



Report 22: 2022-23 | 24 May 2023

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

# Effectiveness of Public School Reviews



## Office of the Auditor General Western Australia

### **Audit team:**

Jason Beeley  
Rowena Davis  
Jayd King  
Sana Qambari

National Relay Service TTY: 133 677  
(to assist people with hearing and voice impairment)

We can deliver this report in an alternative format for those with visual impairment.

© 2023 Office of the Auditor General Western Australia.  
All rights reserved. This material may be reproduced in whole or in part provided the source is acknowledged.

ISSN: 2200-1913 (print)  
ISSN: 2200-1921 (online)

***The Office of the Auditor General acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.***

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

---

## **Effectiveness of Public School Reviews**

---

Report 22: 2022-23  
24 May 2023

This page is intentionally left blank



**THE PRESIDENT  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**THE SPEAKER  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL REVIEWS**

This report has been prepared for submission to Parliament under the provisions of section 25 of the *Auditor General Act 2006*.

Performance audits are an integral part of my Office's overall program of audit and assurance for Parliament. They seek to provide Parliament and the people of WA with assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector programs and activities, and identify opportunities for improved performance.

This audit assessed if the Department of Education's public school review process provides an effective basis for oversight of school performance and supporting school improvement.

I wish to acknowledge the entity's staff for their cooperation with this audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Spencer'.

CAROLINE SPENCER  
AUDITOR GENERAL  
24 May 2023

# Contents

- Auditor General’s overview..... 3
- Executive summary ..... 4
  - Introduction ..... 4
  - Background..... 4
  - Conclusion ..... 5
- Findings ..... 6
  - PSRs help schools self-reflect and identify opportunities to improve ..... 6
  - PSRs provide valuable insights and oversight, but do not offer complete assurance on school performance..... 7
  - To effectively encourage school improvement, reviews need to be timely and linked to appropriate support .....11
- Recommendations..... 15
  - Response from the Department of Education .....16
- Audit focus and scope ..... 17
- Appendix 1: Full response from the Department of Education..... 18

## Auditor General's overview

WA has over 800 public schools, and no two of them are the same. They are spread across the State and the students and communities they serve are highly diverse. Schools work within a system of connected autonomy which gives principals significant freedom to run their schools in a way that they consider best meets the needs of their students and local communities. At the same time, all schools are connected as part of the education system, with the Department of Education providing support, guidance and oversight of school performance and management.



The Public School Review (PSR) process is a key part of the Department's oversight toolkit. PSRs are a three-year cycle of self-assessment and review for schools to reflect on their performance, identifying both commendations and recommendations against six domains.

While there are improvements that could be made to how the PSRs are managed and the support that schools receive after a review, my Office found that the Department has designed and implemented a generally effective program of structured review for the education system. PSRs help schools identify ways to improve their performance, and the model has been broadly accepted by schools and stakeholders. My team observed sincere dedication and effort (by both departmental PSR staff and principals engaged as peer reviewers in the process) to help schools self-reflect to change behaviour and practices for the benefit of their students.

PSRs do not provide complete oversight of all aspects of individual school performance and administration, therefore it is important that the role of PSRs is not overstated and that expectations are managed accordingly among stakeholders. The Department also has the opportunity to better support schools to address identified shortcomings, and to better use the information that PSRs provide in examining performance across the education system.

I am pleased that the Department has accepted all recommendations from this audit to better support schools to meet the needs of their students and communities.

# Executive summary

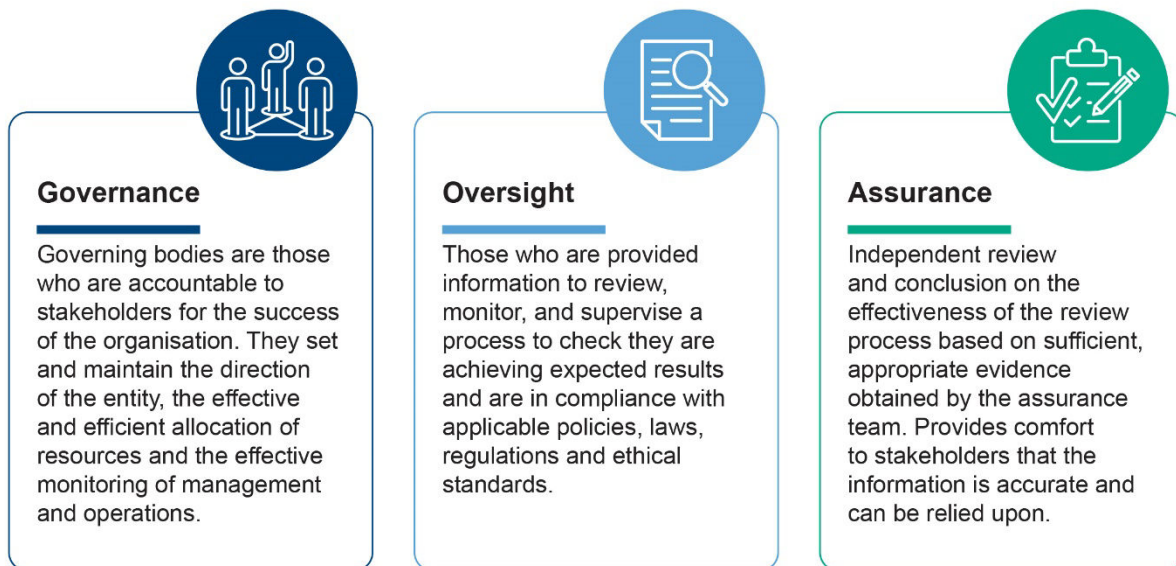
## Introduction

This audit assessed if the Department of Education's (Department) public school review (PSR) process provides an effective basis for oversight of school performance and supporting school improvement.

As part of this audit we conducted a survey, receiving responses from 111 principals, 101 teachers, 16 school board members and 64 parents. A selection of results are included throughout the report.

## Background

Governance, oversight and assurance all play an important role in capturing how schools are performing. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they are distinctive and have their own role to play. Figure 1 explains these roles at a high-level.



Source: OAG based on The IIA's Three Lines Model<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1: High level description of governance, oversight and assurance, which can and should occur at the school and the system level by the Department**

The PSR process is a three-year cycle of self-assessment and review. Schools reflect on their performance against six domains, outlined in a Department document called the Standard, and provide evidence to support their assessment.

The self-assessment and supporting evidence is assessed by a PSR team, consisting of a PSR director (department employee) and principal peer reviewer (from a similar school). The review team checks the self-assessment and supporting evidence prior to conducting a day long site visit at the school. During the site visit, the PSR team meets with the school principal and any other individuals nominated by the principal. Based on this, the PSR team determines if the school has met the requirements of each domain:

- if the Standard is not met for one or more domains, the school will be re-assessed on the unmet domains in one-year

<sup>1</sup> The Institute of Internal Auditors Australia, ['The IIA's Three Lines Model'](#), IIA Australia, July 2020, accessed 16 May 2023.



- if all domains are met, the school will undertake the next full PSR review in three to five years.

The results of a review are captured in a PSR report, which outlines commendations of current performance, recommendations for improvement as well as the timeframe of re-review for the school. The report is provided to the Deputy Director General Schools, other Departmental senior management and the schools, who are required to place it on their website so the community can access it.

The PSR process started in 2018 and underwent a significant review in 2020. In 2020, the Department introduced differentiated review cycles so schools may be reviewed every one, three or five years, depending on whether they have met or exceeded pre-defined criteria. As the current model was implemented in 2020, there has not been a full cycle of PSRs.

## Conclusion

PSRs are a largely effective way to help schools self-reflect and identify areas for improvement. The process provides a structure to guide schools and the regular cycle of reviews encourages continuous improvement. PSRs provide the Department and school communities with information and insight into individual school performance. However, it is important to recognise they do not cover all aspects of a school's operation, and results are not routinely drawn together to provide a system-wide view of performance.

We found the support available to schools to make improvements after their reviews is only partly effective. Accessing the right support when needed to improve school performance can be difficult because it is often not clear to principals what support is available or where to find it. To maximise the improvements that can come from PSRs, the Department needs to make sure all schools are reviewed in a timely manner and are provided supported when needed.

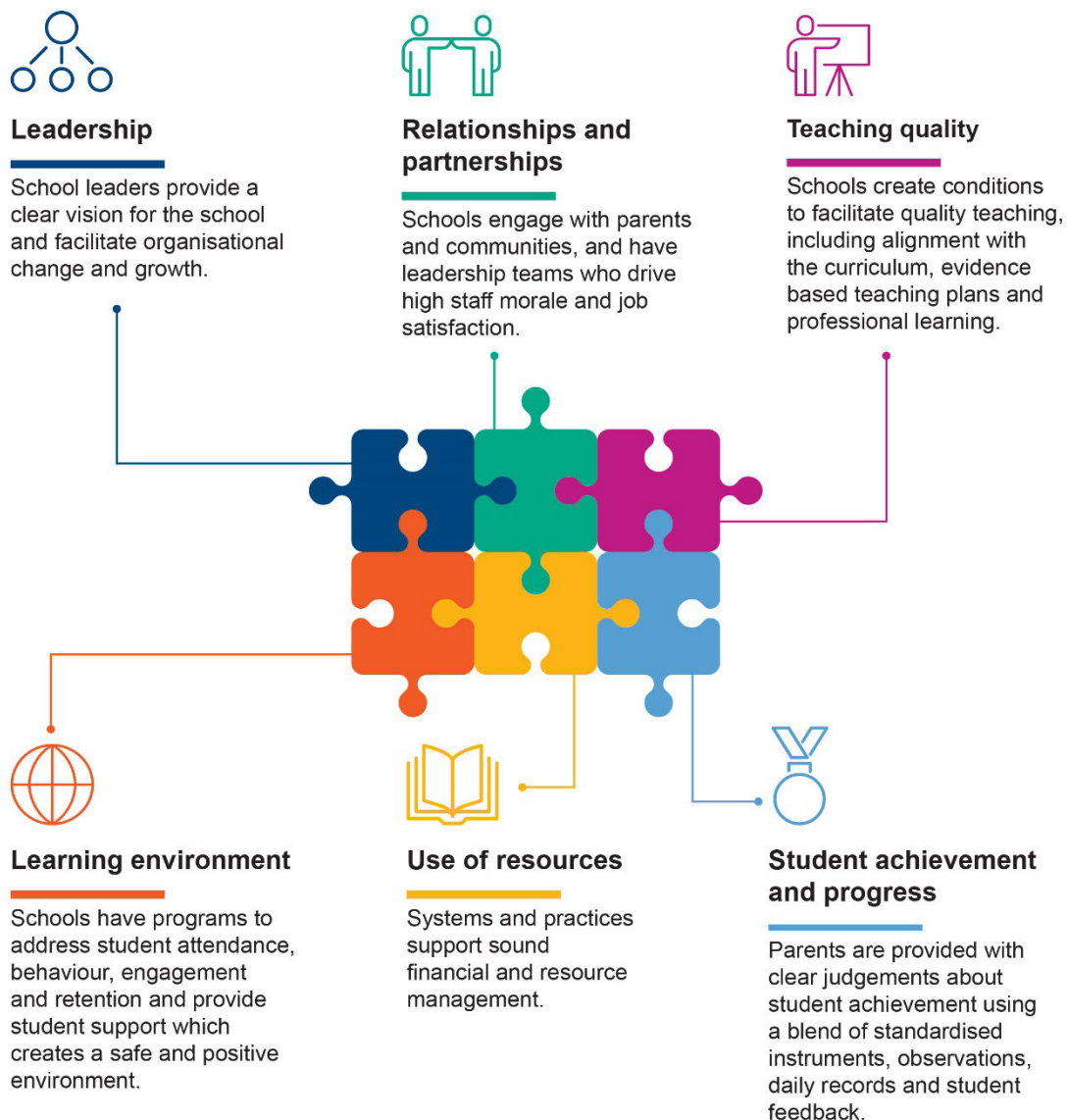
Parents, teachers and even principals often expect PSRs to provide a higher level of oversight and assurance than they do, perhaps in part due to the Department describing PSRs as providing assurance about school performance. However, this is not how the review model is designed or works. PSRs are only one part of a broader oversight system and the Department needs to be clear about what all the parts of that system do, how they join up and what kind of information and assurance stakeholders can expect from each of the oversight mechanisms.

# Findings

## PSRs help schools self-reflect and identify opportunities to improve

### PSRs provide a consistent method and tool which simplifies school self-reflection

The Department developed the Standard in 2020 to provide a documented framework for schools to assess themselves against. The Standard describes what is expected of schools across six domains (Figure 2) and provides examples of the evidence that may be presented to support the school’s assessment. The Standard is supported by the Domain References document which provides further guidance on questions and evidence sources principals can consider during their self-assessment. Having a clearly articulated framework provides consistency with the way schools assess themselves and prompts schools to reflect on issues which may not be regularly considered.



Source: OAG based on Department information

Figure 2: High level overview of the domains within the Standard

Principals undergoing reviews have sufficient information and written support to complete the self-assessment. The Department uses a bespoke software system, the Electronic School Assessment Tool (ESAT), to capture school self-assessments. The Standard and other supporting documents are embedded into the system for easy access. ESAT has been structured to align to the six domains, allowing schools to arrange the information about their performance in an easy to follow format that can be used by multiple people at the school or future staff. The tool supports structured self-assessment as well as simplifying school self-reflection processes.

The cyclical nature of the self-assessments and reviews helps drive improvement for many schools. As part of the review process, schools are encouraged to identify areas for improvement for each of the domains. Subsequent reviews should consider if the schools were successful in implementing the recommendations and if they have helped to improve school performance. As such, schools are motivated to make progress so that they can demonstrate improvements when they are re-reviewed.

<p><i>“The electronic tool and the headings provide a consistent framework for school reflection and improvement planning, with the ability to involve all staff.” – Principal</i></p>	<p><i>“Gave us a real mandate to focus in and ask the questions we should always be asking, but don’t always find time to. This way, we are forced to really look inwards and highlight the things we are doing well and the areas we need to improve on.”</i> – Principal</p>	<p><i>“Review process is important to see where we are at and what steps to be taken to achieve our expectations and outcomes.”</i> – Teaching staff</p>
--	--	--

Principals are guided on their performance and improvement plans during the PSR team’s school visit. Principals are able to get input from the PSR directors on the feasibility of their school improvement plans and if they think this will put the school in a position to meet the Standard. This provides principals an external perspective on their performance and improvement plans.

During the PSR program rollout in 2018, principals were provided with the opportunity to improve their self-assessment skills through a PSR team roadshow. Principals were able to attend one of 32 seminars across the State, where the PSR directors presented on the PSR processes as well as ways to approach the self-assessment. The presentation has been updated over time to reflect changes in PSR processes and is available to all principals on the Department’s intranet site.

## **PSRs provide valuable insights and oversight, but do not offer complete assurance on school performance**

### **Some stakeholders think PSRs provide more assurance than they do – the Department can do more to manage this expectation gap**

The Department has opted for a PSR model that focuses on school improvement. It appropriately allows schools to reflect on their unique performance and improvement opportunities. The outcomes of the PSRs are provided to senior members of the Department, giving them some oversight of the individual school’s current performance and their plans to improve.

For PSRs to provide a higher level of assurance to stakeholders, there would need to be a more rigorous (i.e. resource-intensive) approach to their delivery. The PSR would need to

provide a clear conclusion on the school's performance and be supported by robust, independent verification of evidence. It is difficult for one process to effectively achieve both timely school improvement and in-depth assurance (Table 1). The Department can acknowledge the limitations of the PSR and consider if other mechanisms are needed to support assurance on a risk basis.

Item	Assurance	School improvement
<b>Guidance</b>	Clear expectations and methodology	Ideas to provoke thought and reflection
<b>Self-assessment</b>	Verified against supporting evidence	Completed by principals
<b>Interviewee selection</b>	Selected by the assurance provider	Selected by principals
<b>Evidence collection</b>	Triangulated to other supporting evidence	Provided by the school to support their viewpoint
<b>Review focus</b>	Identify gaps in performance that need to be addressed	Support principals to identify improvements that are suitable for their school
<b>Report</b>	Clear critique of the school's performance, providing ability to compare outcomes between schools	Provides suggested recommendations for future focus
<b>Quality assurance of review and report</b>	Independent, robust scrutiny of the review and report	Editorial review of the final report

Source: OAG

**Table 1: Examples of different expectations for assurance and school improvement activities within a review process**

The Department promotes the PSR as a vehicle for providing assurance on school performance, however this is not how the PSR model has been designed, causing confusion. The Department's annual report as well as PSR reports on school websites state that the reviews are to provide accountability and assurance on school performance. Confusion around the use of the word assurance can lead to false assurance (i.e. taking more assurance than is sensible) or to undervaluing assurance (i.e. not having enough confidence considering what has been done).<sup>2</sup> Feedback from our interviews and survey results show that there is confusion about the level of assurance that the PSRs provide.

With the exception of broad attendance and student performance data (including NAPLAN), all information considered in the PSR review is provided by the principal and is not verified against other sources. Principals are the gatekeepers of all information considered during a review as they select the evidence and choose which staff, students and parents are interviewed by the PSR team. Existing information sources (e.g. complaints, critical incidents) are collected by the Department but are not used by the PSR team to verify information provided by the school. This would provide a valuable input into the process. In addition, PSR reviewers do not conduct verification activities while at the school to confirm the validity of statements made (e.g. select their own teachers to interview or enter a classroom to see how it is running). When we sampled reviews in ESAT we found no evidence that information other than what the school provided was considered. This creates a risk that a principal could present only information that reflects their perspective of the

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, '[Assurance guidance glossary](#)', ICAEW, accessed 16 May 2023.

school's performance but which may not adequately reflect the perspectives of other stakeholders.

*"Our narrative painted a positive picture however the reality is there are pockets of excellence amongst mediocrity."*

– **Principal**

*"Schools (or those directly preparing data/information for the review) will obviously do all they can to show they are meeting requirements. There may be an element of 'exaggeration' or even 'fabrication' of data/evidence to ensure schools pass their school review."*

– **Teaching staff**

*"Surely classroom observations, survey from parents, NAPLAN results, school reports all contribute to the data and evidence on how a school is performing."*

– **Teaching staff**

By design, the PSR report does not have a clear conclusion on how a school is performing. As a result of the PSR teams' self-reflections, the PSR review process was amended in 2020 to be more improvement focused by removing the requirement for review teams to rate schools as either effective or not effective. Instead, readers of PSR reports are left to infer if a domain has met the Standard based on the timeframe of review at the bottom of the report. If a school obtained a one-year timeframe of return it means that they did not meet the standard for at least one domain. While this is indicative that further work is needed, it does not necessarily mean that a school is underperforming. In addition, there is no clear critique of why the school was found to meet the Standard or not. Without clarity, readers come to their own conclusions about the outcome of the PSR which may not be in line with what the principal or PSR team found.

### **There is room to improve consistency in reviews**

The Standard is not explicit on what is and is not considered appropriate evidence to support a school's self-assessment. This allows schools to provide information that highlights achievements and improvement needs in areas they feel are relevant to the school, which suits a model of self-reflection. However, it also means the review team is left to make subjective assessments based on whether the evidence is suitable to meet the Standard. Principals can find the lack of explicit guidance challenging and some feel that similar information provided at self-assessment could lead to different outcomes by the review team.

There is a need to improve consistent judgements based on the Standard. One PSR team may evaluate if the self-assessment was robust, another may focus on whether an outcome has been achieved, or alternatively if school processes are in place to meet the Standard. While flexibility in the PSR process is desirable, and the ability for reviewers to exercise professional judgement essential, a more consistent approach to what is assessed during reviews would further enhance quality and comparability in results across schools and over time.

Guidelines could be strengthened to outline how a PSR director should conduct a review, and include guidance that captures the competencies and training required in order to successfully complete them. The PSR team advised us that they follow a system of observation and supervision for new PSR reviewers but we were unable to verify this. The lack of clarity can lead to confusion about what is required for the self-assessment and may cause some schools to waste resources gathering the wrong information.

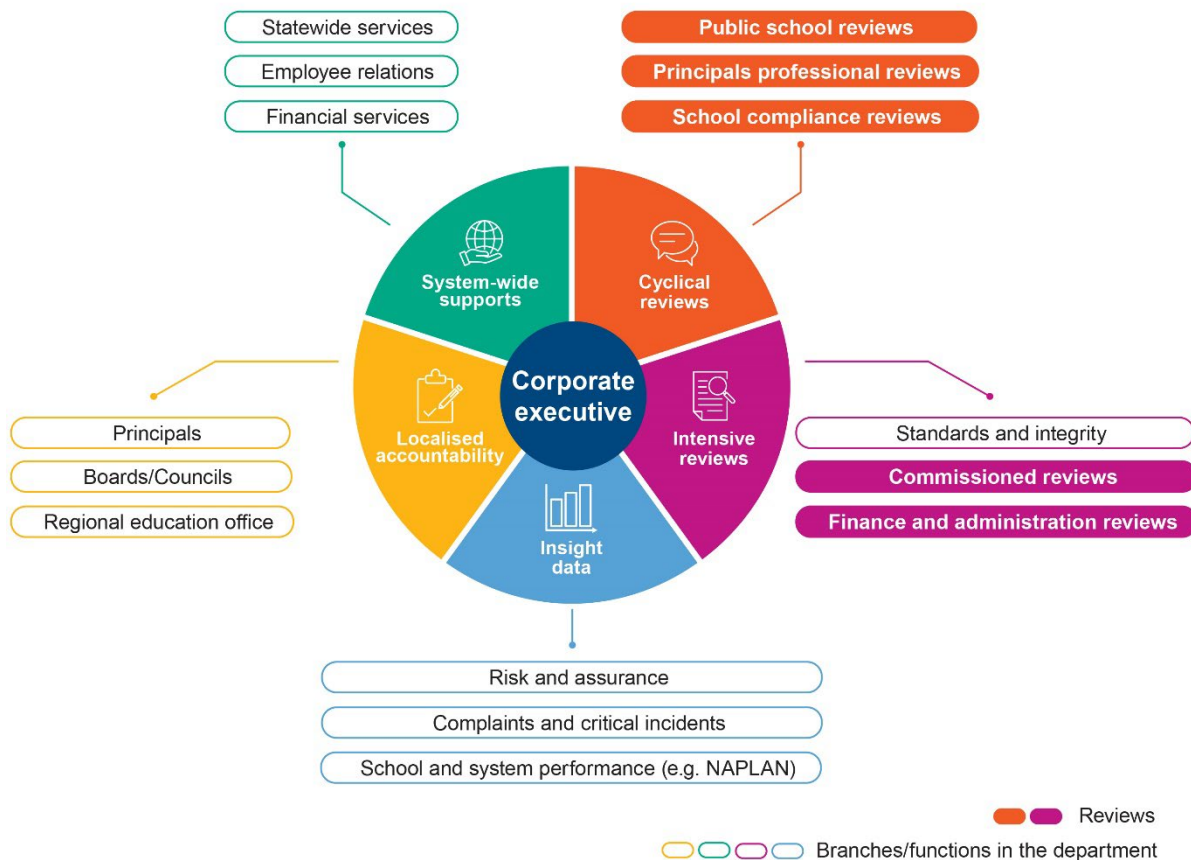
“The feedback from the original reviewers was that the school gave too much info and details from too many staff. On the return visit from different reviewers the opposite feedback was given - not enough detail more staff need to contribute. Contradictory advice.”  
**– Principal**

“There is a significant amount of time spent deciding how to present the evidence, what to present while trying to engage as many stakeholders in the process as possible. Examples or further direction as to how much, how little and what the reviewers are looking for would be beneficial to ensure all of the time and manpower is directed in the right place.”  
**– Principal**

“The amount of information that the school provides is exhausting. There should be a specific guideline to what is needed, not leaving it up to school discretion.”  
**– Principal**

### PSRs are one part of the Department’s complex system of school performance oversight, which is not yet effectively joined-up

In order to have oversight of school performance, the Department gathers information from both PSRs and other mechanisms. While PSR results are presented to senior management, it is on a school-by-school basis without consideration of the results of the other mechanisms. In addition, it is not clear how and if information from various governance, assurance and support functions are joined to form a system wide view of school performance. Examples of key functions that provide the Department with school performance information are captured in Figure 3.



Source: OAG based on Department information

**Figure 3: Examples of the Department’s governance, assurance and support functions**

The PSR process provides some insights into how a school is functioning, but stakeholders, including the public and the Department, need information from other sources to obtain a full view of a school’s performance. Most of this additional information is only available to the Department. Given the public release of the PSR reports, some external users, such as parents and teachers, may be left with an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of the school’s performance.

## To effectively encourage school improvement, reviews need to be timely and linked to appropriate support

### Support is not linked to PSR outcomes and can be hard to access

At the end of the PSR process, schools are not provided with any guidance on how to access support to implement improvements. Guidance on what support is available and how to access it would assist schools to get the support they need. The Department surveys each principal once a PSR is complete. The results from the 2018-2022 surveys show principals want more support following a PSR and want it to be easier to access.

Principals are responsible for identifying and initiating the support they need in order to implement the PSR report recommendations. Our interviews and survey results showed that some principals did not access support because they felt like they did not need it. While this may be appropriate for some, if principals do not recognise they need support or do not know what support is available, and there is no follow up from the Department, schools that need support may not receive it.

Schools find it difficult to access support from the Department to improve their performance. There is no single process to request support. Instead schools must identify and approach the individual teams who they wish to obtain support from directly but there are challenges with these (Table 2). This can result in time poor principals not seeking support which may limit the school improvements that can be made.

Support function	Regional education director	Collegiate principals (part of Statewide Services)	Statewide Services	Financial services
<b>Support provided</b>	Assists with brokering support from the Department	Provides confidential one on one coaching for principals	Provides support for professional capability development, teaching quality and leadership	Provides support to address financial issues and conducts reviews of financial and administrative processes
<b>Challenges</b>	Large number of schools for each regional director to support along with other functions	Only 16 across the State, with 600 requests for support since inception	Department’s 2020 form and function review found services are too difficult to access and often resources were not available to meet school requirements particularly in regional and remote settings	There is limited capacity to complete financial and administrative reviews so focus on schools with the highest needs

Source: OAG based on Department information

**Table 2: Examples of the Department’s support functions and activities**

The Department's intention following a PSR review was that regional education directors would broker support for principals but they have limited capacity to do so. There are eight regional education directors, each with responsibility for between 23 to 255 schools. They prioritise contacting schools based on their knowledge of the school and if they believe support is needed. Three of the six principals we interviewed said they did not hear from their regional education directors despite obtaining one-year returns, which denotes a need for additional support.

Principals can also access support from Statewide Services who are responsible for a range of services including assistance to build professional capability, teaching quality and leadership. But the Department has recognised this can be difficult. It recently reviewed the efficiency of Statewide Services and found "access to services can feel ad hoc, without sufficient coordination and prioritisation to direct services to the schools that need them most". Therefore while support is available, principals must actively seek it through a system that has limited resources and can be difficult to navigate.

The Department has published multiple resources on their intranet to guide school improvement. The intranet provides information to help schools across multiple areas including student health, student behaviour as well as teaching and learning. Having centrally available documented information means that schools can access consistent and relevant support on these topics when they need it.

Principals do not feel they are provided adequate support to address systemic issues, such as support to develop or remove an underperforming staff member. This could affect multiple domains measured in the PSR but without support to address the issue, the school may continue to receive one-year return cycles even if the rest of the school is performing well. Similarly, structural issues, such as regional staffing shortages are complex and therefore difficult to solve, and a one-year review cycle may not deliver any additional benefit to the school or its students, relative to the effort required for the review process.

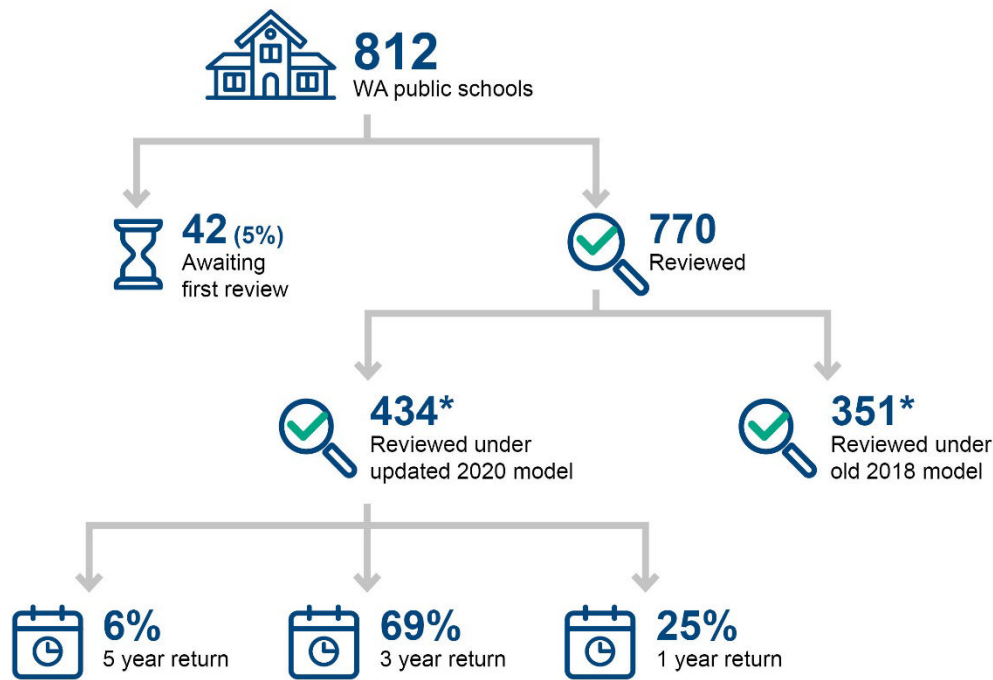
### **Based on current progress, the Department will not cover all schools in the three-year cycle**

The PSR team has reviewed almost 95% of the 812<sup>3</sup> schools since 2018, with approximately 55% of schools completed under the new differentiated timeframe of return model (Figure 4). This leaves 42 schools who have yet to be reviewed under either PSR model.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Education's 2021-22 Annual Report states there are 826 public schools in WA. Some of these, including community kindergartens, are excluded from PSRs, creating the total of 812.





Source: OAG based on Department information

\* Includes 15 schools that have been reviewed under both models.

**Figure 4: Number of schools reviewed by the PSR team from Term 3 2018 up to and including Term 4 2022**

The Department’s resource planning has not yet considered how to address the one-year returns resulting in a growing backlog of outstanding reviews. The PSR team estimated that they could complete approximately 70 school reviews a term which would allow all schools to be visited in a three-year cycle. However, this estimate was not revised when the differentiated time of return model was introduced. With some schools requiring a one-year return, the number of schools the PSR team needs to complete per term has risen. Of the 630 reviews estimated to be conducted since one-year returns were introduced, 511 reviews have been completed on 433 schools. In order to reach all of the schools in the three-year cycle, including the one-year returns, the PSR team would need to complete approximately 85 reviews per term but this has not been accounted for in resourcing.

		Timeframe of return			
		5 years	3 years	1 year	Total reviews
2020	Term 3	0	6	0	6
	Term 4	8	52	7	67
2021	Term 1	10	42	18	70
	Term 2	5	49	20	74
	Term 3	2	43	25	70
	Term 4	3	49	20	72
2022	Term 1	1	21	5	27
	Term 2	0	2	3	5
	Term 3	2	33	12	47
	Term 4	0	53	20	73

Timeframe of return				
	5 years	3 years	1 year	Total reviews
Cumulative total	31	350	130	511*
Cumulative percentage (%)	6	69	25	100

Source: OAG based on Department data

\* This includes the re-review of some schools inline with the differentiated model.

**Table 3: Number of reviews completed under the updated differentiated timeframe model, including one-year of return follow-up reviews**

The increased workload has added to a growing backlog of reviews which had already been created due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools. If the Department intends to continue with the current differentiated timeframe model in a three-year cycle of review, it needs to realign resources to match the increase in demand and address the backlog.

---

## Recommendations

The Department of Education should:

1. clearly and consistently define the review criteria and evidence expectations to ensure schools fully understand the requirements of the review

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:** The Department agrees with this recommendation. Refer to Appendix 1 for the Department's full response.

2. develop and implement appropriate guidelines for review teams to make sure they are consistently applying the Standard

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:** The Department agrees with this recommendation. Refer to Appendix 1 for the Department's full response.

3. develop, implement and communicate clear pathways for schools to access sufficient support to address PSR review recommendations

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:** The Department agrees with this recommendation. Refer to Appendix 1 for the Department's full response.

4. address the backlog of reviews, consider amending the PSR model or aligning resourcing

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2026

**Entity response:** The Department notes this recommendation. Refer to Appendix 1 for the Department's full response.

5. ensure school oversight and assurance activities are clearly defined, their roles are consistently understood and that they are effectively linked to provide a system wide view of schools. Where necessary develop new mechanisms to address any gaps.

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2024

**Entity response:** The Department agrees with this recommendation. Refer to Appendix 1 for the Department's full response.

## Response from the Department of Education

The Department of Education is committed to ensuring every school is a good school and that every child can unlock and fulfil their learning potential, to leave school prepared for a successful future.

We maintain a firm focus on student success underpinned by quality teaching, effective leadership, strong partnerships with families and communities, and ensuring safe and secure learning environments.

The Department of Education's Public School Review (PSR) provides feedback to school leaders, staff and the school community in all school contexts, to guide improvement efforts for the benefit of all students. This provides information to school communities about the quality of each school's performance.

The Department welcomes the Office of the Auditor General report and recommendations. It is clear we need to balance the focus on what matters most for students, families and communities, and ensure support for schools is prioritised to where it is most needed.

The Department has a long history of school review, which has been progressively strengthened over time. Introduced in late 2018, the Department has evolved the current PSR model in line with international research-based best practice to lead direction in school improvement. Extensive consultation has shaped PSR through its development. Through this it has remained important that the locus of control for school improvement, guided by a clear Standard, is placed deliberately in the hands of school leaders. This is because we value the expertise of our school leaders who are best placed to lead school improvement.

The Department has a range of assurance, oversight and review mechanisms, of which PSR is one component. The Department acknowledges it is important that these are clearly understood and that they are well articulated as part of a connected public education system.

The Department thanks the Office of the Auditor General for its Performance Audit and will use this to support ongoing improvement.

## Audit focus and scope

The objective of this audit was to examine if the school review process provides an effective basis for oversight of school performance and supporting school improvement.

We based our audit on the following criteria:

- Is the school review process conducted in a timely, consistent and accurate manner?
- Does the Department have effective mechanisms to validate the school review results?
- Does the Department use information from the school review process to drive school improvements?

We reviewed the Department's approach to managing the PSR process as well as the support provided to schools. In undertaking this audit we:

- reviewed the Department's policies and procedures
- interviewed key Department staff
- interviewed school leaders from a sample of schools in different regions
- conducted limited sample testing of prior PSR reviews, based on information available in the Department's record management system
- conducted site visits to three schools, observing the PSR team
- conducted a survey, receiving responses from 111 principals, 101 teachers, 16 school board members and 64 parents
- reviewed the Department's survey results of principals who have been involved in PSRs
- analysed the Department's data within their records management system for the PSR team.

This was an independent performance audit, conducted under Section 18 of the *Auditor General Act 2006*, in accordance with Australian Standard on Assurance Engagements ASAE 3500 *Performance Engagements*. We complied with the independence and other ethical requirements related to assurance engagements. Performance audits focus primarily on the effective management and operations of entity programs and activities. The approximate cost of undertaking the audit and reporting was \$340,000.

# Appendix 1: Full response from the Department of Education

The Department of Education should:

1. clearly and consistently define the review criteria and evidence expectations to ensure schools fully understand the requirements of the review

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:**

The Department agrees with this recommendation.

The Department acknowledges that strengthening current practice with further guidance for Principals undertaking a Public School Review (PSR) will add value to the overall process and facilitate consistent and shared understandings. Building on existing reference documents, guidelines will be developed to support Principals in their understanding of the review process and what constitutes reliable and valid data sets.

The PSR is founded on a model of self-assessment, research and with Principals maintaining the locus of control, guided by a clear standard. The Department is not seeking to prescribe or limit schools' ability to contextualise their PSR self-assessment. Principals are best placed to identify and lead school improvement to meet the diverse needs of their students and school communities.

Consultation with principals will be undertaken to provide independent advice and guidance regarding any development of exemplars. The Department will continue to focus on providing communications and resources that are contextually relevant. Any impacts through ongoing enhancements/ development of the Electronic School Assessment Tool (ESAT) will also be considered.

The opportunity for school and middle leaders to seek professional learning in relation to a school's preparation for their PSR is already available through the Department's Professional Learning Information System. Current offerings in the suite of professional learning will be adapted to include more explicit references and examples for schools. The opportunity for Principals to participate as Peer Reviewers also provides significant experience with the application of the Standard and leadership of the Public School Review process.

Opportunities for the development of specifically tailored professional learning will be explored to further support Principals in undertaking PSR. Targeted professional learning workshops, with a lens on leading school improvement, will also be developed and delivered, with a specific focus on evidence that would effectively demonstrate a school's performance.

2. develop and implement appropriate guidelines for review teams to make sure they are consistently applying the Standard

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:**

The Department agrees with this recommendation.

The Public School Review team engages in a range of moderation and induction practices to ensure consistency in application of the Standard. The Department

acknowledges that this is an area that can be strengthened through further development and documentation of induction, moderation and peer reviewer practices.

Current resources will be reviewed and updated to support the review teams with validation and moderation, to align the PSR Standard to lines of interest and the submitted performance evidence, which demonstrates the Standard has been met during the review.

The Department will develop and implement a set of guidelines to capture existing processes and structures to ensure consistency in applying the PSR Standard across reviews. Moderation practices, aligned to current practice, will be explained in these guidelines. The guidelines will further document the moderation of practices that support decisions in assessment of evidence that determines whether the domain foci and elaborations, as outlined in the PSR Standard, have been sufficiently demonstrated.

Communication of relevant information from the guidelines will be shared with Principals and with Peer Reviewers.

Regular professional learning further supports the Review Team to reflect consistent messaging to schools in applying the Standard. Comprehensive engagement with Peer Reviewers, as a critical element of the Review Team, through all stages of the PSR process, also provides an independent and contextually relevant judgement against the Standard.

3. [develop, implement and communicate clear pathways for schools to access sufficient support to address PSR review recommendations](#)

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2025

**Entity response:**

The Department agrees with this recommendation.

The Department acknowledges that access to support pathways for schools are important. Supports are available for schools through the Regional Directors of Education and Statewide Services, including Collegiate Principals. The Department agrees that processes for schools to access support could be further streamlined and made more transparent.

The Public School Accountability directorate will continue to communicate with Directors of Education in relation to review outcomes, including report recommendations that require system support. Directors of Education play a key role in supporting schools to broker system supports aligned to the context and improvement foci of the school.

Statewide Services has recently completed a comprehensive form and function review, and from the start of 2023 has commenced implementation of a new model of service. This model is built on a service charter that commits to aligning service and support to individual school needs. It also includes a new service catalogue built around core areas of service which are linked to a common request for assistance process. Services are delivered through a prioritisation framework that informs schools how resources and responses will be targeted. The framework ensures schools on a one-year PSR return are prioritised for service and support. The model will take time to fully mature, but a clear direction for service provision has been established, and this will continue to drive refinements and improvements in support for schools.

4. address the backlog of reviews, consider amending the PSR model or aligning resourcing

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2026

**Entity response:**

The Department notes this recommendation and acknowledges the impact of COVID-19 with pauses to the PSR schedule during 2020 and 2022. The Department will work diligently with principals to ensure reviews are undertaken and will progress comprehensive planning of forward schedules to align resourcing accordingly.

Further enhancements to the Electronic School Assessment Tool (ESAT) will be considered to support scheduling requirements.

5. ensure school oversight and assurance activities are clearly defined, their roles are consistently understood and that they are effectively linked to provide a system wide view of schools. Where necessary develop new mechanisms to address any gaps.

**Implementation timeframe:** 2023-2024

**Entity response:**

The Department agrees with this recommendation.

The Department acknowledges the need for school governance, oversight and assurance activities to be clarified and shared to provide a system wide view.

The purpose and role of PSR in the context of Department assurance will be further considered. The review of current information, including the School Improvement and Accountability Framework, will be considered and updated.

A coordinated approach to this work will be led by the Department's Risk and Assurance function. Consultation will also be facilitated through an established Community of Practice for Integrated Risk Assurance. The community aims to advance risk management and assurance practice in the delivery of public education services.

The Department acknowledges the importance of providing information and advice to assist strengthened understandings of the assurance oversight, and governance mechanisms that it has in place.

The modification of communications to stakeholders will be considered to provide greater clarity regarding the distinct function of PSR and the subsequent system assurance provided through other mechanisms.



This page is intentionally left blank

This page is intentionally left blank

## Auditor General's 2022-23 reports

Number	Title	Date tabled
21	Financial Audit Results – State Government 2021-22 – Part 2: COVID-19 Impacts	3 May 2023
20	Regulation of Air-handling and Water Systems	21 April 2023
19	Information Systems Audit – Local Government 2021-22	29 March 2023
18	Opinions on Ministerial Notifications – Tourism WA's Campaign Expenditure	27 March 2023
17	Information Systems Audit – State Government 2021-22	22 March 2023
16	Opinions on Ministerial Notifications – Triennial Reports for Griffin Coal and Premier Coal	22 March 2023
15	Opinion on Ministerial Notification – Stamp Duty on the Landgate Building, Midland	8 March 2023
14	Administration of the Perth Parking Levy	16 February 2023
13	Funding of Volunteer Emergency and Fire Services	22 December 2022
12	Financial Audit Results – State Government 2021-22	22 December 2022
11	Compliance with Mining Environmental Conditions	20 December 2022
10	Regulation of Commercial Fishing	7 December 2022
9	Management of Long Stay Patients in Public Hospitals	16 November 2022
8	Forensic Audit Results 2022	16 November 2022
7	Opinion on Ministerial Notification – Tom Price Hospital Redevelopment and Meekatharra Health Centre Business Cases	2 November 2022
6	Compliance Frameworks for Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Obligations	19 October 2022
5	Financial Audit Results – Local Government 2020-21	17 August 2022
4	Payments to Subcontractors Working on State Government Construction Projects	11 August 2022
3	Public Trustee's Administration of Trusts and Deceased Estates	10 August 2022
2	Financial Audit Results – Universities and TAFEs 2021	21 July 2022
1	Opinion on Ministerial Notification – Wooroloo Bushfire Inquiry	18 July 2022

**Office of the Auditor General  
Western Australia**

7<sup>th</sup> Floor Albert Facey House  
469 Wellington Street, Perth

T: 08 6557 7500

E: [info@audit.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@audit.wa.gov.au)

[www.audit.wa.gov.au](http://www.audit.wa.gov.au)



[@OAG\\_WA](https://twitter.com/OAG_WA)



Office of the Auditor General  
for Western Australia