



Public Sector
Commission

Agency Capability

Department of Education

Executive summary



December 2024

Introduction

The Department of Education (the agency) was reviewed under the [Agency Capability Review Program](#) from February to October 2024.

The agency is entrusted with providing public education for students in Western Australia from Kindergarten to Year 12. In addition to delivering a system of public schools, the agency is responsible for the regulation and funding of all Catholic and independent schools in the state.

The agency intersects with the human services sector (which includes the Western Australian public health system, mental health, police, justice and community services) across various critical areas. It has a key role to play in significant policy matters and broader government priorities to support children and young people.

It is important for the agency to develop its internal capability to deliver on a substantial government reform agenda. The signing of the [Western Australia Bilateral Agreement](#) under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement in September 2024 marks a significant achievement for the agency and will see an estimated \$1.6 billion in additional investment in public education from 2025 to 2029. The agency is actively working to design and implement initiatives to support its capability and capacity to deliver on expanded requirements now and into the future.

At a time when escalating complexities in student needs are impacting the school environment, the review explores the importance for the agency to understand and articulate its role as system leader, the role of schools and the role of teachers. The agency also needs to set a clear future vision and direction and make explicit the expectations of schools. This is needed to lead through difficult workforce and student support challenges.

The agency is commended for its approach to oversight of schools through the Public School Review process as well as its effective incident management, robust infrastructure planning and high functioning Audit and Risk Committee.

With the awareness and commitment of the executive leadership team, the agency can drive the changes and improvements required in line with this report.

About the Agency Capability Review Program

The Agency Capability Review Program takes a comprehensive whole of sector approach to improvement. It sets standards based on a clear understanding of what constitutes a high performing public sector agency in Western Australia.

Reviews provide valuable insight into how agencies can improve and deliver the quality of services expected of them. Reviews also contribute to the development and improvement of the sector.

Reviews are conducted by independent lead reviewers who have public administration expertise and experience. Lead reviewers are supported by senior executives from the government sector who are co-opted for each review as well as the Agency Capability Review team at the Commission.

Each review is conducted against a standardised [Agency Capability Framework](#) of the 5 most significant areas of public sector management and administration.

The framework is relevant and applicable to all agencies regardless of remit, purpose, functions and services.

The framework supports agencies to ask 4 key questions:

- What are we meant to achieve?
- How well are we currently doing it?
- How do we know?
- Where can we do better?

Agency background

The agency is responsible for providing public education in WA as well as Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. It engages with the Australian Government and other Australian jurisdictions on matters related to education including workforce, public education trends, and curriculum development and delivery.

The agency oversees a system of 831 public schools, educating nearly 330,000 students every day across 8 education regions. It is also responsible for regulating and distributing government funding to non-government schools, comprising 162 Catholic and 155 independent schools. The agency is WA's largest public sector employer with 44,000 full time equivalent staff, of whom 96% are employed by schools. The agency's budget for 2024-25 is \$6.8 billion.

The agency was led by Director General Lisa Rodgers PSM until September 2024, with Jim Bell acting Director General until Jay Peckitt formally commenced in the role on 11 November 2024. The Director General is supported by 3 deputy directors general and 8 executive directors.

The structure has 9 divisions:

- Schools
- Student Achievement
- Education Business Services
- Communications
- Professional Standards and Conduct
- Strategy and Policy
- System Response and Transformation
- Teacher Registration
- School Curriculum and Standards

Ministers

The agency reports to the Hon Dr Tony Buti MLA, Minister for Education, who also holds the Aboriginal Affairs, and Citizenship and Multicultural Interests portfolios; the Hon David Templeman MLA, Minister for International Education, who also holds the Culture and the Arts, Sport and Recreation, and Heritage portfolios; and the Hon Sabine Winton MLA, Minister for Early Childhood Education, who also holds the Child Protection, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, and Community Services portfolios.

Boards and committees

The agency provides support and remuneration to the following:

- Teacher Registration Board of WA: Administers a scheme to ensure people registered as teachers are suitably qualified, suitably proficient in English, and fit and proper
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Board: Develops and maintains the Kindergarten to Year 12 curriculum and syllabuses; delivers assessments, examinations, reporting and certification; and monitors and reports on standards of student achievement
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Curriculum and Assessment Committee: Oversees the development, review and recommendation of curriculum and assessment policies to ensure they meet educational standards and align with educational goals
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Standards Committee: Ensures student achievement standards are maintained and consistently met through oversight of performance, assessment integrity and certification processes
- Non-Government Schools Planning Advisory Panel: Provides advice to the Minister for Education on planning proposals to establish non-government schools or to make significant registration changes

The agency provides additional support to the following:

- Non-Government School Registration Advisory Panel: Reviews decisions by the agency or Minister about the registration of non-government schools
- Western Australian Higher Education Council: Discusses strategic matters of mutual interest between universities and the WA Government
- Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council: Comprises key education stakeholders and community representatives to address priority issues for rural and remote education

Future operating environment

The agency is expected to navigate a dynamic and evolving operating environment over the next 3 to 5 years. It will need to align with WA and Australian Government priorities that focus on improving education outcomes, addressing workforce shortages and enhancing student wellbeing. Reforms like the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034 will guide funding and strategic efforts.

Developing a forward thinking strategic vision with appropriate resourcing will be essential to deliver these priorities. The agency will need to shift from a reactive to a proactive stance to meet the needs of students and the expectations of the community and government.

There is also a growing expectation for the agency to engage in meaningful and collaborative partnerships with other public sector agencies and community organisations including adopting a multidisciplinary approach to meet the diverse needs of students.

Continued investment in technology, such as Program Kaartdijin (a cloud based software solution), will be crucial. With rollout to schools due for completion by mid-

2026, Kaartdijin will integrate new systems to support student safety, wellbeing and administrative efficiency while addressing legacy system challenges.

A focus on intelligence and data will be critical to support evidence based decision making and translate intent into actionable results. The agency will need to drive a strong data and technology agenda to move from collecting data to leveraging the substantial wealth of the data it holds.

The review process

The review was led by Jo Gaines as the independent lead reviewer with support from Mark Burgess as senior reviewer co-opted from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Commission's Agency Capability Review team.

Jo is an experienced organisational leader and strategic policy director. She was Deputy Chief of Staff for 9 years to Mark McGowan, the former Premier of Western Australia and Leader of the Opposition.

Jo is Executive Director of Gaines Advisory, Chair of GESB, Deputy Chair of CinefestOZ, and a Non-Executive Director of DevelopmentWA and Australian Vanadium Limited.

She has worked across all levels of government, the private sector and non-government organisations to drive reforms in a diverse range of fields including economic diversification, energy, child protection, health, contracting and procurement, and climate change. She was a leader in the development of the WA Recovery Plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jo led the review of the [Mental Health Commission](#) for the Agency Capability Review Program.

The review looked at all 21 capabilities and identified 3 lines of inquiry for in-depth investigation. This involved further engagement and investigation with the agency, and research into how practices may be improved and capability gaps addressed. The review also identified areas of strength that the agency and sector can build on and share.

The review process involved 8 months of exploration, research and collection of information:

- A comprehensive review was undertaken of a large number of published and unpublished documents.
- 60 external stakeholder meetings were held and submissions received.
- 24 public school site visits were conducted and focus groups were held with 35 school leaders across all 8 education regions.
- A corporate executive self assessment was conducted against the framework.
- 2 half day corporate executive workshops were held.
- Interviews were conducted with each corporate executive member.
- Meetings, demonstrations and workshops were held with staff, management tiers and internal groups and advisory bodies.
- 2 comprehensive capability questionnaires were used to gauge staff perceptions of the agency's capabilities.
- Staff were invited to share what the agency does well, what can be improved and ideas for improvement through a 'Have Your Say' tool.

Key observations

- The agency is operating in one of the largest geographic education jurisdictions in the world. With growing community expectations of the role of schools, the agency continues to deliver a high standard of education across the state while navigating an increasingly complex operating environment.
- Agency staff are aware of and deeply committed to the purpose of educating children and young people. However, there is no longer term strategic plan to give direction to the workforce during times of change, to position the agency itself and its employees for the future. Without a clear and long term strategic direction, the agency risks operating in a reactive, incident management mode and be ill prepared for the challenges on its horizon.
- The agency's lack of future focus is hindering its strategic policy capability, and impacting its understanding of long term policy requirements and its role in developing or responding to whole of government reforms. While the agency established a Strategic Policy Unit in 2020 to build its strategic policy capability and provide advice to senior decision makers on system wide issues, the unit has yet to fulfil its mandate.
- The agency has commissioned and invested significant resources in a number of reviews in recent years to strengthen its capability and capacity. However, because it has failed to embed many of the recommendations provided, it continues to encounter the challenges that these reviews were intended to address. The agency needs to actively consider implementing recommendations from these past reviews including the Statewide Services Form and Function Review and the Strategic Review of the WA Department of Education.
- It is critical for the agency to establish a clearer understanding of the role of central services in setting the strategic direction and supporting the system; the role of schools in providing a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes educational excellence and student wellbeing; and the role of teachers to support and provide education approaches and collaborate with others to address students' holistic needs.
- The agency needs to adopt a system approach to delivering additional support to students in areas such as mental health and behaviour. Without appropriate allied professional support for students, teachers are navigating complex issues they have not been adequately trained to deal with. The lack of a system approach has resulted in schools developing their own solutions, particularly in regional WA, with services provided in an ad hoc manner in schools. A multidisciplinary approach is needed to support student learning and wellbeing to provide every student with a pathway to a successful future. This requires collaboration across agencies and with non-government service providers.

- The Independent Public Schools initiative introduced in 2009 was effective in ensuring schools had increased decision making responsibilities while remaining part of the system. However, the agency seems reluctant to make explicit its expectations of schools to the point where many believe they are autonomous from the system. There needs to be more balance between system leadership and the flexibility in decision making given to schools. This is to ensure the agency exercises its authority when required and provides greater formal direction in a targeted way to implement important strategic policy initiatives.
- Alongside greater flexibility in decision making at the local level are associated increases in administrative functions and paperwork. The agency would benefit from understanding where there are inefficiencies and duplications in functions, and seek to centralise some of these processes. Backend processes around recruitment could be an early opportunity in this regard.
- The increasingly complex needs of students have expanded teacher workload and are resulting in high levels of stress and burnout, with attraction and retention affected. In the last 3 years more than 5,200 teachers have left the agency. While workforce challenges are well documented, the agency has struggled to take a strategic approach to workforce planning. It needs to develop a whole of agency workforce strategy aligned to its future strategic direction. Workforce planning efforts should be informed by and help inform workforce planning occurring across the human services sector to facilitate adequate and appropriate supply pipelines.
- The particular workforce challenges faced by schools in regional WA are a longstanding problem. More effort is needed to build long term workforce capability in regional and remote WA with a priority to grow a workforce from the regions' local populations.
- Public sector agencies perceive a reluctance by the agency to engage proactively with them on significant policy matters and broader government priorities to support children and young people. The agency's reputation and achievement of outcomes are at risk if the entire system does not participate collaboratively to achieve agreed government priorities.
- School principals are requesting greater guidance, support, resources and tools to help them run their schools. There is a role for the agency to provide operational guides, templates and 'playbooks' to ensure the implementation of effective teaching strategies and efficient student services, and greater support to deliver effective business planning and leadership.

Lines of inquiry

The review identified 3 lines of inquiry to inform areas of focus for the agency and direct performance improvement efforts.

Line of inquiry 1: Exercising the system leadership role to make explicit expectations on key policy and strategy matters

The agency is responsible for the overall functioning of the state's public education system, ensuring education outcomes and strategic objectives are achieved. However, the review found a lack of system leadership in setting a strategic direction and making expectations explicit when required. The corporate executive appears reluctant to use its authority to direct schools or require action on key policies and strategies even when this would benefit the agency.

While each school is charged with responding to its own unique context, all schools are required to operate within consistent governance, accountability and support structures provided by the agency. The review highlighted the importance of school based staff feeling they belong to both their school and the system. The absence of clear system leadership impacts this sense of belonging. Three key factors appear to contribute to executive leaders' reluctance to make expectations explicit: lack of clarity about the difference between autonomy and being autonomous; the need for greater system leadership; and the need for better change management and communications.

Lack of clarity about the difference between autonomy and being autonomous

The Independent Public Schools initiative, announced in 2009, aimed to give principals and their school communities greater flexibility and authority over decisions in their schools, including on recruitment and financial matters. However, this brings with it additional workload from related administrative processes. The intention was to review this after the Independent Public Schools initiative was introduced but this has not occurred.

In providing greater autonomy to public schools, there is a need to clarify the difference between more autonomy and being autonomous. Schools are not autonomous; they operate within a broader system that is structured and supported to provide access to high quality education. It is evident that the corporate executive has withdrawn from setting adequate direction and expectations for schools because of not wanting to infringe on school autonomy.

Providing evidence based direction to schools bolsters their ability to make informed decisions at a local level that are aligned with broader education priorities. In supporting school autonomy, the agency will benefit from reviewing where the workload associated with increased school level decision making could be transferred into the appropriate agency business units.

The need for greater system leadership

In governing complex education systems, there is a need for the agency, led by the corporate executive, to play its role as system leader. This includes providing strategic direction and leadership, monitoring and accountability, and advice and

support. The system leadership is responsible for setting the purpose, vision and strategic direction of the public education system to ensure alignment with government priorities.

There is a strong sense that schools do not feel adequately supported by the agency, with many principals requesting more support. Newer principals, especially those in regional and remote WA find it difficult to access support. Many school staff expressed a desire for greater leadership on matters where there is a strong evidence base. Making expectations explicit can reduce cognitive load for principals and teachers, allowing them to focus on contextualising endorsed approaches rather than reinventing the wheel. Without sufficient leadership and support, more autonomy can lead to increased stress, burnout and attrition.

It is important to acknowledge there are pockets of good leadership support in place, such as the Leadership Institute which offers professional learning for leaders. The review also heard consistently of the positive impact of Collegiate Principals who provide valuable support and act as sounding boards, trusted sources of feedback and problem solving partners.

The need for better change management and communications

The corporate executive is clear that central direction is not the most effective way to drive improvement. Rather an approach that activates the professional commitment of staff is required. While motivating staff in this way is effective, making expectations explicit is required over key policy and strategic matters. Better communications and change management are needed to ensure schools are informed and supported during changes. Feedback to the review suggested initiatives and programs are introduced without adequate communication to ensure schools are informed and supported as changes are implemented. There is benefit in a standardised process for piloting new initiatives and programs including a clear commitment to some form of consultation before proceeding. This should not undermine central leadership's role as the owner of the initiatives and programs but rather support good communications and change management processes with schools to ensure expectations are explicit and understood where required.

Taking on the role of system leader requires the agency to be more explicit about what should be implemented by schools when there is a strong evidence base to support improved education outcomes. Clarifying and communicating roles and responsibilities with schools can enable expectations to be better understood and may reduce workload and duplication of effort for school leaders.

Line of inquiry 2: Responding to escalating complex student needs at a system and cross government level

Escalating complexities in the operating environment are resulting in schools and their staff taking on more responsibilities. Societal changes have disrupted family and community structures and led to increased complexity and frequency of domestic issues including drug use, homelessness and violence. These issues, exacerbated by rising living costs, have led to more students showing signs of developmental delay, poor mental health and wellbeing, and antisocial behaviour.

Over the last decade, more WA children have presented with serious mental health concerns, often in crisis and with increased complexity.

Principals agree that early intervention, diagnosis and support are crucial, supporting the need for more services in primary schools. Research demonstrates infants and children with mental health issues need early treatment for the best outcomes. Failure to act early leads to compounding costs, with recent Australian data estimating the cost of later intervention at \$15.2 billion a year.

The impact on teachers and schools

The increasing presence of students with complex needs, coupled with inadequate resourcing and support, has profoundly impacted schools' ability to provide for student learning needs and the safety of the school communities. Teachers are now teaching basic self management skills and providing emotional and behavioural support at a level previously managed by families and communities. This shift has increased workloads for school staff and placed significant demands on teachers who should focus on delivering high quality education and supporting general student wellbeing.

The review heard schools are compelled to implement their own support initiatives to respond to these challenges. The expectation for schools to deliver additional health and social services without adequate system support is a significant challenge that is straining resources and increasing workload and burnout of school staff who lack specialised expertise. This is particularly pronounced in regional and remote communities where schools are often the only trusted place for families, especially those with children at heightened risk of not meeting their education outcomes. Students not regularly attending school risk missing out on critical stages of education development, leading to long term learning challenges and fewer education and employment opportunities. Schools are often where the need for support first becomes apparent, and where early intervention and support programs can be provided.

The review identified 2 levels of response to address escalating complex student needs:

1. System response
2. Joined up human services response

System response

The agency could benefit from consensus on the roles of central services, schools and teachers in supporting student wellbeing, engagement and inclusion. There are mixed messages and lack of concrete acknowledgement from central leadership about the role of schools in dealing with consistent and complex student challenges. While the need for early identification and appropriate referrals are recognised, the processes to support a response is not sufficiently developed or communicated to schools. This affects the availability and consistency of advice when schools seek assistance.

School leaders reported challenging situations in schools where they have had to develop sophisticated approaches to support students. Ideally, schools can provide

multidisciplinary student support services but many have limited access to student services staff and allied professionals, and limited knowledge of referral pathways. School leaders have made some progress using their budgets but there is little centralised support and coordination.

The executive leadership has several levers to respond to escalating complex student needs including strategic policy, workforce planning, infrastructure, and data and information sharing.

While the agency's new Student Wellbeing and Care – Future Directions strategy supports student mental health and wellbeing, it is seen as aspirational and not addressing practical implementation. The agency would benefit from developing a roadmap for implementing Future Directions, prioritising schools requiring additional support and resources especially in regional and low socioeconomic areas.

Allied professionals play a critical role in providing student support services. At a local level, children and parents can access some appointments with service providers in schools, with many principals using staffing budgets to employ social workers, counsellors and speech and occupational therapists, or allowing access to external providers on school sites. Many schools also employ attendance coordinators and student support officers. School leaders report the level of coordination required in supporting these services needs better recognition and resourcing.

Integrating services, as described above, in schools can be more efficient and cost effective. However, many schools lack the necessary facilities to do this effectively. Ensuring the education system is fit for purpose includes considering emerging needs and practices in the design and construction of facilities and identifying where existing assets can be used. The 22 Child and Parent Centres at or near primary schools in WA's regional and low socioeconomic areas are a good example of schools and partners working together to respond to children's needs through a holistic place-based approach.

Joined up human services response

The agency intersects with the human services sector at critical areas. Better outcomes for students could be achieved through greater engagement with these agencies and partners. However, the broader human services sector has intricate systemic issues that cannot be tackled in isolation. The agency needs to work with other agencies and delivery partners to build a joined up response that includes data sharing agreements.

An overarching partnership agreement and framework can strengthen collaboration between agencies and delivery partners. Formalising a joined up approach in this way could realise significant benefits including greater clarity on the roles of key government agencies and a practical, implementable and affordable way forward for both the government and community.

Line of inquiry 3: Developing a deliberate, future focused workforce strategy to address significant attraction and retention issues

The agency faces significant challenges in attracting and retaining teachers, with over 5,200 teachers leaving in the last 3 years. Teacher resignations have more than doubled, with 1,263 resigning last year compared to 604 in 2019. Attrition rates are particularly high among younger teachers, with 61.2% of those leaving under 30 years old. The ageing workforce, with one-third aged 55 and older, exacerbates the issue as retirements have increased by 15% from 2020 to 2023. The complexity of the school environment, increasing workloads, and additional challenges in regional and remote WA are key factors affecting attraction and retention.

The agency's focus on having a teacher in every classroom on the first day of each school year detracts from longer term workforce planning and ignores the need for a broader range of occupational groups and capabilities in schools and central services. Despite warnings from previous reports about impending workforce issues, there has been limited strategic thinking and forward planning to address these matters. Public pressure and media scrutiny on teacher shortages have led to short term reactive measures instead of a cohesive approach to drive long term strategic solutions.

A strategic approach to address attraction and retention challenges

The agency would benefit from developing a future focused workforce strategy to address significant attraction and retention issues. This strategy should be informed by a stocktake of workforce recommendations from previous reports and an analysis of agency workforce data to understand composition, skills, competencies, performance levels and turnover rates. Understanding the agency's workforce profiles is essential for planning.

While there are multiple factors compounding attraction and retention challenges and workforce supply, the following 4 key areas would benefit from prioritisation in the development of a system wide workforce strategy:

1. Building professional capability
2. Responding to workload pressure in an increasingly complex environment
3. Targeting regional WA
4. Influencing the supply pipeline

These focus areas can help the agency prioritise effort and resources to address specific challenges and opportunities in the education workforce.

1. Building professional capability

A deliberate approach to identifying and building professional capability ensures the agency has the right people with the right skills in the right jobs to meet current and future needs. The agency needs to understand the skills required in its workforce and how to build these capabilities. It needs to better understand the skills required to support schools and reconfigure its workforce accordingly. Developing future leaders through strategic workforce planning and initiatives is critical. The Leadership Institute provides well regarded leadership development for principals and aspirant leaders but additional development and support in financial literacy,

budget management, human resources management, risk and governance are needed for principals and corporate services staff in schools.

2. Responding to workload pressure in an increasingly complex environment

Increasing workloads have led to high attrition rates and difficulties in attracting new staff. Workload pressure can be attributed to increased administrative burden and the complexity of the working environment. The agency is aware of these issues and is taking steps to address psychosocial safety and workload pressure through initiatives such as the [Principal health and wellbeing strategy 2023–2027](#) and [Staff health and wellbeing strategy 2023–2027](#).

3. Targeting regional WA

The agency faces unique service delivery challenges in regional and remote WA. A specific regional workforce plan is needed to address these complexities as remuneration and incentives have not sufficiently attracted staff to regional areas. The agency should continue to review its attraction and retention measures and consider initiatives beyond remuneration. This includes building local workforces through tertiary education and training in regional WA. The system wide workforce strategy should consider how the agency can work with tertiary institutions such as WA universities and TAFEs to deliver courses in regional areas to develop local talent.

4. Influencing the supply pipeline

The agency has taken steps to address issues with the teacher supply pipeline, such as recruiting internationally qualified teachers and using Teach for Australia, but a more strategic approach is needed. Elevating the teaching profession and promoting it as a rewarding career can help turn around decreasing enrolment trends at universities. The number of allied professionals and student services positions in schools has not kept pace with increasing student needs, leading to workload pressure and attraction and retention issues. The agency should consider how it can influence the supply of allied professionals and work with relevant agencies to meet future workforce needs.

The role of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers is highly valued and stakeholders express a desire for this role to be elevated. Establishing career pathways for these staff can help attract and retain them given their important role in building cultural responsiveness and fostering relationships between schools and Aboriginal families. The agency is working on a proposed career pathway for First Nations people and this is a positive step forward.

An evidence based, data driven and system wide workforce strategy and implementation plan is required to meet the agency's evolving workforce needs. The workforce profile should be fit for purpose and support the agency to deliver on its remit and priorities. Success can be achieved when there is a sustainable supply of skilled professionals and the agency is viewed as an attractive place to work.

Areas of strength

Highlighting and sharing areas of good practice are important elements of the Agency Capability Review Program.

Sharing good practice contributes to the development of the WA public sector. The body of knowledge and data collected through reviews will be used to create a bank of valuable learnings and resources which can be used to develop solutions to common problems and shared across the public sector.

The following 4 are examples of where the agency has demonstrated areas of strength that can contribute to learnings for other agencies:

Area of strength 1: Audit and Risk Committee governance

An independent and objective approach to audit and risk is crucial for public sector agencies to maintain integrity and impartiality. This can be achieved through an internal audit function that operates without bias and is supported and monitored by an internal audit and risk committee.

Central to its integrity and risk approach is the agency's Audit and Risk Committee. It provides independent advice and assurance to the Director General on agency governance, risk, control and compliance; internal audit activities; and annual financial reporting responsibilities and obligations.

The agency has proactively implemented stringent and effective governance structures to enhance the committee's independence and objectivity beyond the minimum requirements of government. Before the 2019 government policy (Treasurer's Instruction 1201: Internal Audit) requiring public sector audit and risk committees to have external chairs, the previous Director General sought out professionals with extensive experience to sit on the committee including representatives from other jurisdictions. Today, all members are external to the agency and the committee is independent from agency management.

There is an open flow of information and support between the committee, agency and Office of the Auditor General. The Director General is a standing attendee, and a representative of the Office of the Auditor General is a meeting observer. It is expected the agency's Chief Audit Executive attends every meeting, with other attendees invited on request. The structure, governance and resources enhance the independence and objectivity of the committee, strengthening the agency's approach to integrity and risk. This approach can serve as a model for other public sector agencies.

Area of strength 2: Public School Review process

Public School Reviews are integral to the School Improvement Model and provide a consistent oversight mechanism to assess school performance and support improvement. A documented framework, developed through extensive consultation and based on international best practice, ensures system wide consistency.

The review process, evolving since the 1990s, began with a pilot in 2018 to standardise self assessment and validation processes for all schools. In 2020,

review intervals of one, 3 or 5 years were introduced based on findings and needs. The Director General can initiate a Commissioned Review Process at any time where concerns are raised.

Public School Review directors report outcomes to schools, communities and education directors and quarterly summaries are provided to corporate executive and the Audit and Risk Committee. Schools not meeting standards within a year are tracked, and recurring issues trigger a 'Next Steps' process involving senior leaders to allocate necessary support for improvement.

The Office of the Auditor General's [Effectiveness of Public School Reviews](#) performance audit published in May 2023 noted the review program's effectiveness in helping schools improve performance. The audit also identified 5 areas for improvement, emphasising that the reviews do not provide complete oversight of all aspects of individual school performance and administration. The agency accepted the areas for improvement and is implementing them.

Review findings focus on schools rather than individual leaders, ensuring whole school accountability and improvement. New principals receive support to understand review recommendations, and a principal induction program includes guidance on preparing for and responding to reviews. Schools can also proactively request expedited reviews if significant changes occur.

With 831 schools across WA, each led individually, the Public School Review process provides a consistent assessment of performance and serves as a model for other agencies with a statewide workforce to maintain effective oversight.

Area of strength 3: Incident management

Stakeholders consistently recognise the agency's ability to respond to incidents. Structures, resources and expertise ensure schools have reliable support for complex, high risk situations. The Incident Support Unit, established in December 2020, is central to coordinating responses to serious incidents like bushfires, security threats and natural disasters including Tropical Cyclone Seroja in 2021.

The approach to incident management prioritises schools remaining operational, students and staff being safe, and teaching and learning being maintained during and following incidents. This approach is relevant and transferable to other public sector agencies or sectors with devolved governance structures such as health, social services and community safety where local flexibility and central oversight must work together to achieve system wide goals.

The Incident Support Unit developed an Incident Management Framework, including a practical and scalable Incident Management Manual, to guide staff on roles and responsibilities during incidents. The manual covers school specific scenarios like threats, natural disasters and accidents. The unit monitors the Online Incident Notification System daily and provides reports to the executive leadership team and briefings to ministers.

The unit collaborates with external stakeholders, including Catholic Education WA and the Association of Independent Schools of WA, during emergencies and hosts a

Critical Incident Review group to ensure a holistic approach to incidents affecting child health, safety and wellbeing.

The unit partners with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, WA Police Force and Department of Justice to enhance coordination and response.

Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) ensure cooperation and information sharing as well as align responses to incidents and emergencies. For example, there is a MOU with the WA Police Force to work on matters of mutual interest including addressing safety and growing community concern on violence in schools.

The unit also develops and delivers training (including hostage and large natural disaster simulation exercises in schools) in conjunction with WA Police and Department of Fire and Emergency Services to build incident management capabilities.

Area of strength 4: Infrastructure planning

Stakeholders recognised the agency for its strategic and future focused approach to managing its land and building assets in a fiscally constrained environment. The agency manages the public sector's largest physical asset portfolio with infrastructure assets valued in excess of \$15 billion. School buildings range from those over 100 years old to brand new. Approximately half of the schools are more than 50 years old. From 2017 to January 2023, the agency opened 34 new schools, spent \$2.1 billion on infrastructure through the Asset Investment Program, completed a \$200 million maintenance program and spent \$605 million on school maintenance.

With a significant shift in market stability in mid-2021 that saw a rise in building material costs and decline in labour availability, the agency reviewed and re-prioritised future planning through a strategic lens and enhanced asset management oversight by establishing stringent committee structures. The Asset Investment Program Steering Committee was established to ensure alignment with the Department of Treasury's Strategic Asset Management Framework and oversee controls to manage time, scope, quality, cost and risk.

The agency restructured its infrastructure division in 2023 to focus on strategy, planning, governance and reporting. The agency undertakes strategic planning initiatives for its physical assets. Its Strategic Asset Plan is high quality and commended for its environmental scanning and demand forecasting to inform asset investment planning to 2033. The agency conducts annual assessments of all schools projected to have accommodation and enrolment pressures in the next 10 years. It also conducts strategic risk assessments and scenario planning for upcoming school projects in partnership with the Department of Finance.

The agency is recognised for undertaking review, reform and strategic planning initiatives in response to challenging infrastructure market conditions. These initiatives strengthen the agency's ability to meet future service delivery requirements in schools across WA and are a good example of managing a large infrastructure portfolio in a complex environment.



We are proud to deliver our services from Whadjuk Noongar boodja. We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders, Traditional Owners and Custodians from the many land and language groups of Western Australia.

Copies are available in different formats on request.

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