



# Tasmanian Audit Office

Student attendance and  
engagement: Years 7 to 10

Report of the Auditor-General

No.8 of 2018-19

# Today's presentation

- Objective and scope of the audit
- Audit approach
- Auditor-General's conclusions
- Major themes of the audit including Auditor-General's recommendations:
  - What does the attendance and engagement data show?
  - Is student attendance managed effectively?
  - Is student engagement managed effectively?

# Objective and scope of the audit

**Objective:** To form an opinion on the effectiveness of the Department of Education's (DoE) management of student attendance and engagement in Years 7 to 10

**Scope:** Full-time and part-time students in Years 7 to 10 at Tasmanian Government high schools - 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2017  
Together with evidence obtained during school visits during 2018

# Audit approach

- Data analysis
- Examination and verification of internal and external reports
- Review of strategic and annual planning processes and documents
- Discussions with DoE staff
- Visited seven high schools during the first half of 2018:

Clarence	Kingston	New Norfolk
St Marys	Prospect	Deloraine
Burnie		

# Auditor-General conclusion

- Key elements are in place within policies, processes and systems to support DoE's effective management of student attendance and engagement for Years 7 to 10.
- Whilst the framework is effective, it could be enhanced by further investment in:
  - improving student attendance data quality
  - better defining and capturing student engagement data
  - enhancing monitoring and reporting systems
  - establishing and monitoring performance targets for acceptable attendance and engagement

# 1. What does the attendance and engagement data show?

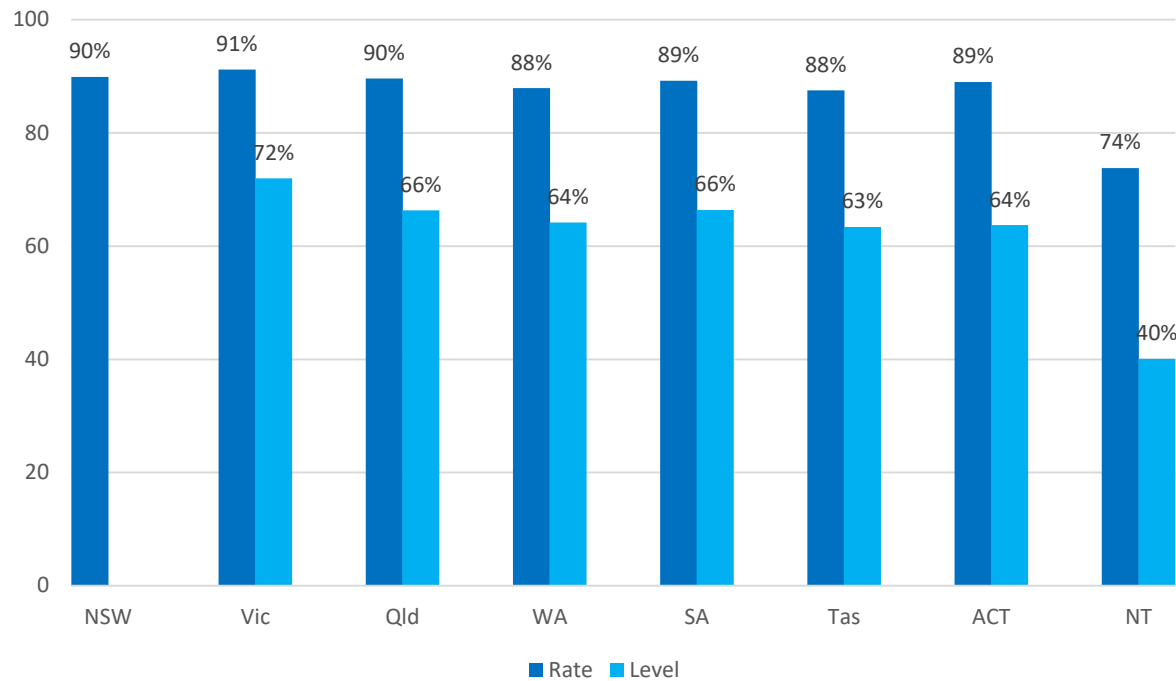
# What does the attendance data show?

## Examined:

- National reporting of attendance rates and levels
- Tasmanian attendance rates and levels and its Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) score

# What does the attendance data show?

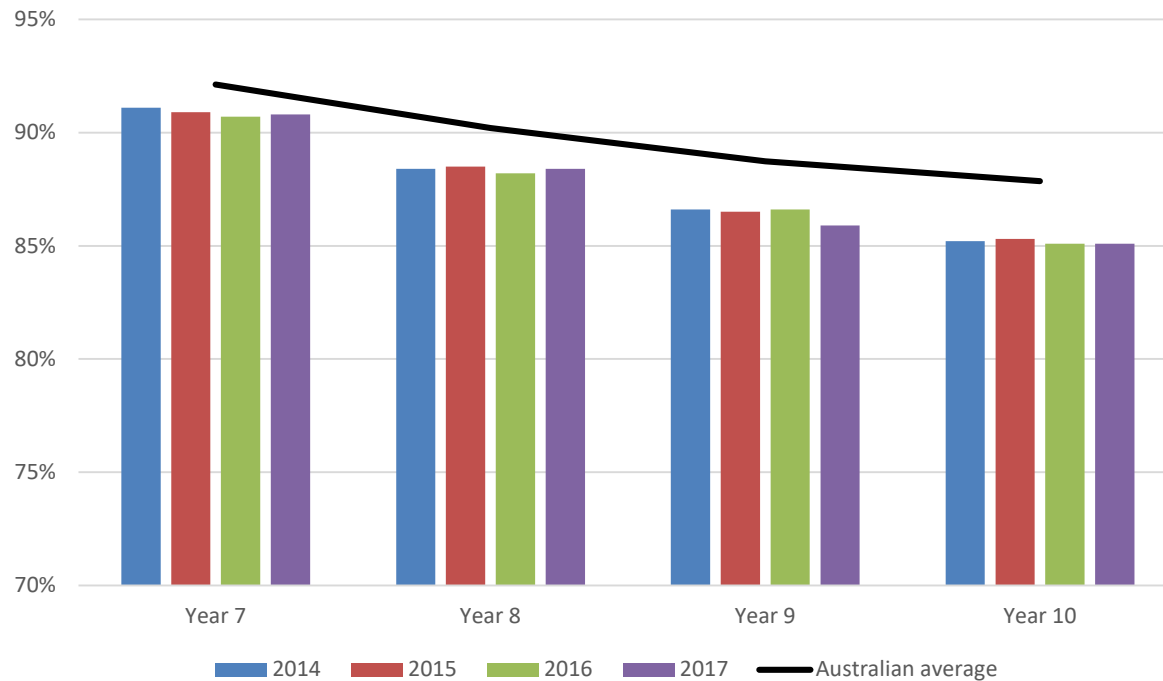
## National Average attendance rates and levels – Years 7 to 10 – Government schools 2017





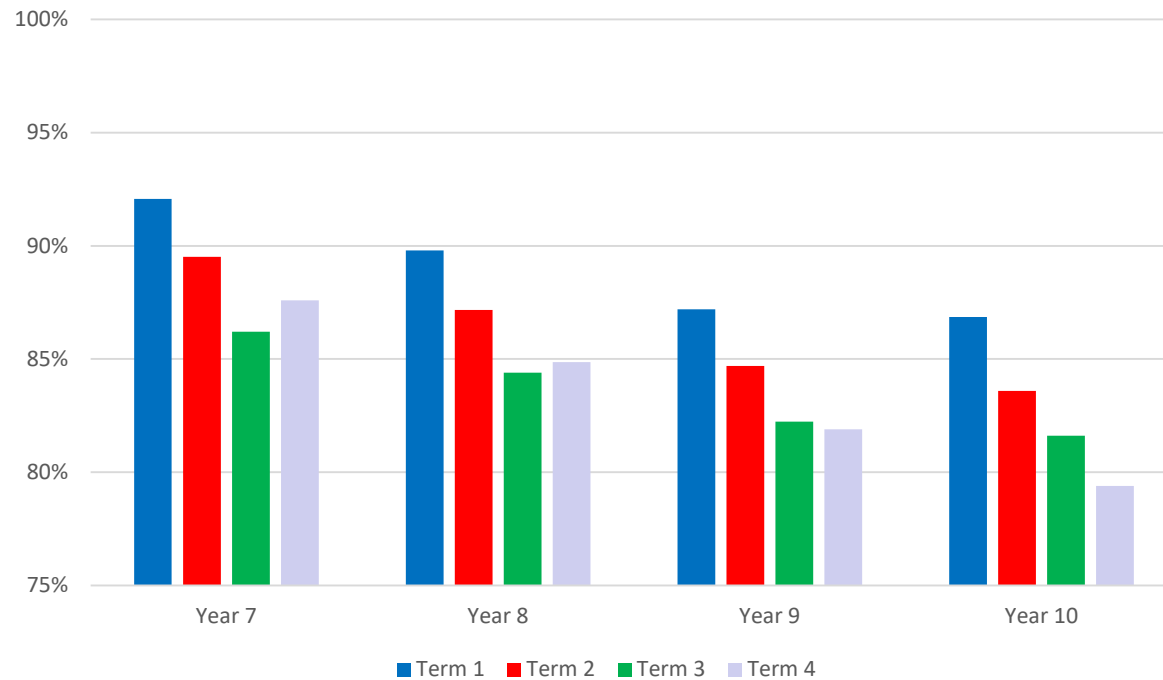
# What does the attendance data show?

## Average attendance rates Years 7 to 10 – Tasmania and Australia - 2014 to 2017



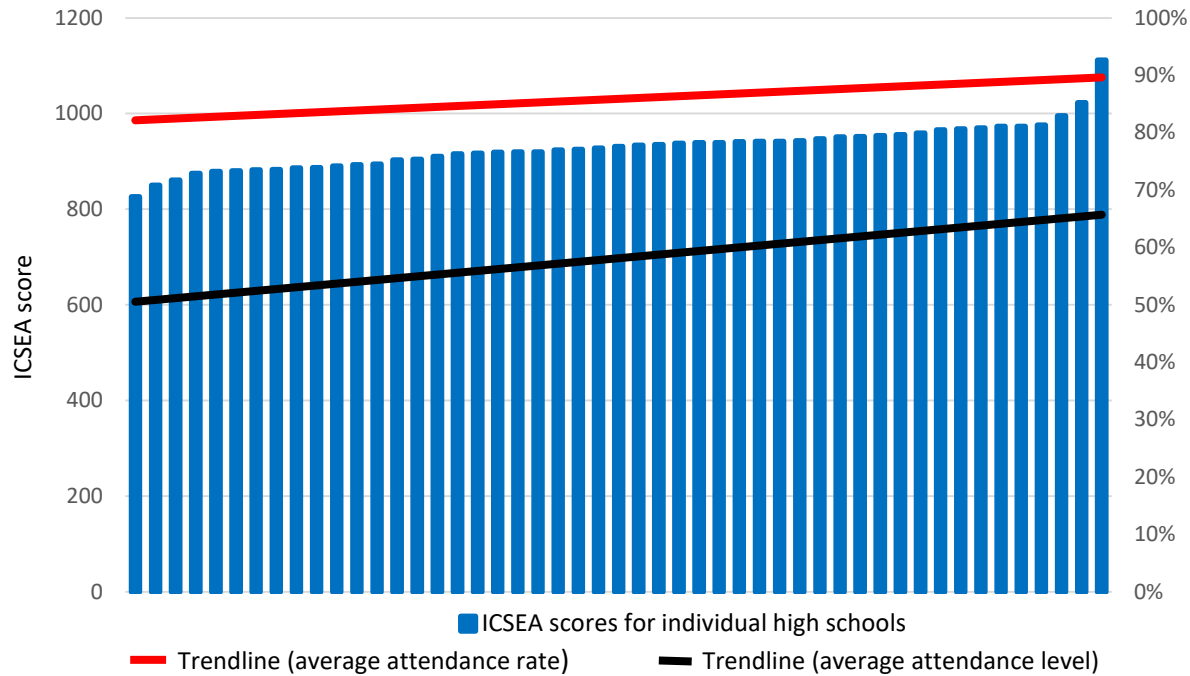
# What does the attendance data show?

Tasmanian average daily attendance rate  
by Year group Years 7 to 10 - 2017



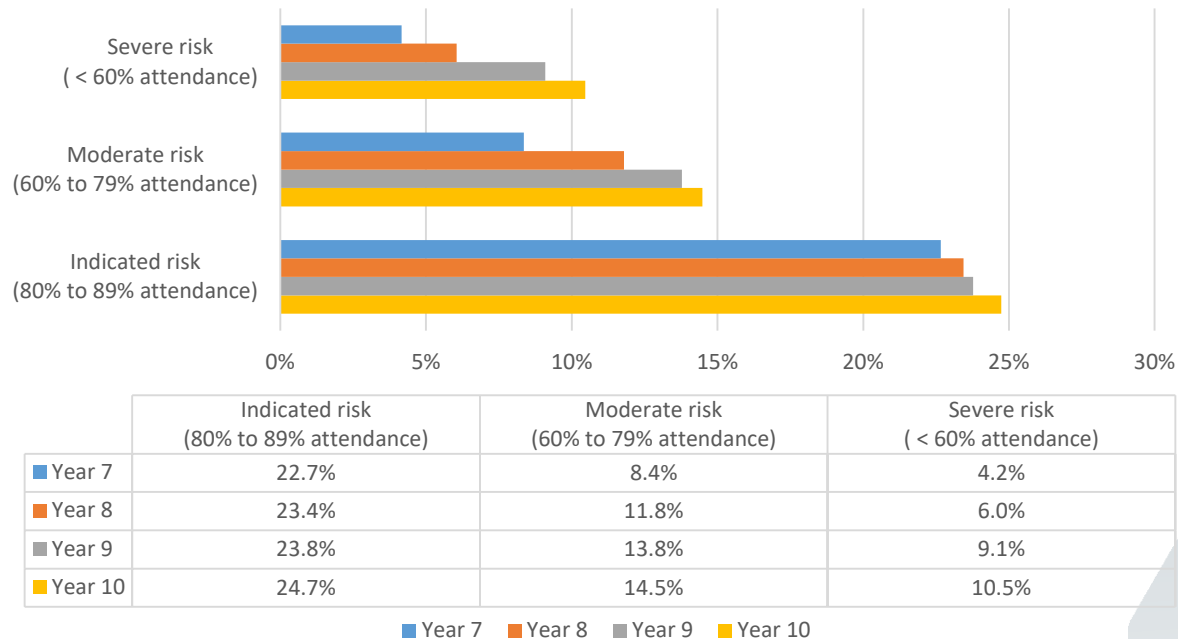
# What does the attendance data show?

## Tasmanian schools attendance rates, levels and ICSEA scores - 2017



# What does the attendance data show?

## Percentage of students in Year 7 to 10 by category of educational risk - 2017



# What does the attendance data show?

## Findings:

- Average attendance rate of 88% - 2% lower than Australian average
- Attendance level dropped from 65% to 63% from 2014 to 2017
- 2017, 91% students began Year 7 with acceptable attendance rate but by Year 10 dropped to 85%
- Correlation between ICSEA score and attendance rate and level
- No correlation between attendance rate and level and remoteness
- Limited correlation between attendance rate and level and school size
- Students at educational risk progressively increased from 2014 to 17 with increases noted in each risk
- Student engagement data largely student centric

# What does the attendance and engagement data show?

## Recommendation:

1. Consider analysing absence data for students in each Years 7 to 10 according to educational risk categories - particularly in schools with a low ICSEA rating — with a view to establishing initiatives that make a positive difference for disadvantaged students

## 2. Is student attendance managed effectively?



## 2.1: Is student attendance recorded, monitored, reported and analysed?

### Findings:

- DoE had appropriate systems
- However, our testing identified:
  - inconsistencies in the way parents were contacted
  - students incorrectly recorded as absent
  - inconsistencies in the way categories of absence were interpreted and recorded
- DoE reports to ACARA in compliance with national requirements but only reported one figure for attendance in annual reports
- Absence information available to DoE management but no evidence it was reviewed regularly or systematically



## 2.1: Is student attendance recorded, monitored, reported and analysed?

### Recommendations:

2. Reinforce the use of documentation and self-directed online training modules to increase the data reliability
3. Consider using attendance information to measure DoE and school performance
4. Report attendance data for each Year group in annual reports
5. Analyse and report absence information on a regular and systemic basis

## 2.2: Is student attendance data used to inform decisions and responses?

### Findings:

- Process to identify, monitor, report and analyse student attendance is mainly focused on individual students with an intervention escalation process to resolve attendance issues
- DoE collects information on attendance and absence but no evidence data used to effectively monitor trends or establish improvement targets for students at highest educational risk
- Increasing levels of student risk from Years 7 to 10 for schools with a low ICSEA score

## 2.2: Is student attendance data used to inform decisions and responses?

### Recommendations:

6. Define performance measures and targets for student attendance
7. Monitor trends and establish improvement targets for students at highest educational risk
8. Identify and manage risks to student attendance for Years 7 to 10

## 2.3: Does DoE involve parents and others in improving student attendance?

### Findings:

- *Education Act 2016* defines obligations and responsibilities for parents
- DoE recognises the value of community engagement in improving student attendance and engagement
- Little information documented in school improvement plans involving parents in improving attendance (or engagement)
- DoE has recognised and taken action to take advantage of the value the community and other stakeholders can provide

### Recommendation:

9. Consider inclusion of targets in school improvement plans for improved parent, community and stakeholder engagement

## 2.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student attendance?

### Findings:

- No evidence the review of the school improvement framework would specifically identify performance targets or measures for attendance
- Although attendance rates are reported, performance targets or measures for attendance were not

### Recommendations:

10. Complete the implementation of the initiative to review and revise school improvement framework
11. Include development of performance targets and measures as part of the revision of school improvement framework
12. Include targets and measures for attendance rates and levels for Years 7 to 10 in improvement plans

## 2.5: Does DoE have strategies for managing and improving student attendance?

### Findings:

- 2018-2021 Strategic Plan was high level reference document
- Each school to prepare its own school improvement plan
- Targets not consistently included in school improvement plans
- ASPIRE designed to enhance the monitoring and reporting, but:
  - no targets for attendance levels in improvement plans identified
  - information was not disaggregated by Year group

### Recommendation:

13. Continue to develop ASPIRE focusing on further detail and setting targets for improved attendance in Years 7 to 10.

### 3. Is student engagement managed effectively?

## 3.1: Is student engagement recorded, monitored, reported and analysed?

### Findings:

- Staff record engagement information and monitor student engagement through *edi* - but student centric
- Programs designed to improve students engagement
- DoE undertakes annual satisfaction surveys
- Statewide summary report to Executive, but Years not disaggregated
- No definition of performance measures/targets, specific to students
- DoE has interventions to minimise impacts of student disengagement



## 3.1: Is student engagement recorded, monitored, reported and analysed?

### Recommendations:

14. Develop system to identify signs of disengagement and tools to be used by schools for structured analysis of information
15. Consider undertaking further work to clarify and agree on the information to be recorded, reported and monitored regarding student engagement and establishing improvement targets
16. Undertake a benefits analysis to determine the level of success of interventions and determine where best to invest funds using measurable performance targets

## 3.2: Is student engagement data used to inform decisions and responses?

### Findings:

- There was an absence of engagement performance data regularly reported and analysed to inform decision-making
- However, the lack of performance data does not mean decisions are not being made to improve engagement

### Recommendation:

17. Consider how information regarding student engagement can be monitored and analysed to better support DoE and school decisions and responses

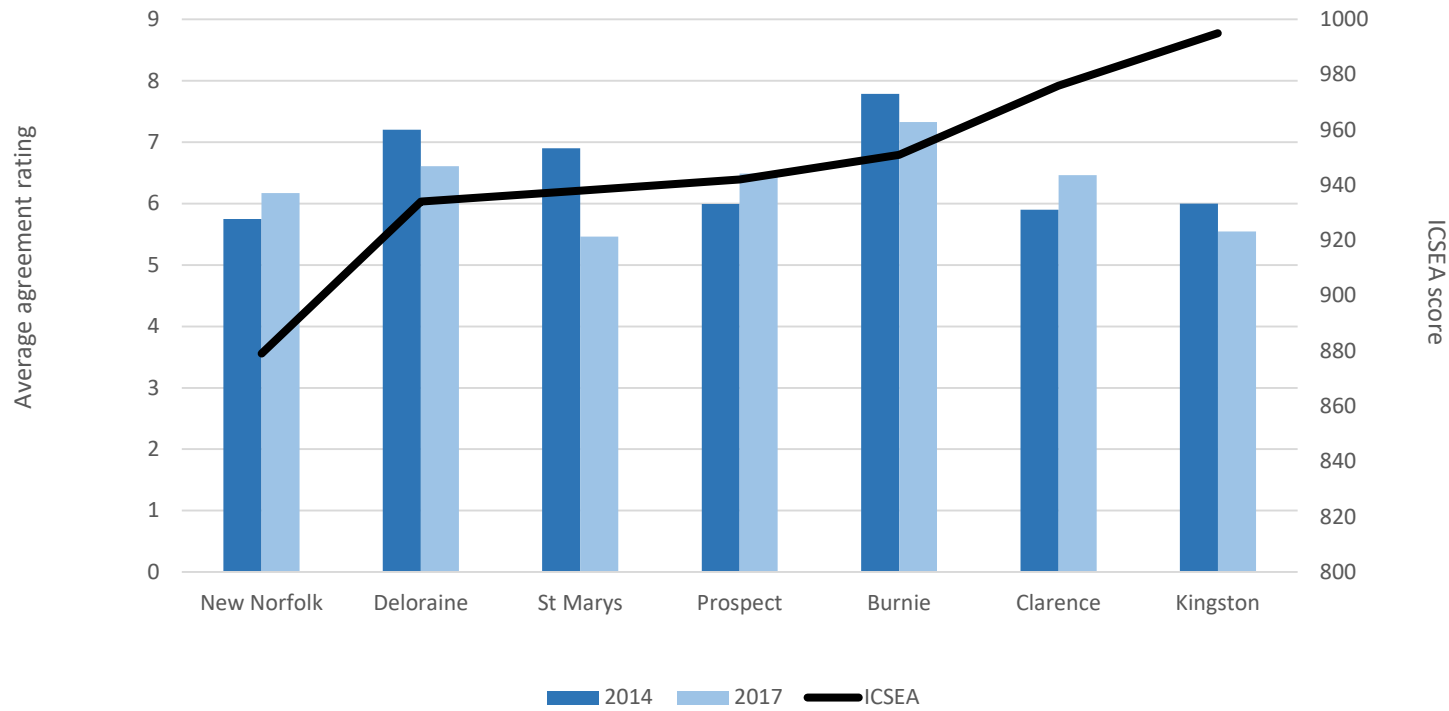
### 3.3: Does DoE involve parents and others in improving student engagement?

#### Findings:

- Act, and policies and procedures, all recognise need for collaboration between parents and educators
- DoE involves parents and others in improving student engagement by providing information to encourage communication between parents, teachers and students

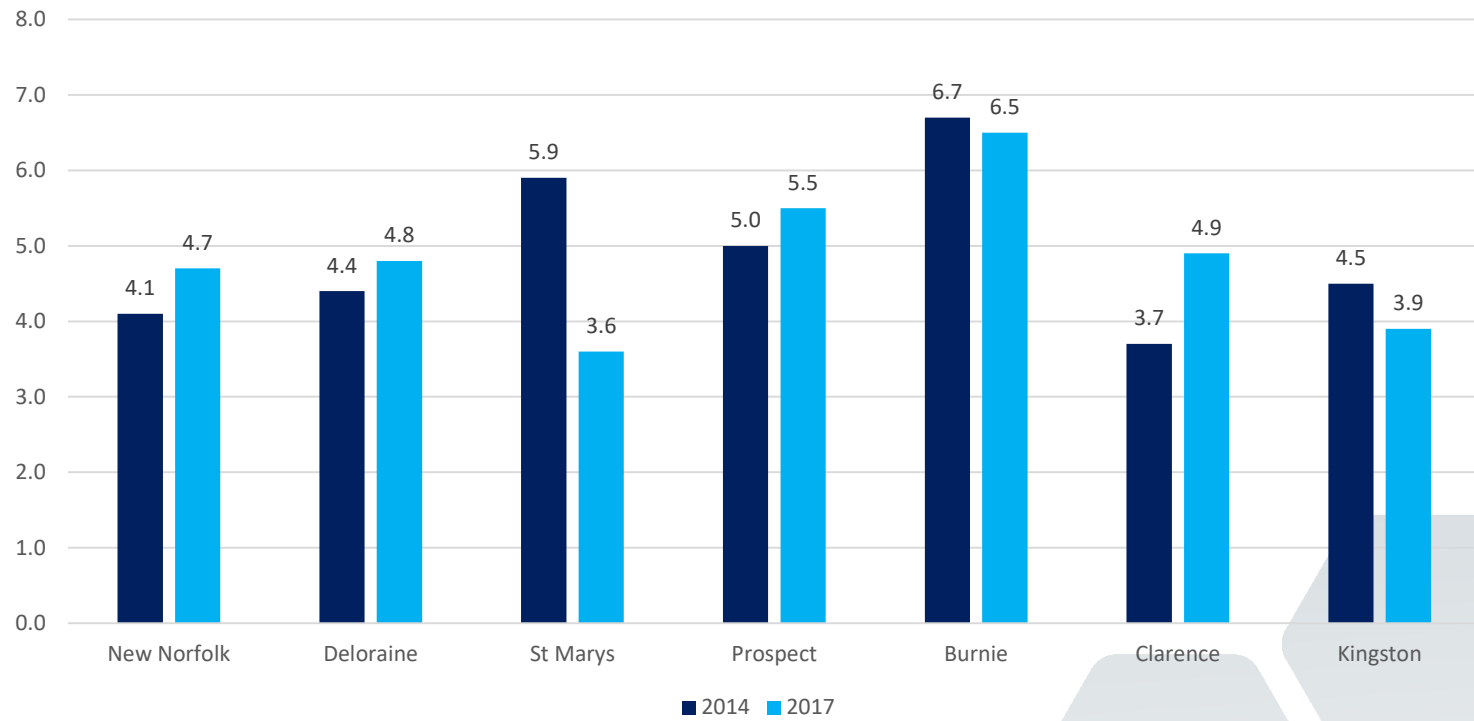
# 3.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student engagement?

Responses to DoE surveys in 2014 and 2017 sorted by ICSEA score



### 3.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student engagement?

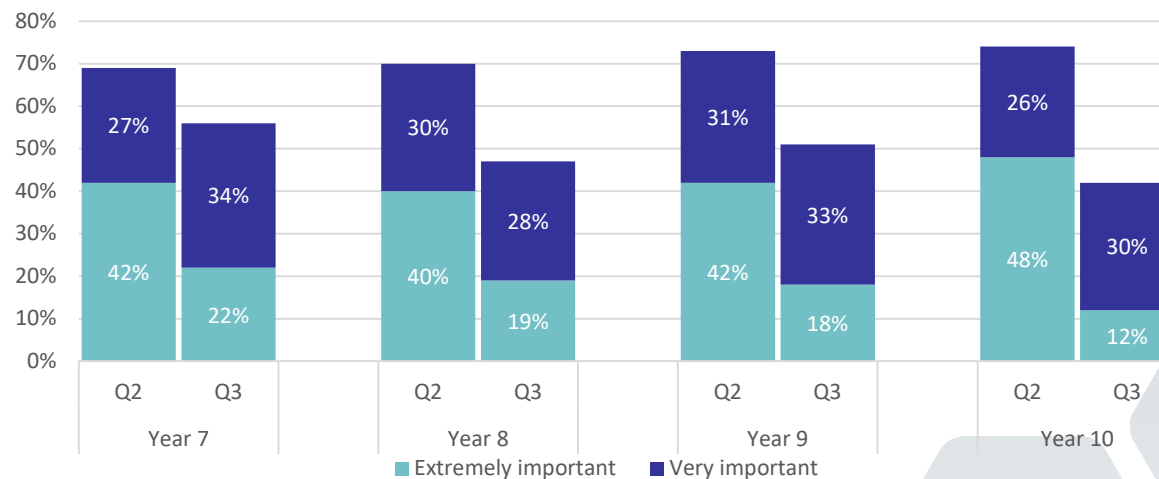
Student responses to DoE Q7, which asked students if behaviour is well managed at their school



## 3.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student engagement?

Results of two TAO questions on learning styles:

- How important is it to have curriculum delivered in ways that accommodate your learning style?
- Is your learning style accommodated - does your teacher teach in ways that work for you?



## 3.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student engagement?

### Findings:

- As noted in Section 3.1, no definition of performance measures, or targets, specific to student engagement found
- Feedback from students showed only 60% felt fully encouraged to do their best
- More Year 7 students felt their learning styles were accommodated than Year 10 students
- NSIT provides a guide for schools developing their school improvement plans

## 3.4: Does DoE support and measure improvement in student engagement?

### Recommendations:

18. Schools use information that identifies issues that most affect student engagement – school improvement plans
19. Align satisfaction survey questions to issues that most affect student engagement – for determining actions
20. Investigate schools with improving survey results with a view to formally share strategies
21. Ensure teachers are provided with professional learning and development - focussing on maintaining engagement
22. Provide opportunities for less effective teachers to observe more effective teachers



## 3.5 Does DoE have strategies for managing and improving student engagement?

### Findings:

- While DoE has developed a risk management policy, it has yet to develop a risk register identifying risks to student engagement

### Recommendation:

23. Ensure the development of a risk register that identifies risks to student engagement and which also develops mitigation strategies for any identified risks

# Comments received

## Department of Education:

- Pleased to note Report's conclusion that key elements are in place within policies, processes and systems
- Report recognises key findings that:
  - DoE has established appropriate systems and processes
  - DoE involves parents and others in improving student engagement
  - Attendance results for Tasmania not significantly different from any other jurisdictions
- Recommendations are noted and will be taken into consideration

Questions?

