

NSW public school student retention rates: 2019 to 2023



Introduction

This fact sheet provides an overview of student apparent retention rates (ARR) at NSW Government schools.

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

All apparent retention rates in this fact sheet are for full-time public school students.

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

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

This results in a rolling break in the time series for apparent retention rates because enrolments increased in 2020 due to the revised counting rule. For example, the Year 7 to 12 ARR for 2023 was calculated using the Year 7 2018 cohort count (excluding all ungraded students), and Year 12 2023 cohort count (including ungraded students in mainstream schools). 2025 will be the first year when ARR for Year 7 to 12 uses the same counting rules for both Year 7 and Year 12 data.

The tables in this fact sheet present 2020 retention rates with both previous and revised counting rules while only showing the 2021, 2022 and 2023 retention rates with revised counting rules. Rates from 2021 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years.

Year 7 to 10 by statistical areas

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 98.0%, 3.6 percentage points lower than in 2022.
- Apparent retention rates in 2023 were 100% or more in most Sydney SA4 groups.
- The SA4 group with the highest ARR was Sydney-Inner (107.1%), with the second highest being in Sydney-South (105.1%).
- The highest ARR outside of Sydney was South East NSW (93.5%).

Table 1: Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2019–2023

SA4 Groups	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)	2022 (revised)	2023 (revised)
Sydney-North	105.9	105.3	106.8	102.1	99.9	100.0
Sydney-Inner	111.5	106.9	109.0	106.9	106.1	107.1
Sydney-South	107.6	106.9	109.8	108.6	103.8	105.1
Sydney-South West	109.2	108.0	114.4	109.6	108.3	103.5
Sydney-West	104.5	104.1	109.3	106.5	107.3	103.5
Sydney-North West	102.6	102.6	105.8	102.6	100.0	96.1
North East NSW	100.4	99.0	102.7	98.9	98.7	92.5
North West NSW	94.5	96.9	102.6	99.4	97.3	92.1
South West NSW	95.1	93.1	97.0	94.2	94.8	90.9
South East NSW	100.2	99.1	105.1	102.8	100.4	93.5
Central Coast, Newcastle	100.0	98.0	101.9	100.7	99.5	93.0
NSW	102.8	101.9	106.1	103.1	101.6	98.0

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid-year census, 2019–2023.

Year 10 to 12 by statistical areas

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 66.3%, 0.2 percentage points lower than in 2022.
- Sydney-North and Sydney-West experienced increases from 2022 of 3.8 and 2.4 percentage points, respectively. North West NSW and Sydney-South West also experienced smaller increases from last year, of 0.6 and 0.4 percentage points (respectively).
- The largest decrease in Sydney was Sydney-South, falling from 75.5% in 2022 to 73.2% in 2023. South East NSW experienced the largest decrease outside of Sydney, falling from 56.7% in 2022 to 54.3% in 2023.
- The rates in Sydney areas contrast strongly with those in the rest of NSW. The lowest ARR for a Sydney area (71.6% for Sydney-South West) was 17.1 percentage points higher than the highest rate outside of Sydney (54.5% for Central Coast, Newcastle).

Table 2: Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2019–2023

SA4 Groups	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)	2022 (revised)	2023 (revised)
Sydney-North	89.6	89.5	90.5	89.6	85.8	89.6
Sydney-Inner	84.5	83.9	85.4	83.8	80.3	79.3
Sydney-South	79.7	80.1	81.7	80.7	75.5	73.2
Sydney-South West	74.8	75.0	77.7	78.3	71.2	71.6
Sydney-West	77.7	78.3	80.1	79.9	74.4	76.8
Sydney-North West	79.4	80.8	82.5	80.1	76.4	74.9
North East NSW	58.7	59.0	60.7	57.1	52.9	52.7
North West NSW	54.7	53.3	55.8	54.5	47.6	48.2
South West NSW	58.3	57.5	59.8	56.9	52.0	51.6
South East NSW	59.5	62.4	65.5	61.5	56.7	54.3
Central Coast, Newcastle	61.4	62.8	64.8	60.3	55.9	54.5
NSW	70.6	71.3	73.3	71.5	66.5	66.3

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid-year census, 2019–2023.

Year 7 to 12 by statistical areas

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 68.3%, a decrease of 2.2 percentage points from 70.5% in 2022.
- ARRs for all SA4 groups decreased compared to 2022, except for Sydney-West which increased from 81.3% in 2022 to 81.9% in 2023.
- Sydney-North (91.4%) was the SA4 group with the highest ARR in NSW in 2023. The highest ARR outside of Sydney was South East NSW (55.8%).
- As with the Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate, all rates in Sydney areas are considerably larger than those in the rest of NSW. There was a 21 percentage point gap between the smallest Sydney rate (76.8% for Sydney-North West) and the largest rate outside of Sydney (55.8% for South East NSW).

Table 3: Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rates (%) by SA4 Group, 2019–2023

SA4 groups	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)	2022 (revised)	2023 (revised)
Sydney-North	96.1	94.7	95.8	94.9	91.7	91.4
Sydney-Inner	96.4	92.8	94.4	93.5	87.6	84.7
Sydney-South	86.4	85.6	87.2	86.8	83.0	79.5
Sydney-South West	81.4	81.5	84.4	85.5	81.4	78.4
Sydney-West	82.4	82.0	83.8	83.5	81.3	81.9
Sydney-North West	82.1	82.2	83.9	82.1	80.8	76.8
North East NSW	59.9	61.5	63.2	57.3	54.4	52.1
North West NSW	52.4	51.5	53.9	51.4	48.9	47.9
South West NSW	56.7	55.1	57.3	54.1	50.5	48.7
South East NSW	61.6	63.9	67.1	61.6	59.6	55.8
Central Coast, Newcastle	61.3	61.8	63.7	60.4	57.0	54.9
NSW	73.4	73.6	75.6	73.5	70.5	68.3

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid-year census, 2019–2023.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 98.7%, a decrease of 6.5 percentage points from 105.2% in 2022.
- The Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 40.6%, a decrease of 0.5 percentage points from 41.1% in 2022.
- The Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2023 was 43.6%, a 2 percentage point decrease from 45.6% in 2022.

Table 4: Apparent retention rates (%) for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, 2019–2023

Retention period	2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)	2022 (revised)	2023 (revised)
Year 7 to 10	103.6	102.4	110.9	107.4	105.2	98.7
Year 10 to 12	45.1	45.2	49.1	46.8	41.1	40.6
Year 7 to 12	48.1	47.2	51.2	48.5	45.6	43.6

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid-year census, 2019–2023.

Apparent retention by gender

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- All cohorts experienced a decline in apparent retention rates in 2023, except for Year 10 to 12 boys, which rose from 61.7% in 2022 to 62.0% in 2023. The largest decline was for Year 7 to 10 boys which decreased by 5.7 percentage points from 2022.
- Beyond Year 10, there is a clear difference in apparent retention by gender, with girls more likely to remain at school until Year 12 than boys.
 - For Year 10 to 12 and Year 7 to 12, the apparent retention rate for girls was 8.9 and 6.4 percentage points higher than for boys (respectively).
 - For Year 7 to 10 however, the apparent retention rate for boys was 1 percentage point higher than for girls.

Table 5: Apparent retention rates (%) by gender, 2019–2023

Retention period		2019	2020	2020 (revised)	2021 (revised)	2022 (revised)	2023 (revised)
Year 7 to 10	Boys	103.0	102.2	107.7	105.1	104.2	98.5
	Girls	102.7	101.6	104.4	101.0	99.0	97.5
Year 10 to 12	Boys	65.3	66.1	68.7	66.6	61.7	62.0
	Girls	76.1	76.7	78.0	76.7	71.7	70.9
Year 7 to 12	Boys	67.7	68.3	71.0	68.6	66.4	65.2
	Girls	79.4	79.1	80.4	78.8	74.8	71.6

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid-year census, 2019–2023.

Explanatory notes

1. The census of students is conducted on the first Friday of August each year.
2. Reporting on apparent retention rates (ARRs) based on small numbers of students can lead to unreliable ARR estimates. The areas reported in the above tables combine ABS SA4 areas to ensure the underlying number of students is sufficiently large to generate reliable estimates.
3. ARRs can exceed 100% due to factors including student migration from interstate and overseas and between school sectors.
4. Only full-time students are counted in the calculation of full-time apparent retention.
5. Prior to 2020, students in mainstream support classes were reported as 'ungraded' and therefore were not counted in the calculation of ARRs.
6. Sydney-Inner includes enrolments from Sydney Distance Education High School.
7. Norfolk Island Central School is not included in this fact sheet, but between 2016 and 2021 the school's enrolments have been included in the ABS Schools Australia publication. This may lead to a slight difference in reported figures from 2016 to 2021. From 2022, Norfolk Island Central School is no longer managed by NSW.
8. Data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) 2021. ASGS Statistical Area 4s (SA4) have been combined into 11 groups for reporting of department data.
9. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students are identified based on responses to the school enrolment form. This information may change throughout an individual's schooling.
10. Reporting by non-binary gender is not possible due to system limitations.

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