What did we find?

The department is focused on attracting and retaining teachers in its regional and remote schools, but it needs to implement more comprehensive and strategic workforce planning.

- The department has a teacher workforce strategy (the strategy) that includes a variety of initiatives to attract and retain teachers in regional and remote Queensland. These initiatives have attracted teachers to the regions. However, the department does not know whether its initiatives are as effective as they could be due to limited monitoring and evaluation activity to date.
- The department has not effectively designed its strategy. It lacks the underlying data, analysis, and planning to inform the design of its strategy and some of the related initiatives. Its strategy and initiatives also lack measurable goals and targets.
- It does not monitor its strategy or initiatives and therefore is unable to assess the effectiveness of its actions. There is no central team responsible for monitoring workforce planning activities and delivery of the strategy.
- It also needs to refresh its approach to prioritising which schools can access initiatives.

The department needs to better assess its current and future needs for teachers.

- The department determines its teacher needs annually through the *Queensland State Schools Resourcing Framework* (school resourcing model). This provides schools with funding, and allocates teacher and other staffing numbers based on student enrolments at the start of each school year.
- The school resourcing model lets principals reshape their staffing profile to meet the needs of their school community. Principals can employ additional teachers, teacher aides, management, and other support staff outside of their allocation. This has led to many different staffing profiles across the schooling system.

- This flexibility means the school resourcing model is not fit-for-purpose as a workforce planning tool. While it provides a short-term projection of teacher needs, this projection does not accurately reflect the actual needs of schools across the state.
- The department has not set parameters for principals to resource within when determining their staffing profile. Without this, the department is limited in its ability to assess overall equity of teacher numbers across the education system. This limits how effectively it can make resourcing decisions and assist schools that are struggling to attract and retain teachers, such as those in regional and remote Queensland.
- Beyond the school resourcing model, the department does not undertake sufficient analysis and modelling of short- or longer-term teacher needs. It also does not identify teacher skill needs across the system, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Without this information, it is difficult for the department to set plans and strategies beyond the short term.

A lack of reliable statewide vacancy data limits how well central functions can help regional and remote schools with teacher recruitment.

- The department collects vacancy data from regional and remote schools. However, not all schools are reporting all vacancies due to ongoing teacher shortages, or reallocating teacher roles to leadership and other support roles. Its centralised recruitment function does not include all schools across Queensland, with most schools in South East Queensland undertaking their own recruitment.
- This limits the department's ability to help regional and remote schools with recruitment activities, as it is not able to prioritise teacher recruitment to the schools of greatest need across the state. This lack of visibility also impacts the effectiveness of its key teacher mobility program, the transfer system, which is designed to help regional and remote schools.

Better guidance and monitoring of early career teachers in regional and remote areas is needed.

- Regional and remote schools attract a higher proportion of new and early career teachers. This includes teachers who are still completing their studies but have begun teaching duties.
- Individual schools are central to inducting teachers in regional and remote areas; however, the schools we visited had varied approaches to onboarding staff. Some schools had structured onboarding and wellbeing programs for new teachers, and others did not.
- The department does not set expectations or provide guidance to schools to support early career teachers' transition, experience, and development. Greater focus on this is important to increase their chances of retaining these teachers within the system.

The department has started work to improve its workforce planning.

- The department has identified gaps in its practices relating to workforce attraction and retention and has started projects to address these.
- It is in the late stages of a school resourcing review, part of which aims to redesign its resourcing model to support schools while ensuring greater equity across the education system. The department has also committed to developing a new teaching workforce strategy, which it plans to release in early 2026, and has started a project to review the effectiveness of some of its existing initiatives.



What does the department need to do?

We made 7 recommendations to the department. These focused on the following themes:

- building stronger central intelligence to inform decisions about its workforce
- implementing a longer-term strategic workforce plan
- implementing better central governance
- improving its central approaches to teacher recruitment and mobility.

1. Audit conclusions

The Department of Education (the department) is working to address its teacher vacancies. It has implemented a teacher workforce strategy and various initiatives to meet existing challenges in the outer regions and throughout Queensland.

Despite this, its strategy and initiatives are not effectively designed or implemented. Many of its approaches lack sufficient planning and are not informed by a detailed understanding of current and future workforce challenges. This has resulted in most of its efforts going towards meeting short-term teacher shortages, with little longer-term planning.

In addition, the strategy and its initiatives have not been effectively monitored. This limits the department's ability to measure the ongoing effectiveness of its programs to address regional teacher shortages.

The department has acknowledged the need to enhance its approach to workforce planning to better address the challenges of teacher attraction and retention. As a result, it has been progressing several workforce-related projects. This includes a school resourcing review, which considers the design of the future workforce resourcing model for schools.

However, it still needs to enhance its understanding of current and future teacher needs. This will enable it to implement a more strategic and longer-term approach to teacher attraction and retention challenges in regional and remote Queensland.



2. Recommendations

We have directed the recommendations in the report to the Department of Education.

Planning for the teacher workforce	Entity responses
We recommend that the Department of Education: - enhances its understanding of current and future workforce needs and challenges. This should include - determining estimated teacher needs across the state - developing acceptable workforce ratios for schools to support system-wide decision-making - implementing more comprehensive workforce analysis to identify skill requirements, risks, needs, and challenges specific to workforce supply and demand. This analysis should span both short- and long-term factors.	Agree
Strategies to attract and retain teachers	
We recommend that the Department of Education: - in developing its new workforce strategy - identifies and includes all relevant actions and initiatives that address workforce risks and gaps - sets clear and measurable objectives for its strategy, and for initiatives within its strategy - develops an implementation action plan that outlines specific time frames, and roles and responsibilities - ensures initiatives within the strategy are supported by appropriate planning activities - implements stronger monitoring of its workforce strategy and initiatives. This should include - defining roles and responsibilities for day-to-day monitoring of workforce planning activities - reviewing governance arrangements to more clearly articulate responsibilities for overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the new workforce strategy - identifying and collecting relevant data to enable ongoing monitoring of its strategy and initiatives - developing a monitoring and evaluation plan over initiatives within its strategy.	Agree Agree

Central support for regional and remote schools	Entity responses
We recommend that the Department of Education: 4. improves its approaches to managing teacher recruitment and mobility, through • collecting data on statewide vacancies to inform decision-making and prioritisation of teacher recruitment, and the effective transfer of teachers across the state • implementing central monitoring of vacancy and mobility requests • documenting and communicating roles and responsibilities for recruitment and mobility for schools, regional teams, and central teams 5. clarifies and communicates the expectations for how regional offices and teams should help schools with attraction and retention matters 6. provides expectations and guidance to its schools about the use of Permission to Teach teachers and support for all teachers in the early phases of their careers 7. improves its approach to determining which schools can access workforce initiatives. It should • establish criteria for school eligibility • periodically review criteria • document eligibility decisions.	Agree Agree Agree Agree

Reference to comments

In accordance with s. 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, we provided a copy of this report to the department. In reaching our conclusions, we considered its views and represented them to the extent we deemed relevant and warranted. Any formal responses from the department are at [Appendix A](#).

3. Queensland's teacher workforce

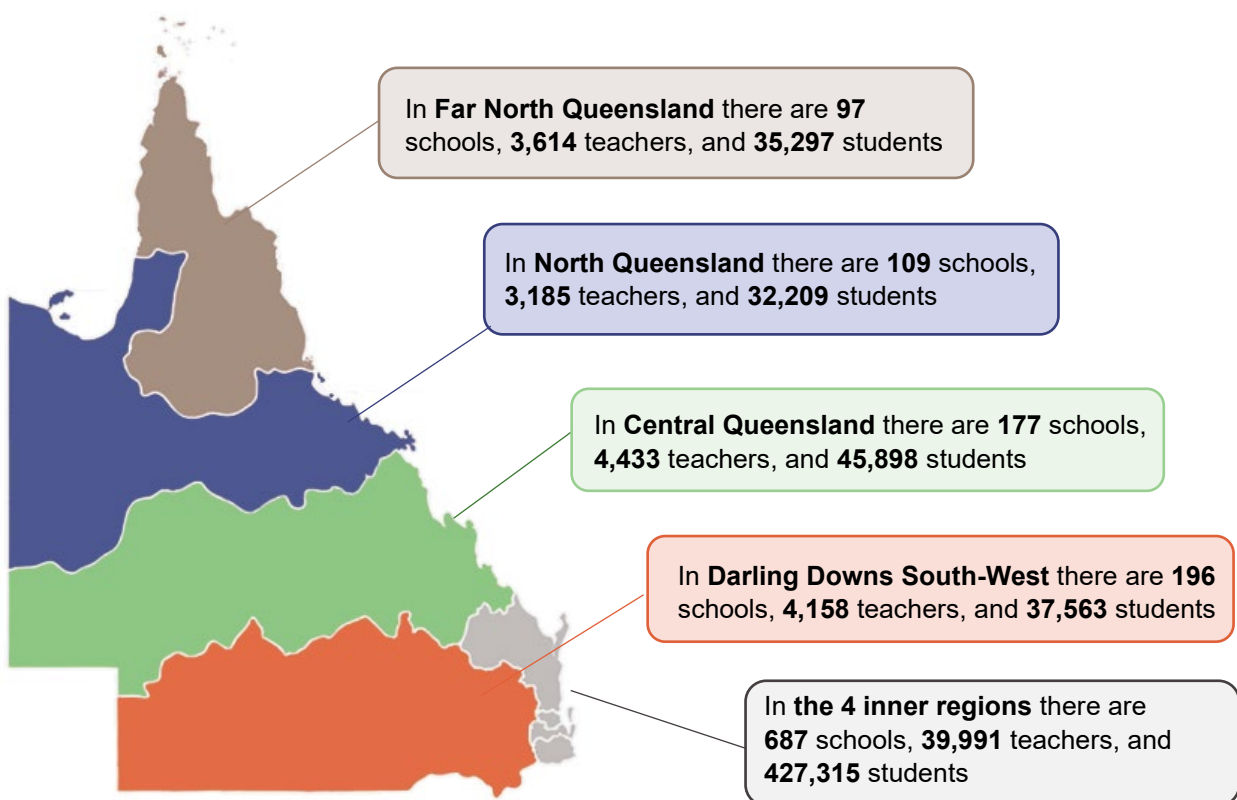
The Department of Education (the department) employs state school teachers across Queensland to provide primary, secondary, and special education. To effectively allocate its workforce, the department must understand both the demand for education across the state and the makeup of its current staff. This is a complex task, which must factor in aspects such as the diversity of student and community needs. Getting this right helps ensure there are enough teachers in the right places to meet student demand.

The Queensland state school system

The Queensland state school system is decentralised, meaning principals have autonomy to run their schools. The department sets the strategic direction and policies for schools, and it plays an important role in overseeing the schooling system. It is also responsible for ensuring all children and young people can access high-quality education, regardless of geographical location.

There are 1,266 state schools in Queensland. As at the end of Term 1 2025, these schools employed 55,381 teachers and delivered education to over 578,000 students. The department splits the state into 8 regions, comprised of 4 inner regions and 4 outer regions. Forty-six per cent of schools, 26 per cent of students, and 28 per cent of teachers are in the 4 outer regions. We refer to the schools in these outer regions as regional and remote schools. Figure 3A shows Queensland divided into the department's 4 outer regions.

Figure 3A
Queensland's Department of Education 4 outer regions in 2025



Note: Teacher numbers are based on Term 1 MOHRI headcount data and student numbers are based on enrolments on the 8th day of school in Term 1, 2025.

Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.

Teacher attraction and retention

Roles and responsibilities across the Queensland state system

Many parts of the department are involved in the attraction and retention of teachers. Roles and responsibilities include:

- **Schools:** Principals are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools. Specific to attraction and retention, this includes setting their workforce profiles in line with their available resources, identifying recruitment needs and undertaking recruitment activities, and looking after the development and wellbeing of their local workforce.
- **Regional department teams:** Regional teams are located in each of the 8 regions across Queensland. They monitor school performance and provide support to schools in their regions. This includes assisting in workforce planning for their regions, approving requests for new hires, helping to source teachers for vacancies shorter than one term, and assisting with teacher transfers between schools. They also help coordinate and deliver some professional development activities.
- **Central department teams:** Central teams have whole-of-system responsibilities. They provide funding and deliver a range of services to schools. These services include areas such as delivery of initiatives and programs, and central human resources support (including recruitment). Central teams also have a whole-of-system oversight role.

Inherent challenges in attracting and retaining teachers

A global teacher shortage is affecting all jurisdictions

The teacher shortage is not specific to Queensland. It is a global issue which affects educational outcomes, increases workload, and has a negative effect on teacher wellbeing. As it continues, it may deter potential teachers from entering the workforce.

The Australian Government introduced its *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* in 2022 to bring the states and territories together to address workforce challenges. Queensland, along with the other states and territories, committed to contributing to and supporting actions in this plan. The impact of teacher supply shortages is heightened by increasing demand for teachers over recent decades. This has been driven by factors such as:

- population growth
- the introduction of the *Inclusive education policy* in 2021, which underpins the department's response to meeting the unique needs of all children, for example, students with disability and First Nations students
- changing expectations for the roles of teachers in managing student behaviour.

It is challenging to find teachers for regional and remote locations

It is difficult to attract and retain a workforce to service a dispersed state like Queensland, particularly during a teacher shortage. Each school is unique and aims to serve the diverse needs of its community. However, it is challenging to ensure teachers with the right skills, capabilities, and experience are delivering education to students in all 8 regions.

While there are many benefits to living and working in regional and remote areas, such as promotion opportunities in smaller towns, there are also inherent challenges. These include isolation, less access to housing and medical facilities, and higher costs of living. Many of these challenges relate to broader economic and social issues which are outside of the department's control.

As a condition of permanent employment, teachers may be required to work at any Queensland state school. Previously, the department would rely on this policy to enforce mobility to the outer regions. In the current environment, it is more difficult for the department to apply these powers.

Challenges in attracting frontline staff to regional and remote locations is also not specific to the teaching profession. Other industries, like policing and healthcare, face similar challenges in ensuring there is a consistent and capable workforce to serve all communities.

Planning to meet workforce challenges

To meet current and future needs, the department needs to effectively plan its workforce to ensure it has the right number of teachers, with the right skills, in the right locations. It also needs to plan for resources such as teacher aides, administration staff, school leadership, and other school staff. Getting the right mix of resources and skills in schools should help manage teacher workload pressures.

DEFINITION

Strategic workforce planning is proactive planning aimed at ensuring the workforce meets the organisation's needs now, and into the future. It involves identifying gaps and developing plans to ensure the right people with the right skills are in the right places.

There are national and state workforce planning frameworks that detail the cycle that entities should align their planning to. Strong workforce planning should include the steps outlined in Figure 3B.

Figure 3B
The cycle of strategic workforce planning

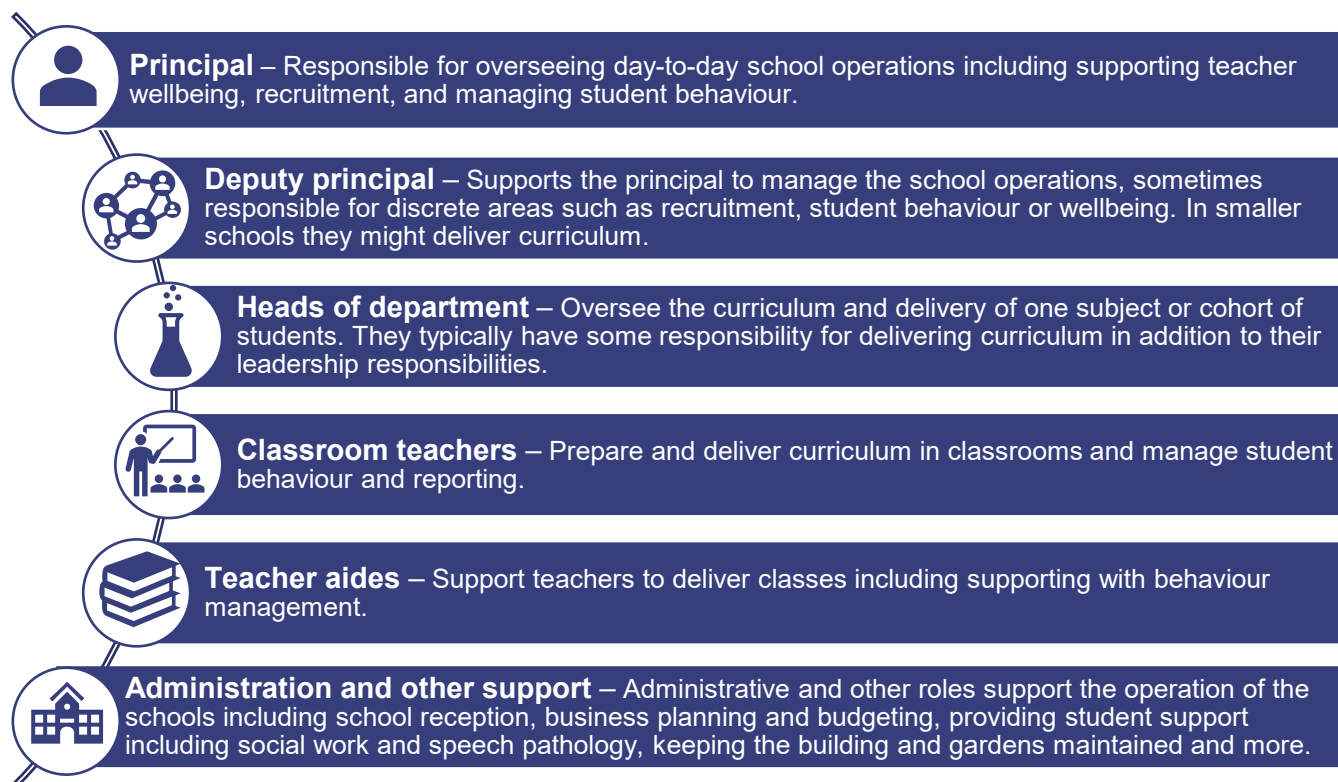


Source: Queensland Audit Office based on the Queensland Public Sector Commission's Workforce Planning Framework and the Australian Public Service Commission's Workforce planning guide.

What makes up the school workforce?

While in this audit we focused on attracting and retaining teachers, we recognise that other roles in schools, including leadership and support staff, can contribute to the numbers of teachers needed. These non-teaching roles support the delivery of education and have a direct impact on the workload of teachers. We have summarised key roles within schools in Figure 3C.

Figure 3C
School roles and responsibilities



Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.

Challenges with the department's workforce model

The Queensland state school system presents unique challenges in workforce planning. This comes from the decentralised nature of the system, with school principals having the autonomy to make education, resourcing, and future planning decisions to best meet the needs of the communities they service.

Principals may require various combinations of staffing roles to support local needs. They must consider areas such as student wellbeing, students with specific needs including disabilities, those who do not speak English as a first language, and more. This creates variability across the system and adds complexity to system-wide workforce planning.

Autonomy can increase the risk of system-wide inequity

While autonomy provides principals with flexibility to tailor to their local community and needs, it also presents challenges to the system. Under the current model, there is no incentive or requirement for principals to consider the resourcing needs of the broader school system. Increasing the resources for one school means that another school could go without.

This makes it challenging for the department to set a workforce plan which maintains autonomy and prioritises growing and retaining its workforce. However, without sufficient control and oversight by the department's central office, the autonomy given to principals could lead to inequity in school resourcing.

What we audited

In this audit, we assessed whether the department's strategies are effective in attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland. We visited 18 schools and met with a further 6 schools virtually to understand the challenges they faced and how they attracted and retained teachers.

4. Planning for the teacher workforce

As part of effective workforce planning, all Queensland public sector entities need to understand and analyse their workforce trends, needs, and challenges. These insights should inform how strategies are designed to address gaps and risks in the workforce, such as attraction and retention.

This chapter examines whether the Department of Education (the department) is effective in its teacher workforce planning, and in how it identifies current and emerging needs and workforce challenges across the Queensland state school system. The analysis focuses on statewide understanding as well as the unique challenges faced by regional and remote schools.

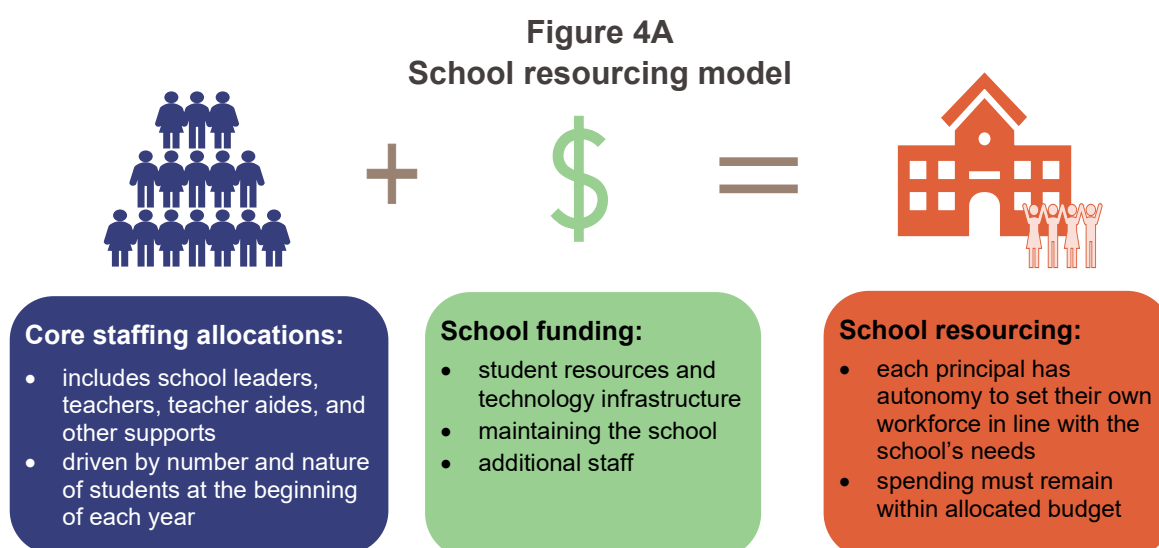
Does the department know how many teachers it needs?

The department's approach to resourcing its schools does not provide it with a reliable estimate of teacher requirements across the state. Its approach provides school principals with flexibility in resourcing to meet the specific needs of their school community, which is important. However, it does not monitor how this flexibility is applied across the education system. This limits its ability to undertake effective workforce planning.

The department has a resourcing model for schools, but it is not reliable for forecasting teacher numbers and for workforce planning

The number of teachers needed at Queensland's state schools varies by school and year. The department determines its overall workforce requirements using the *Queensland State Schools Resourcing Framework* (school resourcing model). It uses its school resourcing model to allocate core and targeted staffing, as well as additional funding to schools. Principals can supplement allocated staffing with further targeted staffing from their own funds as they see fit.

Figure 4A summarises the school resourcing model.



Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.

Student enrolments at the beginning of the school year determine **core staffing allocations**. This is supplemented by extra staffing allocations based on the number of students with specific needs, including students with disabilities or students completing tertiary certificates. This approach to core staffing allocation is consistent across Australia.

Core staffing allocations is funding that schools use to hire school leaders, teachers, teacher aides, and other supports. Schools, with assistance from the department, are responsible for sourcing their staff.

Schools also receive additional **funding** to cover:

- operations, including technology, infrastructure, and necessary resources including desks, printing, and stationery
- other needs-based funding provided to schools that meet specific criteria or by application. This can relate to areas such as specific student needs, behavioural management, socio-economic ratings of schools, and the number of First Nations students.

Schools can use funding to reshape their core staffing allocations in line with their local needs. In 2025, many Queensland state schools have workforce compositions outside of the core staffing allocation provided through the school resourcing model.

The school resourcing model does not provide the department with an accurate baseline understanding on how many teachers it needs

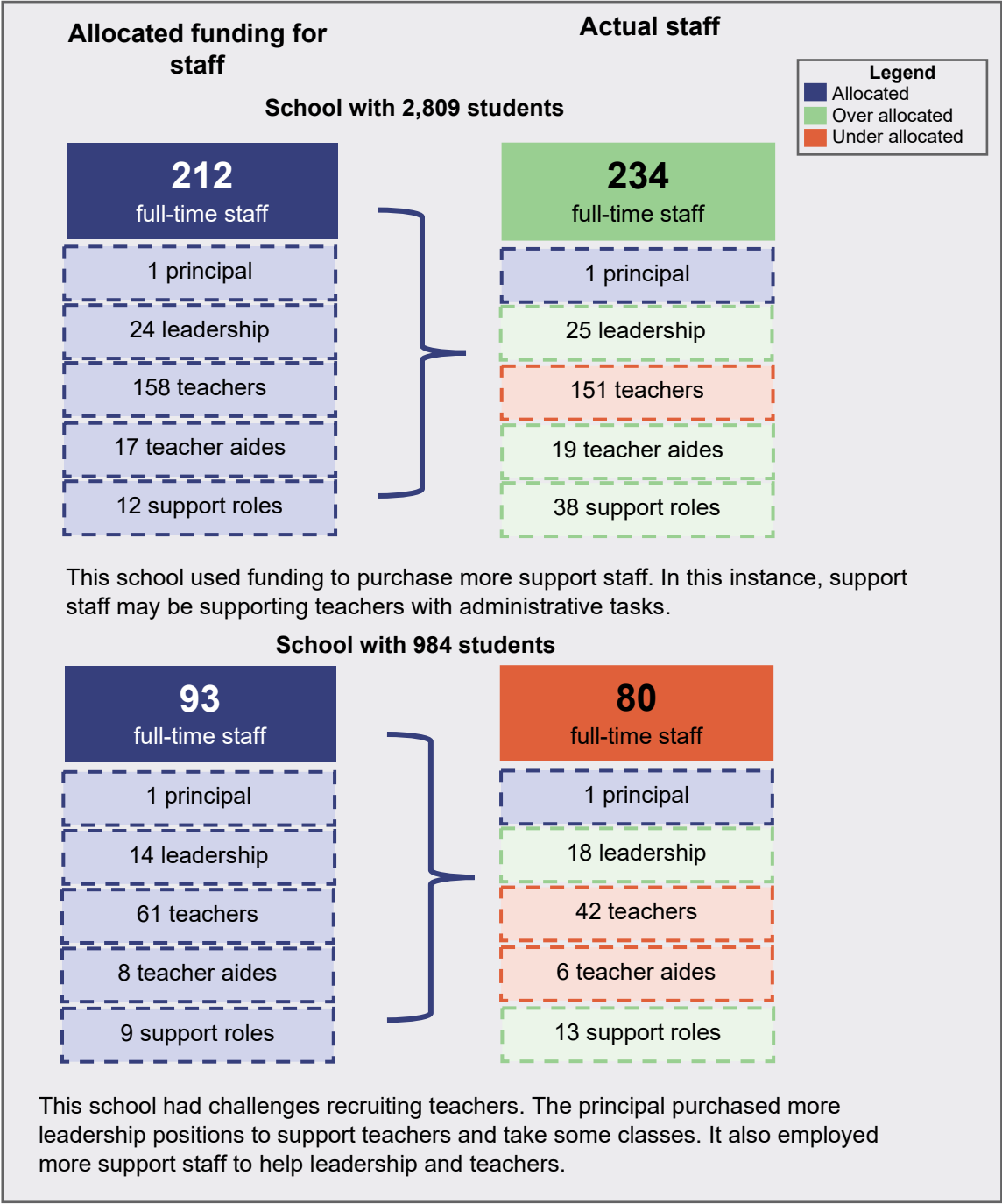
Principals' ability to hire outside of their school's core staffing allocations means the department does not have an accurate baseline understanding of teacher numbers. Each school is different, and principals apply their discretionary funding in different ways. Many use this to bring in additional leadership roles, such as deputy principals or heads of department. Others use this to bring in more teachers or support staff.

This flexibility is an important aspect to ensuring each school can meet the needs of their school community. It means principals can adapt their workforce to address the specific needs of students to address areas such as behaviour management. Applying a one-size-fits-all approach to resourcing schools would limit this. However, the design of the model limits the department's ability to estimate its statewide teacher requirements. It has not set acceptable ranges or parameters within this model, which impacts its ability to undertake effective workforce planning.

Figure 4B shows a case study example of 2 schools' actual staffing in 2024 compared to the staffing allocated through the school resourcing model. It illustrates the variability in workforce profiles. This can be driven by many factors, such as principals' preference to have more management staff to assist with student behaviour, or the need to bring in additional support staff due to challenges in finding suitable teachers.



Figure 4B
Staff allocated through core funding compared to actual staff in 2 schools in 2024



Note 1: Allocated funding for staff includes funding allocations calculated based on the count of students on the 8th day of the 2025 school year.

Note 2: Actual staff has been calculated as a full-time staff number based on the number of hours worked and paid in each fortnight period over the calendar year 2024, based on the department’s payroll data. The calculation removes payments for leave, such as sick leave.

Note 3: Amounts have been rounded to the nearest full-time staff number.

Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.



The department has not reviewed its school resourcing model and core staffing allocations for appropriateness since it was introduced.

The needs of students and the role of teachers has changed since the school resourcing model was introduced in the 1990s. Changes include increased needs in behaviour management and reporting, moving to a national curriculum in 2010, and the introduction of the *Inclusive education policy* in 2021. Other changes have also occurred over this time, such as advancements in technology, which can impact education delivery.

The department has progressively added additional funding streams to the school resourcing model to address these increased needs. However, the process of basing core staffing allocations on student numbers has not changed.

The school resourcing model requires review to re-establish baseline expectations for the teacher workforce.

A clearer picture is needed on the makeup of school workforces

The department needs to better understand how schools compose their workforces. While its school resourcing model profiles a core workforce composition, the autonomy provided to principals has contributed to many differing ratios in support staff and leadership across the schooling system. The department has not established acceptable parameters for workforce ratios within schools. Setting parameters would enable central oversight while ensuring principals maintain flexibility in setting their workforces.

To inform the establishment of parameters, the department needs better data and information on the roles staff undertake within schools, including:

- data on the specific roles teachers undertake within schools, such as time teaching, time planning, and time on administrative tasks
- the roles and duties non-teaching staff undertake within schools to reduce teacher workload
- how schools use various management positions, such as heads of departments and deputies.

Better understanding these areas would help inform whole-of-system workforce planning.

In 2019, the department had an external party review its governance over the school resourcing model. This review made several recommendations, such as providing greater clarity on application of the school resourcing model and better central monitoring of allocations across regions and the state. The department did not implement these recommendations.

The department identified that the lack of data and information on what roles staff undertake within schools was an issue. It has reviewed its approach to schools' resourcing, as outlined below.



School resourcing review

The department's school resourcing review aims to identify a new approach to school resourcing that is simple, fair, transparent, and predictable. While this review is broader than workforce attraction and retention, it considered many aspects relevant to this topic. The report is being considered by the Minister for Education and the Arts at the time of this report.

Does the department effectively analyse its workforce to identify current and future needs and challenges?

The department needs to improve the analysis it undertakes over the teaching workforce. Its approaches are limited in design and do not provide it with sufficient information to understand and plan for workforce challenges. This includes both short- and medium-term to long-term analysis.

Each of Queensland's state schools is different and presents a unique environment for its teachers. Students and communities vary significantly across the state, and this can impact each school's ability to attract and retain teachers. Regional and remote schools can face additional challenges due to their geographical location, isolation from major city resources (like medical services), access to suitable housing, and typically fewer job opportunities for teachers' families. It is important that the department understands these challenges and the broader needs of its workforce.

The department does not plan for current or future skills needs

Skills mapping helps entities understand the current capability of a workforce and forecast gaps. This is particularly important in the education system where teachers have specific skills for different subjects.

The department needs to better understand the demand for teachers in both core and specialty subjects across the state. It does not identify or track the skills of its current workforce, or collective skills needed across the Queensland schooling system. It also does not identify or capture other skill needs, such as cultural capabilities, which is important to support having the right teachers in regional and remote areas.

The Queensland Public Sector Commission's *Strategic workforce planning framework* identifies that mapping short- and long-term skills is a key step in strategic workforce planning. The department does not know if it has the right balance of skills in its workforce. This also means it does not have a baseline understanding of needs to forecast future skills gaps in particular subjects or emerging areas such as digital technology.

Having this information would enable the department to plan not just for teacher recruitment, but to determine whether alternate teaching models are required. This includes areas such as digital and remote learning. We discuss the department's alternate teaching offerings further in Chapter 6.

Pockets of good practice exist where the department has identified gaps in skills supply through longer-term vacancies in key specialty subjects. In 2023, it implemented the Trade to Teach Internship Program. This program aims to grow the manual technology workforce through an accredited program that provides day-to-day support and reduces teachers' workloads. To fill known gaps, the program targets the recruitment of skilled trade professionals to transition to teaching careers.

Work is underway to improve the capability of its workforce

Social and cultural capabilities are increasingly important in small rural and remote towns where teachers are a part of the community. The department has initiatives in its *Queensland Teaching Workforce Strategy 2024–27* that aim to improve the cultural capability of its workforce. This includes increased training opportunities for existing staff and attraction initiatives like Pearl Duncan Teaching Scholarships, which aim to grow the First Nations teaching workforce.

Improvements are needed in longer-term forecasting on teacher demand and supply

Workforce supply and demand modelling is complex and influenced by workplace trends, initiatives to grow the workforce, and other factors such as cost of living and migration policies. The Queensland Public Sector Commission's *Strategic workforce planning framework* advises organisations on how to understand their workforce supply and predict current and future demand. This is key to understanding upcoming workforce gaps and being able to address challenges strategically.

The department previously forecasted the supply and demand for its teacher workforce; however, it stopped doing this in early 2024. It designed the teacher supply and demand model (the model) to inform workforce planning and forecast the supply of teachers and the number of teachers needed for the next 4 years.

The design of the model was simplistic and excluded key parts of the workforce like Queensland special school teachers and the number of teachers reaching retirement age. The results of the forecasts also did not reflect the actual teachers needed.

We were unable to evidence how the department used the model to inform workforce planning or decision-making.

Workforce risks and challenges are known but it is unclear how they inform workforce planning

The department does not adequately capture and document its workforce risks. At a whole-of-department level, it has identified one overarching workforce supply risk, but does not consider other risks such as skills gaps, an ageing workforce, and population changes.

In developing its current workforce strategy, the department documented and communicated some of its workforce challenges to stakeholder groups. This included challenges such as:

- limited accommodation options in regional areas
- competition between state schools for teachers
- increased teaching workloads.

However, it is not clear what actions it is taking to address them. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5. Documenting more detailed risks will ensure the department's control measures are relevant and targeted.

Recommendation 1

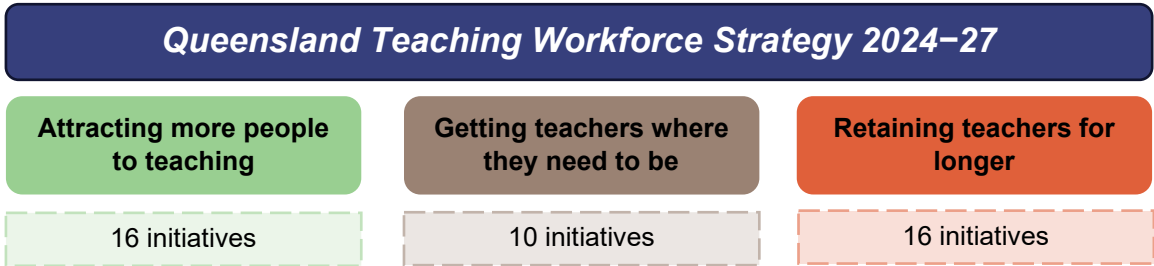
We recommend that the Department of Education enhances its understanding of current and future workforce needs and challenges. This should include:

- determining estimated teacher needs across the state
- developing acceptable workforce ratios for schools to support system-wide decision-making
- implementing more comprehensive workforce analysis to identify skill requirements, risks, needs, and challenges specific to workforce supply and demand. This analysis should span both short- and long-term factors.

5. Strategies to attract and retain teachers

The Department of Education (the department) released the *Queensland Teaching Workforce Strategy 2024–27* (the strategy) in September 2024. The strategy aims to address teacher workforce shortages in Queensland. It focuses on immediate and long-term solutions to address workforce issues, including those in regional and remote schools. Figure 5A depicts the 3 priority areas and number of initiatives.

Figure 5A
The department’s workforce strategy and 3 priority areas



Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.

In this chapter, we examine the department’s strategy and initiatives to attract and retain teachers, including to regional and remote Queensland. We also assess how the department implements and monitors its strategies and initiatives to ensure they are working.

What initiatives are available to attract and retain teachers in regional and remote Queensland?

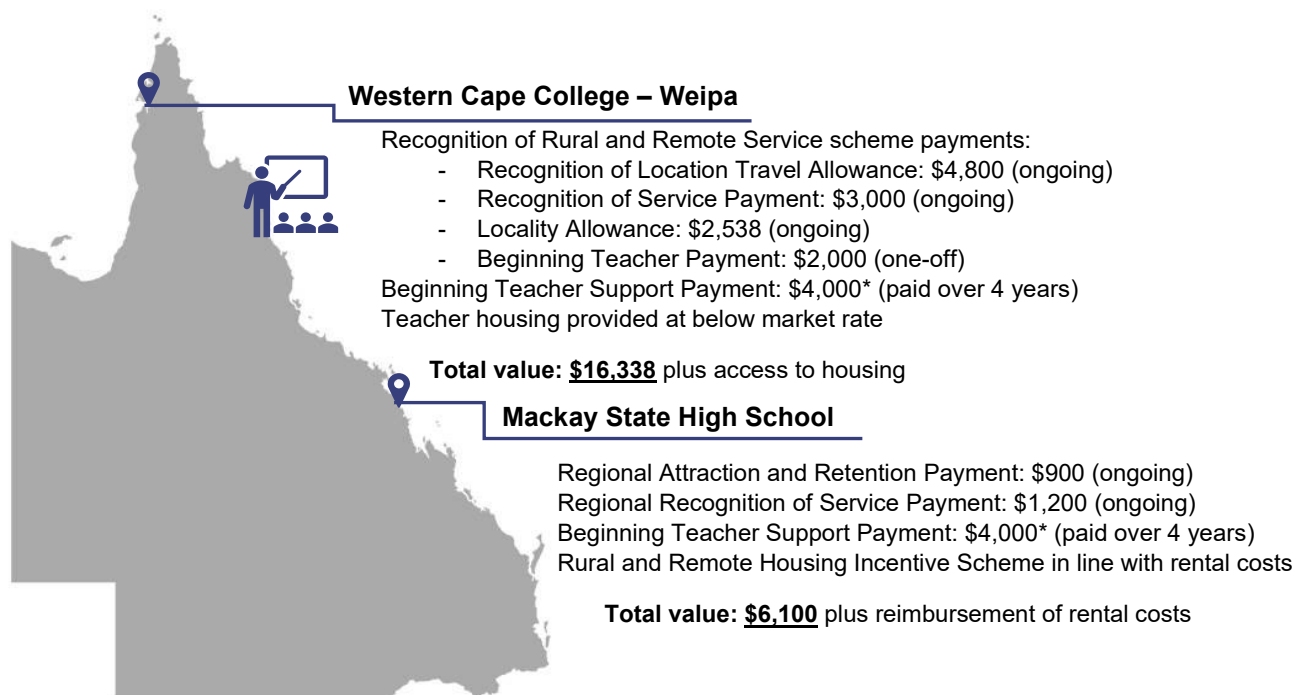
The department’s strategy includes several initiatives to attract and retain teachers to regional and remote areas. These include:

- **programs**, such as grant programs to assist university students to complete their placements in regional areas; programs such as Turn to Teaching, which place graduating interns into regional areas; or programs that target specific skills, such as Trade to Teach
- **financial incentives**, either paid directly to the teacher, or in the form of a rental subsidy or flight reimbursement. The specific amount offered to a teacher can be dependent on the location of the school they teach at and their years of experience as a teacher
- **non-financial incentives**, such as extra annual leave days.

Figure 5B shows the difference in available financial incentives received for a graduate teacher choosing between a remote school and an inner regional school.



Figure 5B
Financial incentives paid to a graduate teacher in their first year teaching in a regional or a remote school



Note: * The Beginning Teacher Support Payment increases incrementally over 4 years. The total overall entitlement is \$20,000.

Source: Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.

The department has responded to the worsening teacher shortage

The department's long-standing incentive program, the Recognition of Rural and Remote Service Scheme, aims to attract teachers to hard-to-fill rural and remote schools. This program, including previous versions of it, has been in place for almost 10 years.

The worsening teacher shortage has led to the department adding other incentive programs to target schools that need more teachers. These incentive programs target schools that did not have access to incentives programs previously.

The department made recurring annual payments to teachers at select schools with known attraction and retention issues through various incentive programs, including the:

- \$900 Regional Attraction and Retention Payment from 2023
- \$1,200 Regional Recognition of Service Payment (previously only offered to rural and remote schools) in 2024 and 2025
- Rural and Remote Housing Incentive Scheme, helping teachers cover their rent from July 2024.

It also announced the \$20,000 Beginning Teacher Support Payment in 2024. This aimed to attract graduate teachers to the 4 outer regions.

Not all schools are the same. Schools face different attraction and retention issues depending on their location and the demographics of their community. In response to the changing needs of schools and communities, the department has developed different initiatives to assist them in prioritising teachers to schools in the most need. We discuss the department's approach to identifying at-need schools in Chapter 6.

Are initiatives effectively designed and implemented?

Some initiatives lack adequate planning and design

The department needs to improve the design and implementation of its strategy and initiatives. Some initiatives within the strategy lacked adequate planning and design prior to implementation. This increases the risk that the intended outcomes of these initiatives will not be achieved. It also limits the department’s ability to monitor and evaluate its investment over time.

Investing in the design of initiatives increases the chance of success. Good design should incorporate the following elements:

- clearly articulating the problem being addressed
- identifying desired objectives and outcomes
- planning activities and processes to effectively deliver the program in line with stakeholder needs
- articulating roles and responsibilities for delivery
- planning how to communicate with stakeholders
- identifying risks to success and considering unintended consequences of the planned activities
- planning how to measure and report on success.

We have included a case study of one example where the department could improve planning and design of an initiative in Figure 5C.

Figure 5C
Case study 1 – Beginning Teacher Support Payment

Incentive design limitations for the Beginning Teacher Support Payment

The department announced the Beginning Teacher Support Payment in September 2024. It is a \$20,000 payment provided to graduate teachers over a 4-year period. The department developed and announced this as part of its current strategy. All graduate teachers who began employment with the department between 2023 and 2025 in the 4 outer regions received this payment.

The department was not able to provide design documentation to demonstrate the program objectives and reasons behind its decisions. This included key aspects such as eligibility options, amount of the payment, and how many teachers it intended to attract to the regions.

Did the department articulate a risk or challenge?

The department articulated the need for more teachers, particularly in rural, remote, and regional communities, during consultation for the strategy. It presented facts about the number of teachers entering the profession and reaching retirement age. It also identified the changing demographics of graduate teachers as a challenge. In 2024, the average age of a teacher applying for registration with Queensland College of Teachers was 36 years.

However, the department did not analyse the average age or experience of teachers in or going to regional areas. Doing this could have helped the department identify whether this was the right cohort to target and incentivise. It is unclear why the department targeted this cohort with regional area incentives over more experienced teachers.

Did the department identify specific, measurable, and achievable outcomes for the program?

The department did not identify what success looked like for this program, including defining specific or measurable outcomes. For example, it could have defined success as the following:



- percentage of beginning teachers that stayed in the regions for all 4 years of the incentive program
- target number of teachers that moved from a home address in the inner regions to the outer regions.

Without specific, measurable, and achievable outcomes, it is difficult for the department to determine if this program was successful.

Did the department consider various options to achieve the intended outcomes?

The department did not document consideration of different options for design of the program prior to implementing it. For financial incentives, this could include performing scenario modelling to consider different options, including the payment amount, and the numbers and locations of teachers.

Did the department consider unintended consequences of this program?

Incentivising more graduate teachers to work in rural and remote areas of Queensland increases the risk to the capability of the regional workforce. Early career teachers need more support from leadership and peers to deliver quality education than more experienced teachers. The department identified this as a risk in its stakeholder consultation sessions, but it is not clear in its strategy how it planned to address this risk.

The changing demographics of graduate teachers moving to the regions also presents other challenges for the department. This includes more demand for accommodation where a teacher is bringing their family. The department identified limited visibility of accommodation options as a challenge in its stakeholder briefings; however, it did not document how it planned to mitigate this risk in designing the program.

When deciding to implement this incentive program, the department did not consider how it would impact experienced teachers already working in these regions, or more experienced teachers who may have considered relocating. The decision to focus on one cohort of teachers should have been based on analysis. The department should have considered possible unintended consequences, including the potential for experienced teachers to leave the regions or quit the profession. The department does not monitor the trends of different cohorts of teachers entering or leaving the regions.

Source: *Queensland Audit Office based on information provided by the Department of Education.*

The inherent challenges the department faces in attracting and retaining teachers in its regional and remote schools heightens the need for adequate planning and design. It needs to invest in both better understanding its workforce challenges and in more comprehensive design of a suite of initiatives.

Better documentation and analysis are needed to support the overall suite of initiatives

While the department lists many initiatives in its teaching workforce strategy, it has not assessed whether the overall suite of initiatives is appropriate to address the overall risks and challenges. This makes it difficult to determine whether initiatives have been prioritised appropriately. For example, it is not clear why the department has focused more of its financial incentives on:

- attracting early career teachers to regional areas rather than more experienced teachers
- attracting teachers to the regions through financial incentives, with less financial incentives focused on retaining them.

While the department's priorities may be appropriate, the absence of analysis and documentation means it is unable to determine if its initiatives effectively address risks and challenges.

Some initiatives could be more clearly outlined within the strategy

The department's strategy outlines key initiatives under its 3 identified pillars, however not all workforce-related programs are clearly outlined within the strategy.

The department has a long-standing program called the transfer system, which is key to facilitating teacher mobility across the state and filling vacancies in regional and remote schools. Teachers earn points based on the length of time they spend in regional and remote schools, which they can use to transfer to schools in their desired location. This system is not included in the strategy.

In addition, the department mentions some of its alternate teaching models, such as digital learning, within the strategy. However, they could be more clearly listed as a direct workforce planning initiative. The department did not design its digital programs to specially address teacher shortages, but having options available should a physical teacher not be available is an important element to workforce planning. Its strategy would benefit from looking at alternate programs as a dedicated workforce initiative to ensure all students have access to education.

Does the department have an effective workforce strategy?

The department's strategy is not effectively designed and it is no longer monitoring it

The department introduced its current workforce strategy in September 2024. While the strategy seeks to address attraction and retention challenges across the state, its effectiveness is limited by gaps in its design. This includes:

- minimal detail on initiatives, with no supporting action plan developed
- limited measures of success, such as benchmarks, indicators, or defined targets
- lack of defined risks and challenges.

In addition, the department did not incorporate national actions under the Australian Government's *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* in this strategy. This work is ongoing and forms an important part of the work being undertaken to address attraction and retention issues. The department's previous plan, the *Teacher Attraction and Retention Workforce Plan 2023–26* included this. Including initiatives and actions from the national plan will assist in ensuring that the collective work being undertaken is appropriate to address known local and national challenges.

While there are several weaknesses in the strategy, the department's process for consulting on it was positive. It undertook consultation in May 2024 with a wide variety of stakeholders from across the education sector. This included senior staff within the department, leaders in the university sector, the Queensland Teachers' Union, and representatives from other public sector entities.

The department is developing a new strategy

The department is no longer monitoring its existing strategy. It has committed to developing a new teaching workforce strategy, which it anticipates will be released in early 2026. It will be important for the department to address gaps in its current strategy as part of this process.



Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Department of Education, in developing its new workforce strategy:

- identifies and includes all relevant actions and initiatives that address workforce risks and gaps
- sets clear and measurable objectives for its strategy, and for initiatives within its strategy
- develops an implementation action plan that outlines specific time frames, and roles and responsibilities
- ensures initiatives within the strategy are supported by appropriate planning activities.

Is the department's oversight and monitoring effective?

The department is not effectively monitoring its strategy or initiatives relating to attraction and retention. It needs to enhance both detailed and overall monitoring and commence evaluation activity to help it determine whether its approaches are working. At present, it does not know if its strategies are effective.

Many parts of the department are involved in attraction and retention, but there is a lack of central oversight and monitoring

Many teams within the department are involved in attracting and retaining teachers. This includes various areas within human resources and recruitment, strategy and policy, regional teams, and schools.

The department does not have a central team to guide workforce planning and monitor the overall strategy and implementation of initiatives on a day-to-day basis. With so many teams involved in workforce planning activities, more effective leadership and dedicated resources are needed to ensure the strategies are delivered and outcomes are achieved.

To effectively implement the department's strategies and initiatives, roles and responsibilities need to be clarified and more direction provided. The Australian Public Service Commission's *Workforce planning guide* details the need for strong system leaders who are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of plans.

Committees have not provided consistent and effective oversight of strategies

The department has used several different committees to oversee workforce planning, but they have not met consistently or evidenced effective oversight. In June 2024, the department implemented its Queensland Teacher Workforce Strategy Working Group. Its role was to oversee the planning and implementation of the department's strategy. It met on 3 occasions before disbanding in July 2024, 2 months before the strategy was published.

In December 2024, it formed a similar committee, the Strategic Workforce Committee. It was scheduled to meet on 5 occasions from December to June 2025; however, it only met on 3 occasions. The committee has appropriate representation of members from across the department and had shared and discussed information on workforce planning. However, it has not been involved in workforce decision-making and did not discuss the effectiveness of initiatives.

These committees were both overseen by a system-wide committee, which had responsibility for the strategic direction of the department. Given its broader mandate, this is not appropriate for detailed monitoring of the strategy.

Initiatives need to be monitored and evaluated

The department has monitored and evaluated some individual initiatives, including the previous version of the Recognition of Rural and Remote Service Scheme. However, the department has not consistently planned or performed evaluations of its initiatives. Many of its current initiatives are new, however limitations in the design of these initiatives may limit the effectiveness of evaluation activity.



Work in progress: Initiative evaluation activities

The department has engaged an external provider to undertake an evaluation over the suite of initiatives it offers. This review focuses on the effectiveness of the initiatives to increase attraction and retention of teachers, with a focus on regional and remote areas. The review is expected to be finalised in late 2025.

Poor data capture is limiting the department's ability to monitor its strategy and initiatives

Poor data capture is affecting the department's ability to measure the success of its strategy and initiatives. To effectively monitor these, the department needs to plan the data that it will collect. It also needs to identify benchmarks and targets at the design stage. The department has not done this for most of its strategies and initiatives. This means it cannot determine if they have been effective in addressing workforce supply issues.

Recommendation 3

We recommend the Department of Education implements stronger monitoring of its workforce strategy and initiatives. This should include:

- defining roles and responsibilities for day-to-day monitoring of workforce planning activities
- reviewing governance arrangements to more clearly articulate responsibilities for overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the new workforce strategy
- identifying and collecting relevant data to enable ongoing monitoring of its strategy and initiatives
- developing a monitoring and evaluation plan over initiatives within its strategy.



6. Central support for regional and remote schools

The Department of Education (the department) has both central and regional teams that play a role in supporting its schools.

This chapter examines the support that central and regional offices provide to schools to attract and retain a capable workforce. We also discuss the central and regional support provided to teachers moving to the regions.

Are regional and remote schools well supported to attract and retain teachers?

The department provides support to its schools through its central and regional teams. However, there is opportunity to improve this support to assist individual schools and ensure equity across the education system.

While principals run their schools and make recruitment and workforce decisions, it is important that central and regional teams support them. These teams can apply a broader system view to help schools get access to the right teachers and to identify potential solutions.

Not all schools face the same challenges in attracting and retaining teachers. Vacancies in some schools and areas of Queensland are inherently harder to fill due to lack of transport, remoteness, cost of living, or reputation. These schools typically require greater assistance to attract teachers. They are more likely to have high-risk and critical vacancies that impact on the delivery of core curriculum or teacher wellbeing.

The department has some teacher vacancy data, but this may not represent true teacher needs in regional and remote schools

As at 30 June 2025, the department had 617 vacancy requests for classroom teacher positions in the 4 outer regions. This includes 7 schools that had 10 or more vacancies at that time.

These are reviewed and approved vacancies, however there is likely many more that are not recorded. This is due to factors such as:

- the reallocation of teacher positions to other leadership and support roles due to an inability to fill them over time. In these instances, schools may be operating at a profile that is not optimal
- principals choosing to employ a different mix of staff to better meet the needs of their local school
- principals not raising required vacancies due to a lack of confidence in the recruitment process and choosing to manage this themselves.



We heard from some principals that they do not trust the central recruitment team to be able to recruit the staff they need. They told us that they do not raise all of their vacancies or if they do, they will recruit teachers or other support staff themselves.

Recruitment of teachers for regional and remote schools is impacted by an absence of statewide teacher targets and vacancy data

In 2024, the department centralised its recruitment model. Previously, each regional office was responsible for recruitment and had its own approaches. The department advised that under the previous model there were large numbers of unfilled vacancies outside South East Queensland. The department designed the centralised model to address issues such as:

- inconsistent recruitment processes
- inability to prioritise teachers to schools with more or higher-risk vacancies
- a lack of system-wide data and reporting to support decisions around recruitment and movement of teachers.

The centralised model aimed to provide a 'borderless approach' to recruitment, as well as consistent and equitable resourcing in Queensland state schools. However, the new model has not achieved this due to limitations in statewide vacancy data and limitations in the department's ability to predict teacher numbers across the state (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Not all schools are included in the central recruitment model, meaning the department does not know statewide vacancies

The department designed its centralised recruitment model to include all schools, however, the majority of schools in the 4 inner regions are not included in the model. As a result, the department does not have statewide vacancy data, which limits its ability to assess recruitment activities and prioritise those schools with the greatest need.

The department introduced risk ratings for vacancies to help it identify and prioritise critical vacancies, including where there is an impact on staff wellbeing or delivery of core curriculum. The department assesses each vacancy on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is a high-risk or critical vacancy that needs to be prioritised. However, its ability to respond to these risks remains limited by the absence of statewide visibility.

The department's ability to make recruitment decisions is impacted by limitations in baseline teacher targets across the state

In Chapter 4, we discussed the autonomy that principals have to make workforce and recruitment decisions. The department does not provide guidance to principals on the acceptable ranges for teacher numbers and workforce profiles within schools. This means that at the system-level, the department's recruitment team cannot assess whether schools need the teacher vacancies they report. Some schools have teacher numbers above the core staffing allocations, while others are well under.

In addition, there may be schools operating with reduced teacher numbers that have not reported vacancies. This is due to ongoing challenges in meeting known gaps. We heard this from some principals at the schools we visited. As such, vacancy numbers may not be representative of the true teacher vacancies across the state.

Other weaknesses in the recruitment model's design

In addition to the areas above, the central recruitment model has other design weaknesses that impact its effectiveness. This includes:

- The department did not communicate recruitment roles and responsibilities for central teams, regional teams, and schools. This means regional teams and schools may not be requesting and filling vacancies consistently.
- There was insufficient guidance on how central teams should prioritise vacancies and support schools, particularly those with critical and multiple vacancies.



- The department did not set recruitment targets or capture sufficient baseline data to enable assessment of the new recruitment model. This means the department has not been able to monitor the effectiveness of its new processes in helping fill vacancies.

The department's teacher transfer system has weaknesses

The department introduced its teacher transfer system in 1992 to support the transition of teachers between schools across Queensland. Its overall purpose is to ensure:

- all schools have appropriately qualified teachers
- transfers between schools are equitable and transparent
- rural and remote service is recognised and valued by allowing teachers to return to their preferred location after a minimum service of between 2 and 3 years, depending on where the school is located.

However, the teacher transfer system is no longer operating as intended. The department's 2017 review of the transfer system highlighted several weaknesses, including:

- inconsistent and inappropriate use of the transfer system by principals and teachers, including using it as a mechanism to address poor performance
- lack of transparency over the number and location of vacancies to inform transfer decisions.

The move to the centralised recruitment model could have helped in addressing some of these issues. However, excluding most schools within the inner regions from the model created further weaknesses:

- The central office cannot see vacancies in the areas where teachers typically want to return, including more popular areas such as Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, and the Gold Coast.
- Schools in these inner regions undertake their own hiring and can therefore choose to ignore the transfer waitlist.

The autonomy afforded to principals gives teachers the ability to seek employment directly with schools. For example, some teachers take unpaid leave from their permanent teaching position to take a temporary contract in their desired school. Once they have started the contract, they will request a transfer which the department approves. However, due to limited reporting, it is not clear whether the department has approved these requests ahead of teachers on the transfer request list who have completed more regional service. This process bypasses the transfer system.

If teachers are unable to return to their desired locations after remote and regional service, they may lose trust in the system and no longer be willing to transfer to regional and remote areas.



We heard from principals that the transfer system not working as intended is affecting their ability to attract new teachers. Teachers are uncertain that they will be able to return to the areas they want to live in.

Expectations for regional teams need to be clarified

There is an opportunity for the department to provide clearer expectations and define the roles of its regional teams in helping schools manage attraction and retention risks.

We met with each of the 4 teams in the outer regions and discussed their approach to supporting schools in attracting and retaining teachers. Each region assisted schools, however approaches were not consistent. Some applied a more proactive approach than others, and none could define what they were expected to undertake for attraction and retention.

The department has outlined some of its expectations for regional and remote areas through its Small Schools Support Plan and its professional development program, the Education Futures Institute. However, the department could do more to set clearer expectations for central and regional teams beyond these areas.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Department of Education improves its approaches to managing teacher recruitment and mobility, through:

- collecting data on statewide vacancies to inform decision-making and prioritisation of teacher recruitment, and the effective transfer of teachers across the state
- implementing central monitoring of vacancy and mobility requests
- documenting and communicating roles and responsibilities for recruitment and mobility for schools, regional teams, and central teams.

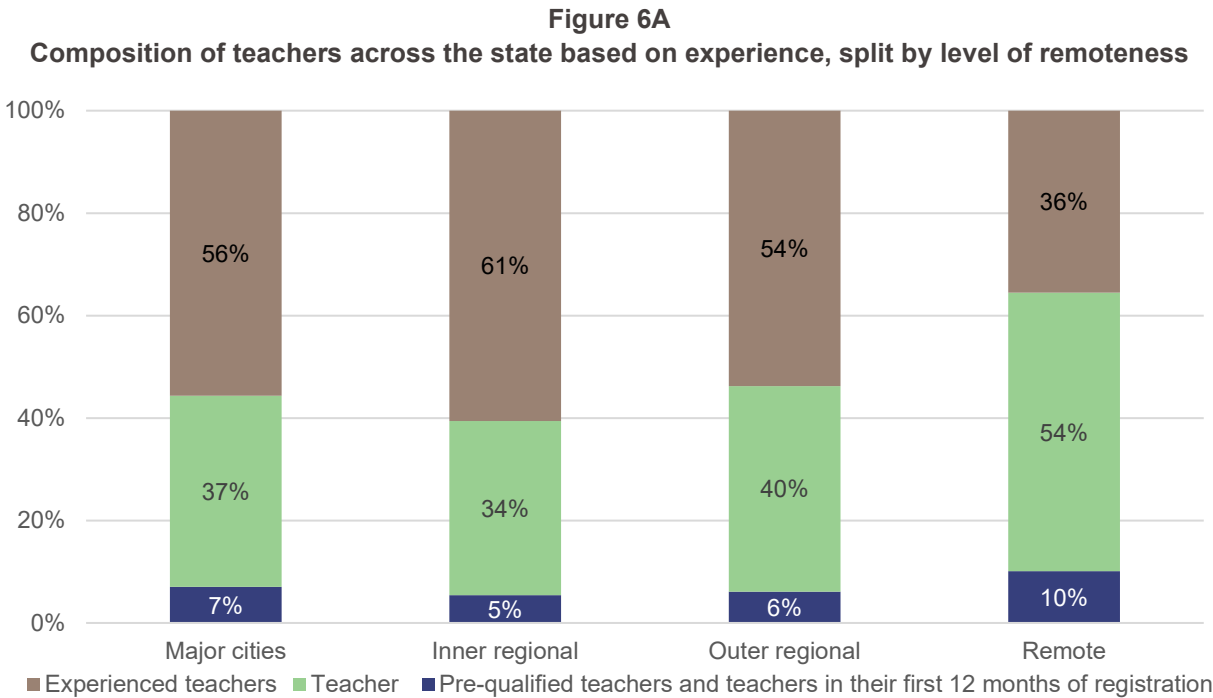
Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Department of Education clarifies and communicates the expectations for how regional offices and teams should help schools with attraction and retention matters.

Does the department support teachers moving to the regions?

Teachers who move to regional or remote schools are often relocating away from their family and social support networks. Some are also at the start of their career. This often requires a period of adjustment. It is important that the department and schools support teachers through this process to both improve their wellbeing and increase their chances of retaining these teachers.

Remote schools have a higher proportion of unqualified teachers and graduate teachers in their first year of teaching. They also have a lower proportion of more experienced teachers (teachers with more than 8 years of experience or further qualifications) in these areas compared to inner regional, outer regional, and large cities. Figure 6A shows the split of teachers by level of remoteness at the end of Term 1, 2024.



Note: We have classified the data based on the 5 classes of remoteness in the Australian Statistical Geography Remoteness Structure (ASGRA). 'Remote' in this table includes remote and very remote schools as per the ASGRA categories. Experienced teachers include experienced, experienced senior, highly accomplished, and lead teachers based on the department's award categories.

Source: Queensland Audit Office based on Department of Education data.



Better guidance and monitoring are needed for early career teachers moving to regional and remote areas

Principals have a responsibility to support new teachers moving to the regions. Of the regional and remote schools we visited, some had structured onboarding and wellbeing programs for new teachers, and others did not. While principals should ensure they are supporting new teachers, schools would benefit from greater monitoring and guidance from central and regional teams.

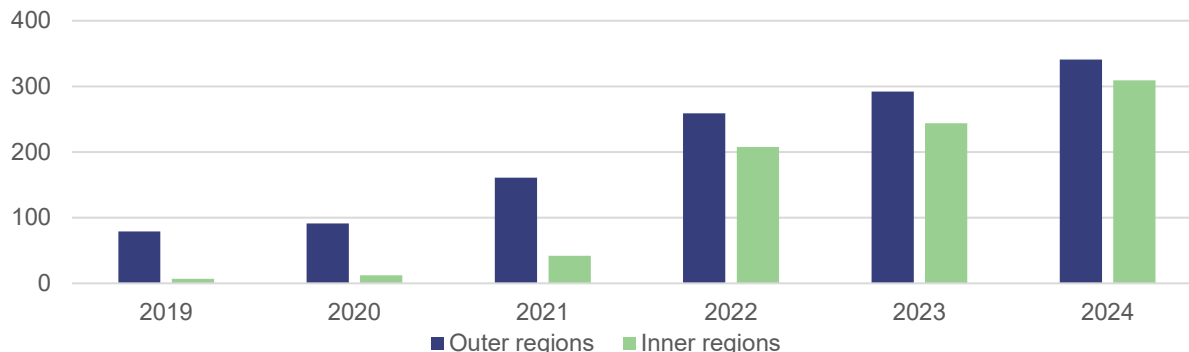
The department is losing more experienced teachers through retirement than it is currently bringing into the system. Ensuring early career teachers have a positive experience in regional and remote areas increases the chances of keeping them within the system.

Better monitoring is needed for Permission to Teach teachers working in the regions

The department, as well as other education providers across the sector, can recruit university students who are still finalising their studies to take on teaching roles. These students are given Permission to Teach (PTT) by the Queensland College of Teachers. We refer to them in this report as PTT teachers.

The Queensland College of Teachers has reported an increase in PTT teacher approvals for state, private, and Catholic schools, from 211 in 2020 to 1,294 in 2024. This is a 513 per cent increase in 4 years. Since 2019, the number of PTT teachers in Queensland state schools has increased from 86 to 650 in 2024. There are more PTT teachers in the outer regions.

Figure 6B
Number of Permission to Teach teachers in the 4 inner regions compared to the 4 outer regions



Note: Number of Permission to Teach teachers is based on actual headcount between 2019 and 2024.

Source: Queensland Audit Office based on Department of Education data.

This cohort of teachers lacks experience and training, so requires greater support. Guidance from the Queensland College of Teachers suggests that PTT teachers should work a reduced teaching load to manage their work and allow them to complete their studies. Despite this guidance, there is no central approach to oversee their teaching loads or monitor their performance and wellbeing. We were unable to verify the teaching load for these teachers due to a lack of data captured by the central office.



We heard from principals that PTT teachers typically require more support and schools do not always have the capacity to offer this support. Some principals told us that the reduced teaching loads of PTT teachers puts more resourcing pressure on schools to find teachers to fill this teaching time.

PTT teachers can undertake traditional classroom teacher roles or be part of an internship program. Internships such as Turn to Teaching (for university graduates completing postgraduate studies in education) and Trade to Teach (for teachers with a trade certificate 3 completing a graduate degree in teaching) offer additional benefits. Teachers in these internship programs start teaching in their second year and are paid a full-time salary with a 50 per cent teaching load. They receive extra support and guidance from the department, including access to a community of practice and a school supervising teacher. PTT teachers do not receive this formal support.

The department advised that PTT teachers should be able to access the professional development opportunities offered to first-year graduate teachers. However, it does not have processes to keep track of the number of PTT teachers in the regions to ensure support is provided.

PTT teachers are the most inexperienced and vulnerable cohort in the workforce. To effectively manage this, the department needs to set clear expectations and have systems in place to provide oversight.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Department of Education provides expectations and guidance to its schools about the use of Permission to Teach teachers and support for all teachers in the early phases of their careers.

The department provides professional development to teachers

The department recognises that support and development are important for teachers starting out in their career. It provides professional development and wellbeing services through its Education Futures Institute (the institute), which started in 2024. Previously, the department had a dedicated program to support its regional and remote schools and teachers, called the Centre for Learning and Wellness. This has now been replaced by the institute.

Are initiatives and incentives accessible when schools need them?

As detailed in Chapter 5, the department has many initiatives to attract and retain teachers in regional and remote schools. It has implemented processes to prioritise which schools can access each initiative to support equitable access to teachers across the state. This is important to ensure schools that face greater challenges in attracting teachers are not disadvantaged.

The department has methods to prioritise access to initiatives, but it is unclear whether the right schools are getting access to incentives

Consistently and fairly identifying at-risk schools, or those that require more support, is important in ensuring the right schools receive assistance. The department uses its transfer rating system to provide incentives to teachers at some schools. For some incentive programs, the department identifies schools using different methods or approaches.

Transfer ratings applied to schools need to be revisited

The department typically uses the transfer rating system, which was created in 1992, to identify schools that can access its initiatives. Each school is rated between 1 and 7 based on the following indicators:

- **Remoteness:** distance from Brisbane or other large cities and towns with populations over 8,000
- **Access to community services:** distance from cities and towns with services
- **Complexity of the school and school staffing requirements:** based on regional office input and moderated by the central office.

The department has not updated the individual ratings applied to schools since the early 2000s, despite multiple reviews. Given this period of time, some factors may need to be updated. For example:

- We would expect that school complexities and staffing requirements change depending on the needs of current students and should be reassessed periodically to reflect changes.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics divides Australia into 5 classes of remoteness. It updated this classification system in 2016 and 2021, and the department's remoteness indicator should be reassessed accordingly.

Without refreshing this model, there is an increased risk that at-need schools are not able to access initiatives.

The department had a review of the transfer system conducted in 2021. This review recommended adjustments to the ratings, which have not been implemented. It found that the current ratings do not consider students' socio-economic and educational status. Factoring this into the ratings would promote greater equity in the system by targeting the department's initiatives to the schools that need them most.

Identification of priority and at-risk schools is not supported by sufficient documentation

The department gives some schools access to initiatives by identifying them as priority or at-risk schools. This applied different criteria to the transfer ratings. This approach ensures it has flexibility and can respond to emerging risks and needs without needing to update the transfer system. However, the department does not maintain sufficient documentation to justify how it selects schools under this method.

For example, the department identified schools for the Rural and Remote Housing Incentive Scheme based on their number of critical vacancies. In selecting the schools eligible for access, it advised that it considered factors such as a 15 per cent or greater vacancy rate and reputational risk. However, the department did not retain any documentation to demonstrate that the selected schools met the criteria.

Another example is the payments made for the Regional Attraction and Retention, and Recognition of Service programs. These are paid to teachers in schools experiencing issues with retention and attraction, and which are rated 2 and 3 in the transfer system. The department selected schools with a retention rate of 84 per cent or lower and an average length of service of 6 years or fewer. This was calculated over a 3-year period. The department did not consider the number of vacancies in the calculation and disproportionately favoured smaller schools as a result.

The department later introduced a committee that would review all schools on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Department of Education improves its approach to determining which schools can access workforce initiatives. It should:

- establish criteria for school eligibility
- periodically review criteria
- document eligibility decisions.

Do schools have adequate supports available if they are unable to fill a teacher vacancy?

Schools and students have access to alternative teaching models

The department's preference is to have a permanent teacher in front of students to ensure that education is delivered in a stable and consistent way. Where this is not possible, the department has implemented alternative options to support schools with access to emergency assistance or digital learning.

Emergency options available to schools

Since 2022, some regional and remote schools with significant teacher vacancies have been eligible to apply for the Teacher Flying Squad. This provides immediate support to schools by flying in teachers to fill vacancies for up to a semester. Schools that are backfilling teachers accessing professional development are also considered eligible if local relief teachers are not available.

This option is available to schools in priority locations, with critical vacancies and approval from the regional human resources director. Not all schools can access this support. The Teacher Flying Squad is not a long-term solution for filling vacancies, but it does provide short-term support to schools in need.

Digital learning and distance education in schools

To make sure students can access education wherever they are, the department provides students with the following digital learning options:

- **Distance Education** schools have been operating since 2002, with the school curriculum able to be delivered online to students who are unable to physically access a school due to remoteness. Distance Education schools are spread across the state in 7 locations and are designed to be accessed by students within certain proximity to each location.
- The **Queensland Virtual Academy** was launched in 2025, operating statewide and offering single subjects across year levels. It focuses on specialties like science, technology, engineering and maths subjects, languages, industrial design and technologies, and vocational pathways.

The department did not design these digital learning options as workforce planning solutions. However, they provide both regional and remote schools and students with learning options if local face-to-face education is not available.



Appendices

A.	Entity responses	33
B.	How we prepared this report	39



A. Entity responses

As mandated in Section 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, the Queensland Audit Office gave a copy of this report with a request for comments to:

- Minister for Education and the Arts
- Director-General, Department of Education

We also provided a copy of the report to the following entities and gave them the option of providing a response:

- Premier and Minister for Veterans
- Director-General, Department of the Premier and Cabinet

This appendix contains the responses we received.

The heads of these entities are responsible for the accuracy, fairness, and balance of their comments.



Comments received from Minister for Education and the Arts

Minister for Education and the Arts



1 William Street Brisbane 4000
PO Box 15033 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3719 7270
Email: education@ministerial.qld.gov.au
arts@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Mr Darren Brown
Assistant Auditor-General
Queensland Audit Office
Email: gao@gao.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Brown

Thank you for your email dated 29 September 2025 regarding the audit report, *Attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland performance*.

I appreciate the opportunity to review a copy of the report.

I understand that Ms Stacie Hansel, Acting Director-General, Department of Education, has considered the recommendations of the audit report and has provided the department's feedback directly to your office.

Should you require further information, I invite you to contact

Thank you again for providing me with a copy of the draft report.

Yours sincerely

JOHN-PAUL LANGBROEK MP
Minister for Education and the Arts

Ref: 25/936656; M3830

Your Ref: PRJ03914

Comments received from Acting Director-General, Department of Education



Office of the
Director-General

Department of
Education

21 OCT 2025

Mr Darren Brown
Assistant Auditor-General
Queensland Audit Office
Email: gao@gao.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Brown *Darren*

Thank you for your emails dated 24 and 29 September 2025 regarding the proposed audit report – *Attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland performance*.

I appreciate the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the report. I am pleased to advise that the Department of Education has considered the recommendations of the proposed audit report and provides the enclosed feedback.

Should you require further information, I invite you to contact

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute and I look forward to receiving the final version of the report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stacie Hansel".

STACIE HANSEL
Acting Director-General

Ref: 25/930972

Enc

1 William Street Brisbane
Queensland 4000 Australia
PO Box 15033 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3034 4754
Website www.qed.qld.gov.au
ABN 76 337 613 647

Responses to recommendations

Department of Education

Attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland

Response to recommendations provided by Stacie Hansel, Acting Director-General, Department of Education, on 17 October 2025.

Recommendation	Agree/Disagree	Time frame for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
We recommend that the Department of Education: - enhances its understanding of current and future workforce needs and challenges. This should include - determining estimated teacher needs across the state - developing acceptable workforce ratios for schools to support system-wide decision making - implementing more comprehensive workforce analysis to identify skill requirements, risks, needs, and challenges specific to workforce supply and demand. This analysis should span both short- and long-term factors.	Agree	Q3 25/26 Q4 25/26 Q1 26/27	Lead: HR Strategy, Corporate and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Services (CATSIS) (Strategic Workforce Policy/ Workforce Policy) Workforce Services, Systems and Analytics Support: Regional Directors & HR Operations, School & Regional Operations & Performance (SROP), and Early Childhood, Regulations and Communications
- in developing its new workforce strategy - identifies and includes all relevant actions and initiatives that address workforce risks and gaps - sets clear and measurable objectives for its strategy, and for initiatives within its strategy - develops an implementation action plan that outlines specific time frames, and roles and responsibilities - ensures initiatives within the strategy are supported by appropriate planning activities	Agree	Q3 25/26	Lead: CATSIS – work is currently underway (as part of GEC 219) with internal stakeholders to identify and refine actions across key priority areas related to workforce design, workforce attraction and retention, capability and workplace health and safety. The strategy will be considered by Government prior to release. Linkages to be made to QAO recommendations.

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Time frame for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
3. implements stronger monitoring of its workforce strategy and initiatives. This should include - defining roles and responsibilities for day-to-day monitoring of workforce planning activities - reviewing governance arrangements to more clearly articulate responsibilities for overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of the new workforce strategy - identifying and collecting relevant data to enable ongoing monitoring of its strategy and initiatives - developing a monitoring and evaluation plan over initiatives within its strategy.	Agree	Q3 25/26 Q3 25/26 Q4 25/26 Q4 25/26	Lead: HR Strategy, CATSIS (Strategic Workforce Policy/ Workforce Policy) and HR School Operations (HRSO), SROP (Recruitment and Mobility) It is recommended that the new HR Governance structure oversees implementation of the QAO recommendation which will be considered in light of the Deloitte Incentive Review final evaluation report.
4. improves its approaches to managing teacher recruitment and mobility, through - collecting data on statewide vacancies to inform decision making and prioritisation of teacher recruitment, and the effective transfer of teachers across the state - implementing central monitoring of vacancy and mobility requests - documenting and communicating roles and responsibilities for recruitment and mobility for schools, regional teams, and central teams	Agree	Q3 25/26	Lead: HRSO, SROP (Recruitment and Mobility) and the Governance team to be established as part of Recommendation 3. Support: HRSO, SROP (Regional Directors & HR Operations) The department will expand its current teacher vacancy data collection to all regions and centralise mobility request reporting by February/March 2026 and document communication accordingly.
5. clarifies and communicates the expectations for how regional offices and teams should assist schools with attraction and retention matters	Agree	Q3 25/26	Lead: HRSO, SROP (Recruitment and Mobility) Support: HRSO, SROP (HR Operations)

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Time frame for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
6. provides expectations and guidance to its schools regarding the use of Permission to Teach teachers and support for all teachers in the early phases of their careers	Agree	Q3 25/26 for guidance development and distribution regarding the use of PTT TBC by Capabilities for guidance for teachers in early phases of career	Lead: HRSO, SROP (Recruitment and Mobility) for PTT guidance, and EFI, Capabilities for early career teacher guidance Support: Regional Directors, SROP and State Schools The department will develop and provide an expectation and guidance document to its schools regarding the use of PTT by adopting and augmenting existing QCT guidelines and material.
7. improves its approach to determining which schools can access workforce initiatives. It should - establish criteria for school eligibility - periodically review criteria - document eligibility decisions.	Agree	Q4 25/26	Lead: HRSO, SROP (Recruitment and Mobility) for the design and documentation of attraction and retention initiatives and the Governance team to be established as part of Recommendation 3 for monitoring and reviewing.

B. How we prepared this report

Queensland Audit Office reports to parliament

The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) is Queensland's independent auditor of public sector entities and local governments.

QAO's independent public reporting is an important part of our mandate. It brings transparency and accountability to public sector performance and forms a vital part of the overall integrity of the system of government.

QAO provides valued assurance, insights and advice, and recommendations for improvement via the reports it tables in the Legislative Assembly, as mandated by the *Auditor-General Act 2009*. These reports may be on the results of our financial audits, on the results of our performance audits, or on our insights. Our insights reports may provide key facts or a topic overview, the insights we have gleaned from across our audit work, the outcomes of an investigation we conducted following a request for audit, or an update on the status of Auditor-General recommendations.

We share our planned reports to parliament in our 3-year forward work plan, which we update annually: www.qao.qld.gov.au/audit-program.

A fact sheet how we prepare, consult on, and table our reports to parliament is available on our website: www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/fact-sheets.

Performance audits

Through our performance audit program, we evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of public service delivery. We select the topics for these audits via a robust process that reflects strategic risks entities are facing. We develop or identify suitable criteria for each audit and evaluate the audited entities' performance against it. We report to parliament on the outcome.

Our performance audit reports help parliament hold entities to account for the use of public resources. In our reports, we provide recommendations or insights for improvement, and may include actions, advice, or better practice examples for entities to consider.

About this report

QAO prepares its reports on performance audits under the *Auditor-General Act 2009*:

- section 37A, which outlines that the Auditor-General may conduct a performance audit of all or any particular activities of a public sector entity.

This report communicates the findings, conclusions and recommendations from our performance audit on attracting and retaining teachers in regional and remote Queensland.

Our audit was a reasonable assurance engagement, conducted under the Australian Standard on Assurance Engagements ASAE 3500 *Performance Engagements*, issued by the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board. The conclusions in our report provide reasonable assurance about the audited entities' performance against the identified criteria. Our objectives and criteria are set out below.



The objective of the audit

The objective of this audit was to assess whether the Department of Education's strategies are effective in attracting, retaining, and recruiting teachers in regional and remote Queensland.

What we cover

This report looks at how the Department of Education is workforce planning to ensure it has enough teachers in regional and remote schools now and into the future.

It focuses on the work the department does to attract teachers to regional and remote schools, and retain them.

The entity we audited

The entity subject to this audit is the Department of Education. It is responsible for workforce planning to ensure all Queensland children have access to education.

Our approach

Audit criteria

We addressed our objective through the following criteria:

Criteria	
1.1	The department identifies workforce demand for teachers in regional and remote Queensland and develops strategies and workforce plans to meet it.
1.2	The department effectively implements strategies and uses incentives to fill workforce gaps in regional and remote Queensland.
1.3	The department effectively monitors and evaluates its strategies and workforce plans for regional and remote Queensland.

Scope exclusions

This audit did not examine:

- the work the Department of Education is doing to attract people into the teaching profession. While we considered how teachers are attracted and recruited to regional and remote schools, we did not assess initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of teachers into the education system overall
- school-level workforce planning
- attraction and retention activities within Queensland's 4 inner regions
- initiatives and support for school staff other than teachers (such as cleaning and maintenance staff, teacher aides, and more).

Method

Field interviews and site visits

We conducted interviews with a range of stakeholders from across the school education sector, including regional and remote areas of Queensland. This included:

- stakeholders from the Department of Education's central and regional teams
- 24 primary, secondary, prep to year 12, distance education, and special education state schools across the 4 outer regions (out of a total 579 schools in these regions)
- members of the parents and citizens association at 1 school
- Queensland Teachers Union representatives from across the 4 outer regions
- Queensland College of Teachers
- Society of the Provision of Education in Rural Australia.

Document review

We obtained and reviewed relevant documents from the department involved in the audit. This included legislation, strategies, policies, guidelines, performance reports, reviews, and evaluations. We also considered research from other jurisdictions and academia.

Data analysis

We analysed data from the Department of Education. This included payroll data, records of Permission to Teach teacher approvals, mobility data of teachers, vacancy data, and school census data.

We validated our data methods and analysis progressively with the department.

Subject matter experts

We engaged and sought advice from a university professor with extensive research and experience in regional and remote teaching. They offered advice and validated facts and concepts related to the audit.





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T: (07) 3149 6000
E: qao@qao.qld.gov.au
W: www.qao.qld.gov.au
53 Albert Street, Brisbane Qld 4000
PO Box 15396, City East Qld 4002