

AT A GLANCE · ADVOCACY DOCUMENT FOR MPS & DECISION-MAKERS

SENATE INQUIRY · THE NATIONAL TREND OF SCHOOL REFUSAL (2023)

Where are we at?

14 recommendations. None clearly done.

In 2023 a Senate inquiry into "school can't" — school refusal — made 14 recommendations. The Australian Government responded in April 2024. Two years on, this is a plain-language scorecard of where they stand, and which government is actually responsible for each. We offer it constructively, to help an inquiry's findings reach families.

🕒 Government response April 2024 · this scorecard reflects the public evidence at July 2026

THE HEADLINE

How the 14 recommendations stand

The Government **noted 12 of the 14** and supported just two "in principle" — largely because schools are run by the states. Here's our read of where delivery actually sits.

0

Clearly delivered
(see the AERO note)

7

Partial or underway,
mostly via the
schools agreement

6

Not known nationally
— sit with the states,
no national reporting

1

Not actioned — more
mental-health visits

Source: Australian Government response to the Senate inquiry, 11 April 2024 (12 recommendations noted; Recommendations 1 and 7 supported in principle). AERO's 2025 outputs on school attendance are titled *Rapid Literature Review* (Barriers to School Attendance; Interventions to Promote School Attendance), AERO, Jan 2025. Status assessments are Helen's Way's, based on the sources listed below.

THE HEART OF IT

No one government owns school refusal

The inquiry heard from families across the country and agreed the problem is real and growing. The Government agreed with almost none of the recommendations outright — not because it disputed the problem, but because responsibility is **split between the Commonwealth and the states**. When everyone is partly responsible,

no one is answerable for the whole. That accountability gap is why so much of this scorecard reads "not known."

The Government's own framing: working "with states and territories and the non-government education sector is key to implementing effective and holistic policy improvements."
(Australian Government response, April 2024)

THE SCORECARD

All 14, and who is responsible

Each recommendation, the government it was addressed to, and where it appears to stand on the public evidence.

1

Task AERO with research into school refusal's drivers, prevalence and effective interventions

Education Ministers. The inquiry asked AERO to **research** the drivers, prevalence and the cost and effectiveness of interventions. What exists — two January 2025 documents titled *Rapid Literature Review*, plus an explainer — reviews existing studies rather than conducting that research, so the research itself has not been done.

Partial

Why Recommendation 1 is "partial," not "delivered"

The inquiry asked Education Ministers to task AERO with **research** into the drivers and prevalence of school refusal in Australia and the cost and effectiveness of interventions. In January 2025 AERO published two documents each titled *Rapid Literature Review*, plus an explainer. A rapid literature review scans what existing studies already say — it is not new research measuring Australian prevalence or evaluating intervention effectiveness, and it did not engage the students, families and schools living school refusal. On the public record, **that research has not been done.**

2

Develop national resources on school refusal for parents, teachers and school leaders

Commonwealth + states. Resources added to the Student Wellbeing Hub, but the "nationally agreed definition" this depends on isn't settled.

Partial

3

Review child-health screening to identify autism, ADHD, learning disorders and anxiety earlier

State & territory. Runs through each state's health system; no national reporting on whether reviews have happened.

Not known

4

Identify students at risk of withdrawal earlier, especially at transition points

State & territory. The schools agreement pushes attendance-data use + a Unique Student Identifier, but practice at transition points is uneven.



Partial

5

Increase flexibility of delivery — mainstream, distance, home and alternative settings

State & territory. Set jurisdiction by jurisdiction; no national picture of what has changed.



Not known

6

Develop a national action plan on school refusal, informed by the AERO research

Education Ministers. No standalone plan published; related pieces folded into the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement instead.



Partial

7

Improve awareness of school refusal in the health sector and embed it in training

Commonwealth + states. Referred teacher-standards changes to Education Ministers; concrete outcome not confirmed.



Partial

8

Review and soften attendance messaging so it doesn't alienate families

State & territory. A local matter; no national account of which systems have updated their messaging.



Not known

9

Develop resources for trauma-informed practice in schools

State & territory. Wellbeing-workforce reforms are related, but dedicated trauma-informed resources aren't clearly evident nationally.



Not known

10

Develop family-engagement resources and specialist family-engagement staff

State & territory. Referred to state authorities; no national account of dedicated family-engagement staffing.



Not known

11

Build schools' capacity for reasonable adjustments under the Disability Standards

State & territory. This is our territory — Helen's Way Priority 3 and the DIAP/audit. "Better measures" promised; adjustment capacity is the live gap.



Partial

12

Identify and promote effective education–health collaboration models

Commonwealth + states. The schools agreement commits to school–health links; specific models not yet named.

**Partial**

13

Fund an independent peer-support network / "one-stop shop" for families

Commonwealth. No funded national network evident; families still rely on volunteer-run groups like School Can't Australia.

**Not evident**

14

Increase subsidised mental-health visits for students experiencing school refusal

Commonwealth. Better Access remains capped at 10 sessions a year; no school-refusal-specific increase has been made.

**Not actioned**

Sources: Senate inquiry recommendations (2023); Australian Government response (Apr 2024); AERO school-attendance rapid literature reviews (2025); Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034; Better Access initiative (Dept of Health). Full list below.

WHO HAS TO ACT**The responsibility, mapped**

This is the reason so much reads "not known" — half the list belongs to eight separate state and territory systems.

MOSTLY THE STATES**State & territory governments**

7 recommendations · 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11

Schooling delivery, health screening, attendance practice, flexibility and reasonable adjustments. Where progress is least visible nationally.

THE FEDERAL LEVER**The Commonwealth**

5 recommendations · 2, 7, 12, 13, 14

National resources, health-sector awareness, education–health models, a funded support network, and Medicare mental-health visits. The two most tangible — 13 and 14 — are the clearest gaps.

ACTING TOGETHER**Education Ministers**

2 recommendations · 1, 6

An AERO literature review (not the research Rec 1 sought) and a national action plan (not delivered as a standalone plan). Routed in practice into the schools agreement.

THE CLEAREST GAPS**Three things that would make a difference now**

Each is well within reach — and two of them the Commonwealth can act on by itself.

No plan

A dedicated national plan (Rec 6)

The evidence exists and the schools agreement is moving — join them up into a dated national plan on school refusal, so the research reaches classrooms.

No network

Fund family support (Rec 13)

A funded, independent "one-stop shop" and peer network for families — instead of leaving it to volunteers. A Commonwealth-clear ask with no visible action.

10 → ?

More mental-health visits (Rec 14)

Better Access is still capped at 10 subsidised sessions a year. For students in crisis, that runs out fast. This is the one clearly not-actioned item.

WHAT WE'RE ASKING

How to turn the inquiry into change families feel

The findings are agreed. What's needed now is for the responsible governments to close the loop.

1 Education Ministers: deliver the dedicated national action plan on school refusal (Rec 6), built on AERO's evidence and with dates attached.

2 The Commonwealth: fund the independent family support network (Rec 13) and increase subsidised mental-health visits (Rec 14).

3 States & territories: report publicly on the recommendations you own (3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11) so progress can be seen, not guessed.

4 Everyone: build schools' capacity for reasonable adjustments (Rec 11) — the same reform Helen's Way pursues in Priority 3.

An inquiry is only as good as what happens next.

Families told the Senate what they needed, and the Senate agreed. Two years on, one recommendation is done and the rest are split across governments that each point to the others. Naming who is responsible is the first step to getting it done — together.

[See the reform agenda](#)

[Read the full status check & sources](#)

SOURCES

- Senate Education and Employment References Committee, *The National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters* (August 2023) — the 14 recommendations.
- Australian Government response to the report, 11 April 2024 — 12 recommendations noted; Recommendations 1 and 7 supported in principle; the state/territory-responsibility framing.

3. Australian Education Research Organisation (2025) — *School attendance: New insights; Interventions to promote school attendance and address student absence; Barriers to school attendance and reasons for student absence*.
4. Australian Government, *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034* — attendance target, wellbeing workforce, Unique Student Identifier, students-with-disability measures, school–health links.
5. Better Access initiative (Department of Health) — 10 subsidised sessions per year.
6. Status assessments are Helen's Way's, based on the sources above, verified July 2026. Where a recommendation sits with the states and there is no national reporting, we say "not known nationally" rather than "not done."