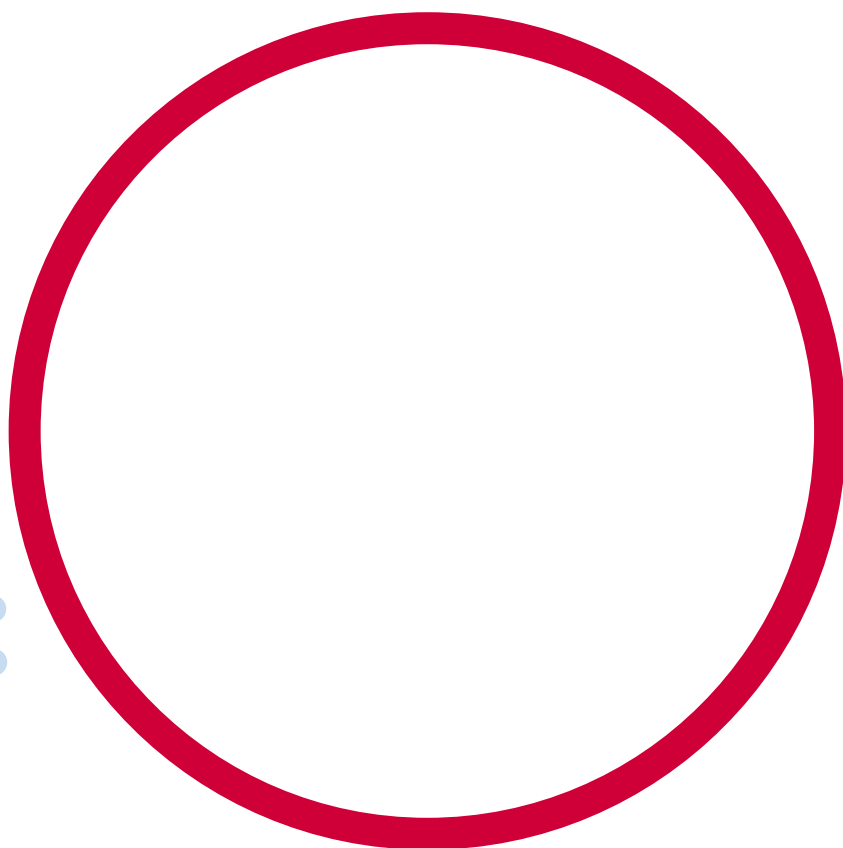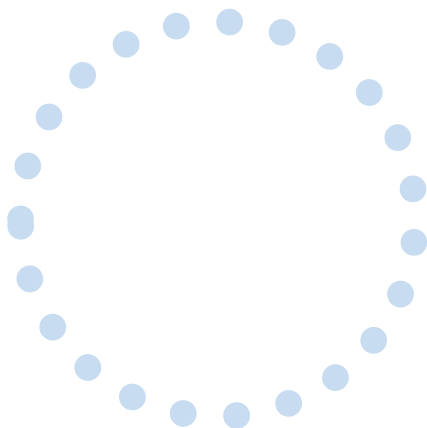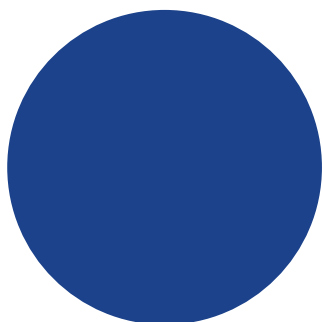# NSW public school student retention rates by statistical areas: 2016 to 2020

Introduction

This factsheet 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 factsheet are for full-time public schools 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 (SSP) are now reported as "ungraded".

This results in a break of series for apparent retention rates because enrolments in Years 7, 10 and 12 increased in 2020 due to the revised counting rule. Approximately 20,000 students, who in prior years would be reported as "ungraded", are now reported against their underlying enrolment grade.

The tables in this factsheet present 2020 retention rates with both previous and revised counting rules.

Years 7-10

- The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate in 2020 was 101.9 per cent, 0.9 percentage points lower than in 2019.
- Apparent retention rate in 2020 was 100 per cent or more in all Sydney SA4 groups in 2020 (refer to explanatory notes).

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 7 to 10 apparent retention rate in 2020 was 106.1 per cent, appearing to be 3.3 percentage points higher than in 2019.
- Apparent retention rates in 2020 were 100 per cent or more in all areas in 2020, except South West NSW.

Table 1 – Years 7-10 apparent retention rates by SA4 Group, 2016-2020

SA4 Groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)
Sydney-North	109.3	107.3	105.9	105.9	105.3	106.8
Sydney-Inner	115.7	114.0	110.6	111.5	106.9	109.0
Sydney-South	110.7	108.4	106.8	107.6	106.9	109.8
Sydney-South West	107.7	108.8	108.6	109.2	108.0	114.4
Sydney-West	105.8	106.0	104.7	104.5	104.1	109.3
Sydney-North West	106.0	103.5	101.6	102.6	102.6	105.8
North East NSW	101.2	102.0	104.2	100.4	99.0	102.7
North West NSW	97.0	95.8	96.6	94.5	96.9	102.6
South West NSW	96.1	97.3	95.9	95.1	93.1	97.0
South East NSW	103.2	103.5	102.4	100.2	99.1	105.1
Central Coast, Newcastle	98.5	99.9	98.3	100.0	98.0	101.9
NSW	104.3	104.0	103.2	102.8	101.9	106.1

Years 10-12

- The Year 10 to 12 ARR increased by 0.7 percentage points from 70.6 per cent in 2019 to 71.3 per cent in 2020. Retention rates for Years 10 to12 have ranged between 70 per cent and 73 per cent in the last five years.

- The only area in Sydney with an ARR under 78 per cent in 2020 was Sydney-South West, which increased slightly from 74.8 in 2019 to 75.0 in 2020. The highest ARR outside Sydney was 62.8 per cent, in Central Coast, Newcastle.

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- The Year 10 to 12 ARR was 73.3 per cent, appearing to be 2.7 percentage points higher than in 2019.

- The only area in Sydney with an ARR under 80 per cent in 2020 was Sydney-South West, which appeared to increase from 74.8 in 2019 to 77.7 in 2020. The highest ARR outside Sydney was 65.5 per cent, in South East NSW.

Table 2 – Years 10-12 apparent retention rates by SA4 Group, 2016-2020

SA4 Groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)
Sydney-North	92.5	92.1	89.3	89.6	89.5	90.5
Sydney-Inner	84.2	84.0	83.7	84.5	83.9	85.4
Sydney-South	81.3	81.7	78.3	79.7	80.1	81.7
Sydney-South West	76.0	76.7	76.5	74.8	75.0	77.7
Sydney-West	76.4	78.9	76.9	77.7	78.3	80.1
Sydney-North West	78.8	81.8	78.6	79.4	80.8	82.5
North East NSW	63.0	63.8	62.6	58.7	59.0	60.7
North West NSW	56.2	56.5	55.6	54.7	53.3	55.8
South West NSW	62.0	62.8	57.8	58.3	57.5	59.8
South East NSW	62.5	63.9	63.4	59.5	62.4	65.5
Central Coast, Newcastle	63.9	63.1	62.4	61.4	62.8	64.8
NSW	72.0	73.0	71.3	70.6	71.3	73.3

Years 7-12

- The Year 7 to 12 apparent retention rate in 2020 was 73.6 per cent, a small increase of 0.2 percentage points from 73.4 per cent in 2019.

- The ARR fell in most Sydney SA4 groups, most noticeably falling by 1.4 percentage points in Sydney-North and 3.6 percentage points in Sydney-Inner.

- Retention increased by 2.3 percentage points in South East NSW compared with 2019, and by 1.6 percentage points in North East NSW.

- Four areas had an improved apparent retention rate between 2016 and 2020 when consistent counting rules were used. The largest increase occurred in Sydney-North West (1.7 percentage points).

When the revised counting rule is applied:

- All areas appeared to increase compared to 2019 except for Sydney-North and Sydney-Inner, where the rates appeared to decline by 0.3 and 2 percentage points respectively.

Table 3 – Years 7-12 apparent retention rates by SA4 Group, 2016-2020

SA4 groups	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 (revised)
Sydney-North	98.1	100.3	97.6	96.1	94.7	95.8
Sydney-Inner	99.9	98.1	96.8	96.4	92.8	94.4
Sydney-South	86.3	89.0	86.7	86.4	85.6	87.2
Sydney-South West	80.7	82.5	82.4	81.4	81.5	84.4
Sydney-West	81.5	82.3	81.4	82.4	82.0	83.8
Sydney-North West	80.5	85.0	83.3	82.1	82.2	83.9
North East NSW	64.3	64.8	63.3	59.9	61.5	63.2
North West NSW	55.0	54.6	53.9	52.4	51.5	53.9
South West NSW	58.2	60.4	55.5	56.7	55.1	57.3
South East NSW	62.9	64.5	65.5	61.6	63.9	67.1
Central Coast, Newcastle	63.7	62.2	61.4	61.3	61.8	63.7
NSW	74.2	75.6	74.4	73.4	73.6	75.6

Source: DoE, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Mid year census, 2016-2020.

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 per cent 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, support students did not have a designated grade 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 factsheet, but since 2018 the school's enrolments has been included in the ABS Schools Australia publication. This may lead to a slight difference in reported figures from 2018.

8. Data is presented using a geographical structure based on the ABS Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). A combination of ASGS Statistical Area 4 (SA4) boundaries in New South Wales have been combined into 11 groups for reporting and publication of department data.

	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