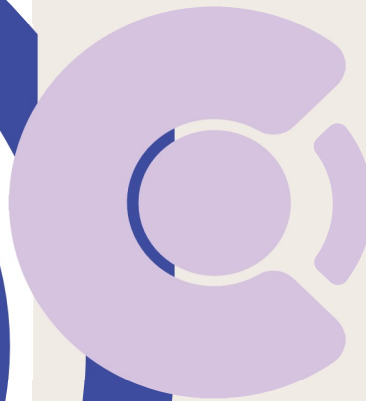


**3P ADVISORY**  
PEOPLE · PLACE · PURPOSE

# SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN TASMANIA

Community  
Consultation  
Summary Report

September 2024





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The authors acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the original and ongoing custodians of lutruwita / Tasmania, its lands, seas and waterways, where the palawa/pakana have cared for their children and families since the beginning of time. The authors pay respect to Elders past and present and acknowledge the privilege and opportunity for all cultures to live, work, play and learn on this land.



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# DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared by 3P Advisory for the Department of Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) Tasmania. The work has been collated from a variety of sources including information and data generally available in public domains, reputable organisational resources, and original material and insights from informants, relevant at the time of writing (September 2024). Care has been taken to verify accuracy and reliability; however, this report does not constitute professional advice, and readers should apply their own judgement in its use. 3P Advisory does not give any warranty or accept any liability concerning the contents of this work.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Tasmanian children begin their educational journey as early as four years old, entering Kindergarten. From the age of five until they turn eighteen, they spend over 55 per cent of their time at school. However, the experiences of children and young people within Tasmania's education system – and how much time they have spent at school at the completion of their education, can vary widely.

3P Advisory were engaged to better understand the experiences of Tasmanians with school attendance and did this through extensive in-person and online consultation across the state. This involved speaking to Tasmanian students, families, teachers, communities and DECYP system stakeholders. From this, Tasmanians have shared their personal and professional knowledge, experiences, insights, and stories regarding school attendance and engagement. Participants shared stories of success, growth, and achievement, providing insights into the factors that supported these positive outcomes. Many people also opened up about the challenges and barriers they had faced personally or observed in students, friends, families, or within a range of inter-related systems more broadly. Overwhelmingly, this process has highlighted significant impact of both educational and non-educational factors, emphasising the interconnectedness in their influence on school attendance and student engagement.

Within school environments, students identified the importance of having trusted and consistent relationships with teachers and peers, access to engaging and relevant content and subject options, and a supportive school culture with a meaningful connection between home and school. In contrast, high teacher workloads, staffing inconsistencies, increasing diversity and complexities of needs among students and families, and rigid policies and systems were all identified as creating significant challenges in meeting the individual needs of students. There are also powerful examples of where these challenges have been overcome in some schools or communities through approaches which embrace flexible and individualised interpretations and application of support options, fostering strong community partnerships, and investing in the well-being of both students and educators.

Beyond the classroom and school environments, perceptions of the influential factors differed among informant groups. While some suggested that low attendance might stem from a lack of value placed on education, discussions with families and young people revealed a different reality. Many families spoke of their struggles in balancing their child's school attendance with daily challenges around the most basic of human needs, such as housing instability, food insecurity, mental and physical health issues, and family violence.

This reveals a gap between the perceptions about engagement and attendance held by some and the realities faced by Tasmanian families and students. Many families spoke of how much they value an education and what that provides for their children. But they also spoke about the challenge to engage fully with the education system while navigating day-to-day safety, survival, and wellbeing challenges. For a growing number of Tasmanians, the hierarchy of basic and essential needs of life have become their day-to-day reality, creating challenges for traditional institutions like education. As a result, these individuals struggle to fully engage with and benefit from educational opportunities.

Additionally, families and young people frequently discussed their efforts to reengage with the education system following periods of ill-health, hardship or disadvantage, only to find a system stretched to capacity and lacking the flexibility to accommodate or address their needs. They shared stories of struggling to catch up on missed content, feeling overwhelmed by the additional effort required to get back to the same level as their peers – particularly when many were still dealing with the same challenges that led to their absence initially.

Staff also highlighted their difficulties in supporting students with these circumstances, expressing a desire to work one-on-one with those who had been absent or to adjust the curriculum to mitigate the impact of their absences, but often constrained by their workloads and course requirements.

Both families and staff identified how this situation perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage and inequity, further widening the gaps for those already facing poor health and hardship. Young people strongly emphasised the "snowball" effect this had – creating cycles of overwhelm and anxiety, further increasing the challenge and load of self-supporting their reengagement with education.

Overall, the most dominant theme emphasised both directly and indirectly throughout the consultation was the importance of recognising and understanding that Tasmanian children and families exist outside the siloed sectors of government agencies and their departments. Their day-to-day experiences are made up of interconnected educational and non-educational factors that can either enable or hinder their attendance and engagement. These are not easily linked back to one dominant sector, program, region, or demographic. Instead, these speak to the importance of the connections between all people, places, and systems that students and families interact with throughout their education – and the experience they have of these as they navigate through them. Importantly, these factors are not a determinant or indicator of the value a student or family places on their education, rather, an indicator of life's circumstances that at times overtake the ability to engage in the traditional classroom model of learning.

The overarching suggested approach that was identified as most effective enabler for meaningful improvement in attendance and engagement – was a flexible and holistic approach that accommodates the diverse needs and experiences of each Tasmanian child and family. This approach is most successful when people, services and systems have the authorising environment to prioritise strengthening connections and collaboration at individual, community and systemic levels. This in turn leads to supportive and effective educational environments that are tailored to the unique circumstances of each child, family, and Tasmanian community.

# Context for the stakeholder engagement

The 3P Advisory stakeholder engagement consultation was commissioned by DECYP in response to a range of challenges in declining school attendance, currently being faced by all Australian jurisdictions.

School attendance is a critical determinant of both socio-economic and academic outcomes. Regular attendance ensures that students gain the full benefits of education, including knowledge acquisition, social development, and preparation for future employment. In Australia, including Tasmania, challenges around school attendance have a significant focus, due to their long-term implications on both individual and societal levels. Tasmania has the added challenge of a long history of lower retention and attainment rates coupled with challenges in the adult population of low levels of functional literacy. While unemployment rates are currently low, Tasmania's participation rate is also lower than the national average, an indicator of the challenges that many Tasmanians face in getting and keeping a job. Therefore, any marked reduction in school attendance requires a high priority of attention to ensure all children and young people are able to access the quality of life a good education underpins.



## Significance of school attendance

Consistent school attendance is a cornerstone of educational success. It is well-documented that students who attend school regularly are more likely to perform well academically, develop essential life skills, and secure stable employment in the future. Conversely, absenteeism can lead to lower academic achievement, increased rates of disengagement and reduced employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

In Australia, the significance of regular school attendance is recognised within national education frameworks, which emphasise the need for inclusive and accessible education for all students. This includes the Australian Curriculum, Australian Qualifications Framework and the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework. However, despite these efforts, Australian jurisdictions, including Tasmania, continues to face challenges in achieving consistent attendance across various demographics and regions.

## School attendance trends and challenges

National statistics reveal that while the majority of Australian students maintain regular attendance, there are notable disparities across states and territories, and among different socio-economic and cultural groups. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) highlights that attendance issues are more prevalent in remote areas, among Indigenous students, and in communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

## The Tasmanian context

Tasmania faces unique challenges that contribute to lower school attendance rates. The state has consistently recorded some of the lowest attendance figures in Australia, particularly in rural and remote resources.