

**Improving School Enrolment and Attendance
through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM)**

Evaluation Report for 2010

by

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Glossary

Authorised absences

- Refer to instances where a student's absence from school is considered authorised or approved. Education authorities define authorised absences to include sickness, funerals/sorry business, holidays or suspension.
- The authorised absence rate is calculated by taking the authorised absences days and dividing by the enrolled days.

Attendance benchmark

- Refers to the attendance rate in the NT at which action under the SEAM attendance component is activated. The attendance benchmark refers to more than five unauthorised absences in a ten week period (or less than 90 per cent attendance).

Attendance notice

- Is issued to a parent in the instance where a school has advised the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) that the parent is not taking reasonable steps to ensure their student's attendance at school is satisfactory. In the NT, the attendance benchmark triggers referral under SEAM. In QLD, a discretionary component allows for school principals to refer students who they deem to have unsatisfactory attendance.

Attendance rate

- The number of school days attended divided by the number of school days enrolled.

Attendance referral

- Referral under the attendance component of SEAM is triggered when schools or education authorities notify Centrelink that a student is not attending to the satisfaction of the school (failure to reach the attendance benchmark in the NT). A list of names is provided to Centrelink by schools for scope checking to determine if they are subject to SEAM requirements.

Attendance sanction/attendance suspension

- Refers to the instance in which a parent fails to comply with an attendance notice and therefore is subject to payment suspension under the attendance component of SEAM.

Bulk verification

- Refers to a data exchange between Centrelink and education authorities to collect enrolment details for in-scope children at the start of the school year.

Compliance period

- Refers to the period beginning from the delivery of an enrolment or attendance notice that outlines the period in which a parent has to comply with the details of the notice. For the enrolment component, a parent has 14 days after a notice is given. For the attendance component, a parent has 28 days after a notice is given. In instances where a notice is posted, an additional period of up to six days may be permitted to allow compliance.

Enrolment notice/notification letter

- In-scope parents who are identified in Centrelink records as having a child of compulsory school age and whose enrolment details have not been confirmed will be sent an enrolment notice. The enrolment notice requires that a parent provide their child's enrolment details to Centrelink. The compliance period is 14 days.

Enrolment sanction/enrolment suspension

- Refers to the instance in which a parent fails to comply with an enrolment notice and therefore is subject to an income support payment suspension under the enrolment component of SEAM.

In-scope – enrolment component

- Children are in-scope for the enrolment component of SEAM if:
 - o they are of compulsory school age
 - o they are not receiving payments in their own right and not receiving an ABSTUDY payment which includes a component of living allowance
 - o their parent/carer has at least 14 per cent care (of that child), resides in a SEAM trial site and is receiving (or suspended on) a schooling requirement payment.

In-scope – attendance component

- Children are in-scope for the attendance component of SEAM if:
 - o they are in-scope for the enrolment component and
 - o they are enrolled in a participating SEAM school.

Partial enrolments

- Refers to the situation where a student is not enrolled for the full school year and has at least one period where no enrolment record is available.

Reasonable excuse

- In the event that there exists an excuse for failure to provide enrolment details or where a student cannot attend school or the parent/carer cannot take reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance, a reasonable excuse exemption can be applied for a short period of time. Once this period ends, the parent is still expected to take reasonable steps or improve their child's attendance.
- Reasonable Excuses are set out in the first instance by the *Social Security (Administration) (Schooling Requirement) Determination 2009 (No.1)* and the SEAM procedural guidelines. A reasonable excuse can include moving house, illness and adverse weather conditions.

Reasonable steps

- Under the attendance component of SEAM, a parent has 28 days to show they are taking reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance. Reasonable steps are determined by education authorities and defined in the procedural guidelines. They include things such as: ensuring a child has arrangements for transportation to and from school, establishing appropriate routines to encourage school attendance, engaging directly with schools to improve their child's attendance and ensuring the child engages with school support services.

Special circumstance

- In the event that there exists some circumstance directly or materially that impacts on the ability of a parent/carer to ensure their child is enrolled at school or prevents them from taking reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance, a special circumstance exemption can be applied. Once the period for the special exemption ends, the parent is still expected to take reasonable steps or improve their child's attendance.
- What constitutes a special circumstance determination is set out in the first instance by the *Social Security (Administration) (Schooling Requirement) Determination 2009 (No.1)* and the SEAM procedural guidelines.

Unauthorised absences

- Refer to instances where a student's absence from school is deemed unauthorised or not sanctioned. Education authorities define unauthorised absences as unexplained, un-notified or unacceptable absences from school.

The unauthorised absence rate is calculated by taking the total days unauthorised absent and dividing by the total number of enrolled days for each student.

School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) Evaluation Report for 2010

Executive Summary

The key focus of this evaluation is to examine program implementation and outcomes of SEAM in the Northern Territory (NT) and Queensland (QLD) during 2010. This report provides a brief policy overview of the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM), outlines key evaluation questions and presents findings of the evaluation.

Background

SEAM was announced in the 2008-09 Budget. The measure aims to trial the attachment of conditions to income support payments. It intends to encourage parents (or those with responsibility for a child) to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are enrolled in and attending school regularly.

SEAM trials have been in operation in six NT sites involving a total of 14 schools (including nine government schools) since January 2009. An additional six trial sites, including 30 schools, commenced in selected QLD locations during October 2009. The trial is being closely monitored and evaluated, providing an evidence base for further policy development in the area of conditional welfare.

An evaluation examining SEAM implementation and outcomes in the NT in 2009 was completed previously. Following on from this evaluation, the SEAM Evaluation for 2010 covers evaluation results on SEAM implementation and its impacts on school enrolment and attendance in QLD in late 2009 and 2010, as well as findings for the NT in 2010.

Evaluation objectives and methodology

The key evaluation objectives are two-fold:

- an evaluation of the implementation of SEAM in QLD trial sites
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of SEAM in the NT and QLD in 2010.

A mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative analysis) was used to evaluate SEAM implementation and its outcomes.

Key findings for 2010

Program implementation

Qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the Social Research Centre in 2010 sought to examine whether the strategies used to communicate SEAM in QLD were effective and whether parents, educators and people in the QLD community had a sound understanding of SEAM requirements.

In summary, the findings suggest that awareness of SEAM among parents that were surveyed¹ was relatively low. Forty per cent of parents surveyed recounted that they had not heard about SEAM prior to interview.

¹ The vast proportion of parents surveyed were in-scope for SEAM (825 out of 850 parents).

- Of those parents who were aware of SEAM prior to interview, 60 per cent recounted that they were informed about SEAM through the media. Other avenues by which parents became aware of SEAM included Centrelink staff, posters at Centrelink offices or letters from their child's school.

The approach adopted by school principals in disseminating and managing information and facilitating program implementation was not consistent.

- Expectations in SEAM schools varied as to whether all school staff or just school administrators (principals, vice principals, teachers and ancillary staff) would be responsible for managing the program.
- Communication strategies used in schools to disseminate information varied. While educators felt adequately informed about SEAM, some methods adopted by schools for information dissemination were considered ineffective by parents.

Mixed responses were received on the implementation of the policy in QLD including some confusion on the aims of SEAM and the roles of some stakeholders.

- Parents were generally unclear or unsure about the aims of SEAM. Principals and Centrelink were also unclear as to what role they would be fulfilling. Tension existed within the referral process as to who held responsibility for determining outcomes of cases, such as exemptions for reasonable excuses.
- Parents perceived the program as a 'big-stick' approach to dealing with attendance issues. Some principals felt that the approach could be used in cases where they did not have any other options but others felt it detracted from schools being seen as positive and rewarding environments.
- Of those parents who had heard about the program prior to implementation, almost half reported that the implementation had made them think about the importance of their child's schooling. A further 29 per cent also noted the program had encouraged them to make more effort to address their child's attendance issues.

In-house research by the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Section in DEEWR sought to assess whether the enrolment and attendance processes were implemented effectively as measured by participation and compliance in the NT and QLD. Centrelink administrative data was the main data source used in this analysis.

Consistent with results from 2009, findings indicated the design and implementation of the SEAM enrolment process during 2010 was generally effective at gathering enrolment details from parents.

- The bulk enrolment verification process resulted in 82 per cent of children in scope for SEAM being successfully matched to enrolment details without notification letters needing to be issued. This reduced the administrative burden on Centrelink.
- The response rate to each stage of the enrolment component of SEAM was generally good. Fifty-four per cent of the 760 enrolment notification letters sent in the NT and 48 per cent of the 2180 letters sent in QLD gathered the required information within the compliance period.
- Follow-up contact and late provision of details gathered most of the outstanding details. Overall, enrolment details were provided for 83 per cent of all notices in the NT and 87 per cent of those in QLD.

- While seven parents in the NT and 104 in QLD had their income support payments suspended for failure to comply with enrolment requirements, no parent had their payments cancelled.
- The vast majority of enrolment information provided by parents was verified by education authorities. A very small number of parents provided inaccurate information about the enrolment status of their children (and were subsequently suspended).

The results suggest that the SEAM enrolment component was successful in ensuring that compulsory school-aged children in scope for SEAM were enrolled in school or an eligible education alternative.

The research also indicated that attendance processes were implemented effectively.

- Where students were referred to Centrelink because of attendance issues, monitoring data shows that attendance improved by 11 per cent in the NT and 55 per cent for QLD.
- A high proportion of referred students (52 per cent in the NT and 76 per cent in QLD) experienced barriers which precluded regular school attendance and they were granted reasonable excuse exemptions (for instance, due to moving house or illness). Although attendance may have improved for some of these students subsequently, it still suggests that improving overall school attendance is not straight-forward.

The much higher referral rate under the attendance component in the NT (25 per cent of in-scope students compared with three per cent in QLD) indicates the attendance benchmark process for referral of students operating in the NT (from July 2010) was more effective in terms of activating the attendance component of SEAM than the QLD approach of providing discretion to school principals.

The impact of SEAM on school enrolment

The enrolment component of SEAM is designed to assist in reducing the number of students who are not enrolled in an education institution or eligible education alternative. The effectiveness of the enrolment component was assessed by looking at whether the enrolment component was appropriately targeted and what aspects, if any, had an impact on school enrolments and to what extent.

Student enrolment data provided by the NT and QLD Departments of Education and Training (DET) and Centrelink administrative data were the main data sources used for this in-house analysis.² It was not possible from this data to estimate:

- the number of children who were disengaged after the verification date in the school year from the NT or QLD education systems. Enrolment data is only verified once a year and transfers occur between government and non-government schools and from SEAM to non-SEAM sites (including across state/territory borders) throughout the year.³
- whether SEAM had any impact on decreasing the number of non-enrolled children from 2009 to 2010 because of insufficient enrolment history for non-government schooling systems.

² Data was not available for other education authorities.

³ In 2011, QLD DET introduced a second enrolment verification process mid-way through the school year.

Overall, partial enrolments appear to be a serious issue, with results showing potentially a third of all students in SEAM schools in the NT and a fifth of those in QLD only enrolled for part of the school year.⁴ In addition, the stability of enrolments among these students deteriorated from 2009 to 2010.

- In both states, the prevalence of partial enrolments increased among the SEAM population but decreased among the non-SEAM population.

However, enrolment notification letters may have had some impact in re-engaging students who had been absent from the schooling system for a short period of time.

- Although new enrolments are not always sustained for the remainder of the school year, sustainability was relatively stable among children who received an enrolment notification letter from 2009 to 2010. Students in the NT are still less likely to remain enrolled for the full year than students in QLD.

In all cases where sanctions were applied, the period of income support payment suspension was relatively short. SEAM did not conclusively identify any student who had been disengaged from the education system for a long period of time.

The SEAM program may benefit from being more tightly targeted to the relatively high degree of instability of enrolment patterns shown among the SEAM population.

The impact of SEAM on school attendance

The attendance component of SEAM is designed to assist in addressing non-attendance issues. The effectiveness of the attendance component was assessed by looking at whether the attendance component was appropriately targeted; what aspects of the component, if any, had an impact on school attendance including issuing attendance notices; and the effect of social worker contacts and parents taking reasonable steps to ensure their child attended school. Student attendance data provided by education authorities and Centrelink administrative data were the main data sources used for this in-house analysis.

In summary, research results indicate SEAM is appropriately targeted and that addressing unauthorised absences is still crucial.

- SEAM students had lower attendance rates across all school terms for 2009 and 2010 in both the NT and QLD compared to non-SEAM students. The lower attendance rates were largely due to higher unauthorised absence rates.

Importantly, results to date are encouraging, suggesting SEAM is starting to have a positive impact on SEAM student attendance in both the NT and QLD. However, these results are tempered somewhat by evidence suggesting that a relapse after the compliance period is common, with an associated increase in unauthorised absences.

- SEAM students showed a greater increase in attendance rates than their non-SEAM peers in both the NT and QLD from 2009 to 2010. The increase was due to a decrease in both authorised and unauthorised absences in the NT and a decrease in unauthorised absences in QLD.

⁴ Students who were only partially enrolled may have moved interstate or to non-government schools where enrolment details aren't available.

- Issuing attendance notices to parents had a short term impact, especially during the compliance period. While attendance relapse was commonly observed in both the NT and QLD, a small improvement was sustained one to two months after the compliance period for students in the NT and in the month immediately after the compliance period for students in QLD.

Interestingly, results suggest that the introduction of an automatic referral process in the NT during July 2010 was associated with a brief increase in attendance for both SEAM and non-SEAM children. It is possible that the existence of SEAM in these schools coupled with changes to the referral process has influenced overall attendance in the NT.

It appears that many families faced complex and significant barriers which thwarted their attempts to make sure their child attended school.

- Results show one quarter of all notified parents took reasonable steps to improve their child's school attendance although this was not always reflected in an actual improvement in attendance.

It is likely that social worker contacts helped to reduce unauthorised absences of referred students during the compliance period. To a lesser extent the contacts may have also helped to limit the relapse in unauthorised absences after the compliance period.

- Social worker contacts were more likely to be provided to parents whose children had higher unauthorised absence rates although distributions of the contacts were different for the NT and QLD. In the NT, the contacts were distributed more evenly among referred students whereas in QLD, the contacts were focused on a smaller proportion of referred students in the Logan area.

There is also some indication that school effect plays an important role in improving school attendance.

- Average attendance varied significantly among SEAM schools in both the NT and QLD and the attendance rates were not linearly associated with the proportion of SEAM students.

In addition, addressing student attendance in secondary compared to the primary school years may represent a substantial policy challenge.

- Aggregated attendance rates for secondary school years were lower compared to primary school years in both the NT and QLD. The difference in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM students was also greater in the secondary school years.

Finally, it appears that the issuing of an attendance notice and the potential threat of suspension has had the most impact on school attendance.

1. Introduction

The School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) was announced by the Federal Government in the 2008-09 Budget. It is a trial designed to encourage parents⁵ on income support to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are enrolled in and attending school regularly.⁶ The trial was introduced from January 2009 in 14 schools across six sites in the NT. An additional six trial sites, including 30 schools, commenced in selected QLD locations during October 2009.

The trial is being continuously monitored and periodically evaluated. While the monitoring provides information on the ongoing progress of the program delivery, evaluation focuses on assessing the effectiveness of the delivery process and impacts of the program.

An evaluation report examining the SEAM implementation and outcomes in the NT in 2009 was completed previously. Following on from the 2009 NT evaluation report, this report covers evaluation results on SEAM implementation and its impacts on school enrolment and attendance in QLD in late 2009 and 2010, as well as findings for the NT in 2010.

1.1. Outline of the report

This report is structured as follows:

Section 2 provides a policy overview of SEAM and includes a brief description of the enrolment and attendance processes.

Section 3 outlines the evaluation: its key research questions, approach and methodology, and limitations.

Section 4 reports on how well the SEAM communication and stakeholder engagement strategies have been implemented in QLD. The delivery of SEAM as measured by stakeholder participation and compliance in both the NT and QLD was also reported in this section.

Section 5 focuses on SEAM school enrolment: the extent to which SEAM impacted on school enrolments.

Section 6 examines SEAM school attendance: the extent to which SEAM impacted on school attendance.

2. SEAM Policy Overview

SEAM was introduced in response to the Australian Government's commitment to improving education outcomes for children. It has been estimated that around 18,000 Australian children of compulsory school age are not enrolled in school or an eligible education alternative, with many others not attending regularly. Research findings have also established the existence of a negative cycle whereby non-attendance and lower levels of school attendance (which are associated with low socio-economic status, Indigenous status and remoteness) lead to poor education outcomes; which in turn are related to an increased likelihood of welfare

⁵ This could be a parent or carer with at least 14 per cent care of a school-aged child. The term 'parent' is used throughout this report to refer to any person who is responsible for the care of a child, whether they are that child's natural parent or not.

⁶ For the purposes of this measure, enrolments include children in approved home schooling and other eligible education alternatives.

dependency, unemployment and in some cases involvement in the criminal justice system. SEAM was designed to assist in breaking this cycle by improving the school enrolment and attendance of students whose parents are on income support payments.

SEAM does not reduce the primary responsibility of state and territory education authorities to respond to truancy issues. Rather, it is intended to provide an additional tool and complement existing strategies to help resolve intractable cases of no enrolment or poor attendance. In particular, SEAM has been introduced as a trial to see whether the potential suspension of income support payments, along with the offer of Centrelink social work services, can be an effective motivation to improve school enrolment and attendance.

The two components of the measure – enrolment and attendance – were implemented as distinct elements of the trial. Both enrolment and attendance commenced in the NT in January 2009 while in QLD staggered implementation resulted in attendance commencing in October 2009 followed by the enrolment component in January 2010.

2.1. SEAM trial sites and participating schools

The SEAM trial was introduced in six NT sites situated in remote and very remote areas comprising more than 80 communities with mainly Indigenous populations.⁷ These sites are:

- Katherine Township⁸
- Katherine Town Camps
- Hermannsburg
- Wallace Rockhole
- Tiwi Islands
- Wadeye.

These six trial sites included 14 schools (nine government and five non-government) participating in SEAM. Table 1 shows the schools participating in SEAM, along with the total number of students enrolled at each school in 2010. The percentage of students at the school who were in scope for SEAM varied widely across the schools, ranging from 94.8 per cent of all students in MacFarlane Primary School to only 9.7 per cent of all students at Casuarina Street Primary School, both in Katherine.

Generally, the students who were not in scope for SEAM either were not of compulsory school age or had no parent receiving an eligible income support payment.

An additional six trial sites, including 30 schools, commenced in selected QLD locations during October 2009. These schools are listed in Table 2. The trial sites in QLD include:

- Logan Central
- Kingston
- Woodridge
- Eagleby
- Doomadgee
- Mornington Island.

⁷ All sites except Katherine Township were prescribed communities under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). SEAM is not specific to remote Indigenous communities or associated with the NTER.

⁸ Katherine Township and Katherine Town Camps are classified as remote areas under the Australian Standard Geographical Classification used by the ABS. The remaining four sites are all classified as very remote areas.

Table 1 Total number of SEAM student enrolments by site and participating school in the NT in 2010

SEAM site	School name	Institution type	School type	Number of SEAM children*	Children enrolled in 2010**	Percentage of children enrolled who were in SEAM
Hermannsburg	Ntaria School	Government	Both primary and secondary	106	151	70.2
Katherine Township***	Casuarina Street Primary	Government	Primary	23	236	9.7
	Clyde Fenton Primary School	Government	Primary	142	239	59.4
	Katherine High School	Government	Secondary	153	585	26.2
	Katherine South Primary School	Government	Primary	84	256	32.8
	MacFarlane Primary School	Government	Primary	219	231	94.8
	St Joseph's School	Catholic	Both primary and secondary	48	328	14.6
Tiwi Islands	Milikipati School	Government	Primary	57	64	89.1
	Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School	Catholic	Primary	161	199	80.9
	Pularumpi School	Government	Primary	50	63	79.4
	Tiwi College	Non-government	Both primary and secondary	16	71	22.5
	Xavier Community Education Centre	Catholic	Secondary	36	90	40.0
Wadeye	Our Lady Of The Sacred Heart Port Keats	Catholic	Both primary and secondary	341	421	81.0
Wallace Rockhole	Wallace Rockhole School	Government	Both primary and secondary	7	23	30.4
Total	-	-	-	1443	2957	48.8

* Based on Centrelink SEAM administration data as at February 2011.

** Based on My School 2010 enrolment data.

*** Katherine Town Camps is not included in the table as no school is located in this trial site. Children in Katherine Town Camps usually attend schools in Katherine.

Table 2 Total number of SEAM student enrolments by site and participating school in QLD in 2010

SEAM site	School name	Institution type	School type	Number of SEAM children*	Children enrolled in 2010**	Percentage of children enrolled who were in SEAM
Logan Central Kingston Woodridge Eagleby	Beenleigh State High School	Government	Secondary	199	942	21.1
	Beenleigh State School	Government	Primary	99	421	23.5
	Beenleigh Special School	Government/Special	Primary and secondary	12	90	13.3
	Berrinba East State School	Government	Primary	191	488	39.1
	Burrowes State School	Government	Primary	54	712	7.6
	Carbrook State School	Government	Primary	13	361	3.6
	Crestmead State School	Government	Primary	30	936	3.2
	Eagleby State School	Government	Primary	185	335	55.2
	Eagleby South State School	Government	Primary	162	279	58.1
	Harris Fields State School	Government	Primary	227	486	46.7
	Kimberley Park State School	Government	Primary	20	896	2.2
	Kingston College	Government	Secondary	161	693	23.2
	Kingston State School	Government	Primary	280	569	49.2
	Logan City Special School	Government/Special	Primary and secondary	21	126	16.7
	Loganholme State School	Government	Primary	28	423	6.6
	Loganlea State High School	Government	Secondary	62	724	8.6
	Mabel Park State High School	Government	Secondary	148	460	32.2
	Mabel Park State School	Government	Primary	280	713	39.3
	Marsden State High School	Government	Secondary	104	1772	5.9
	Marsden State School	Government	Primary	52	989	5.3
	Shailer Park State High School	Government	Secondary	27	869	3.1
	Shailer Park State School	Government	Primary	23	522	4.4
	Slacks Creek State School	Government	Primary	18	271	6.6
	Waterford State School	Government	Primary	24	616	3.9
Waterford West State School	Government	Primary	21	609	3.4	
Woodridge State High School	Government	Secondary	365	942	38.7	
Woodridge State School	Government	Primary	463	662	69.9	
Woodridge North State School	Government	Primary	279	504	55.4	
Doomadgee	Doomadgee State School	Government	Prep – Yr10	220	282	78.0
Mornington Island	Mornington Island State School	Government	Prep – Yr10	166	269	61.7
Total				3934	17 961	21.9

* Based on Centrelink SEAM administration data as at February 2011.

** Based on My School 2010 enrolment data.

The percentage of school population who were in scope for SEAM in QLD varied from 78 per cent at Doomadgee State School to as low as 2.2 per cent at Kimberley Park State School.

2.2. SEAM Enrolment

The enrolment component of SEAM is designed to assist in reducing the number of children who are of compulsory school age but are not enrolled in an educational institution or eligible schooling alternative. A child is in scope for the enrolment component of SEAM if:

- they are of compulsory schooling age: 6-16 years of age in the NT or 6.5-16 years of age in QLD (inclusive)
- they are not receiving payments in their own right and are not receiving any ABSTUDY payment which includes a component of living allowance
- they are in at least 14 per cent care of a person who resides in a SEAM trial site and is receiving (or suspended on) a Schooling Requirement payment⁹.

If these conditions are met, the parent is in scope for the enrolment component of SEAM in respect of that child.

The enrolment component consists of two parts: a bulk enrolment verification performed to gather enrolment details for students at the start of the year, and an ongoing process to collect enrolment details for students who come into scope for SEAM later in the year. A parent is only issued with an enrolment notification letter if their child cannot be matched to an education authority record during the initial verification process or if their child comes into scope for SEAM later in the school year.

2.3. SEAM Attendance

The attendance component of SEAM is designed to assist in identifying students in income support families who have problems with attendance and put in place assistance to help these families address attendance issues. A child is in scope for the attendance component of SEAM if:

- they are in scope for the enrolment component and
- they are enrolled at a SEAM-participating school.

If these conditions are met, the parent is in scope for the attendance component of SEAM in respect of that child.

In-scope parents are required to take reasonable steps to ensure their child is regularly attending school. If a child is not attending school regularly, their parent may be referred to Centrelink for action under SEAM. While students in the NT SEAM schools who have more than five unauthorised absences in a 10-week period (which equates to a 90 per cent attendance benchmark) are automatically referred under SEAM, in QLD referral of students is at the

⁹ Schooling requirement payments include a range of Social Security Benefit payments, Social Security Pensions and some of the Department of Veterans' Affairs payments.

Social Security Benefit – Widow Allowance, Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Sickness Allowance, Partner Allowance, Mature Age Allowance, Parenting Payment Partnered, Austudy, Special Benefit, and Parenting Allowance.

Social Security Pension – Parenting Payment Single, Disability Support Pension, Bereavement Allowance, Age Pension, Carer Payment, Wife Pension, Mature Age Partner Allowance, Widow B Pension, Sole Parent Pension, Disability Wage Supplement, and Special Needs Pension.

Department of Veterans' Affairs – Service Pension, Income Support Supplement, and Defence Force Income Support Allowance

discretion of the school principal. Where a parent is not taking reasonable steps to the satisfaction of the school, Centrelink is notified and issues an attendance notice. The parent then has 28 days to take reasonable steps to address their child's attendance issues. Centrelink offers support throughout this 28-day period to assist parents in addressing attendance problems through social work support. At the end of the compliance period a determination is made as to whether or not the parent has taken reasonable steps or there is an improvement in their child's attendance. If there is no improvement in attendance or it is determined that the parent was not taking reasonable steps, Centrelink can suspend payment.

Parents who have their income support payments suspended under either component and subsequently comply within 13 weeks will have their payments reinstated with full backpay. There is a range of options that Centrelink officers may apply throughout the suspension period and beyond the 13 weeks, such as providing appropriate support services (for example, access to a social worker). In very extreme cases, a parent may have their payments cancelled at the end of the 13 weeks.

3. SEAM Evaluation Framework

3.1. Scope and Objectives

The two key objectives of the 2010 evaluation of SEAM are to provide the Government and stakeholders with:

- an assessment of the implementation of SEAM and the ongoing processes at the trial sites
- an assessment of the effectiveness of SEAM in achieving its desired outcomes at the trial sites including:
 - whether, and to what extent, the **enrolments** of SEAM children increased
 - whether, and to what extent, the **attendance** of SEAM children increased

The findings of this evaluation will inform the ongoing implementation of SEAM at all trial sites. It will also contribute to the decision making at the completion of the trial and to further policy development in the area of conditional welfare payments.

3.2. Evaluation Questions

This evaluation seeks to examine the extent to which SEAM achieved its desired outcomes in 2010, as well as to identify important factors affecting the implementation of SEAM in QLD, and outcomes of the trial in both QLD and the NT. The specific evaluation questions are shown below.

Program Implementation

- Were the strategies used to communicate SEAM in QLD effective as measured by:
 - What was the level of awareness of the SEAM trial among stakeholder groups in QLD and which form of communication was most effective?
 - Did parents, educators and people in the QLD communities have a sound understanding of SEAM requirements?
- Were the enrolment and attendance processes implemented effectively as measured by stakeholder participation and compliance in QLD and the NT?

Effectiveness

- Do the SEAM enrolment and attendance components appropriately target the problem of enrolment and attendance in the NT and QLD?
- Whether and to what extent did SEAM have an impact on school enrolment and attendance in both the NT and QLD?
- What aspects of SEAM had an impact on enrolment in the NT and QLD?
- What aspects of SEAM had an impact on attendance in the NT and QLD?

3.3. Evaluation Approach and Limitations

3.3.1. Data sources

The evaluation questions are addressed using both quantitative and qualitative data. The data utilised for this evaluation came from a number of sources: state and territory education authorities, Centrelink administrative data, commissioned and in-house qualitative research data and program administrative data.

Enrolment and attendance data from education authorities

Education authorities collect enrolment and attendance data for students attending SEAM schools. This data contains individual student enrolment start/end dates (where available), school, year level, demographic information (age, sex) and destination school and reasons for ending the enrolment episode. This data also includes a daily attendance rate for each student along with an absence reason where applicable.

At the end of the school year, education authorities provide historical daily enrolment and attendance data to DEEWR. This evaluation utilises data from the following education authorities:

- 2007-2010 Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET)
- 2009-2010 Queensland Department of Education and Training (QLD DET)

Similar data was requested from the Catholic Education Office but was not received. Data received from the Tiwi Education Board was insufficient for evaluation purposes.

Education authorities in the NT including the Catholic Education Office (CEO) also provide real-time attendance data for some children to Centrelink through a fortnightly data exchange process. Real time data is not received from the Tiwi Education Board.

Centrelink administrative data

Centrelink administrative data is extracted from the Research and Evaluation Dataset (RED) maintained by DEEWR. This dataset contains information on payment history (including supplements), customer demographics, and other associated information gathered by Centrelink which is required to administer payments to customers.

Commissioned and in-house qualitative research

DEEWR commissioned the Social Research Centre (SRC) to undertake a qualitative study of people affected by SEAM in QLD, including parents, school staff, Centrelink officers, staff from QLD DET and other community members with a professional role in SEAM. Fieldwork was conducted in April-June 2010 with the aim of gathering information relating to:

- the implementation of the SEAM trial in QLD
- the effectiveness of SEAM and its outcomes in QLD
- views held by all groups of stakeholders in QLD including parents, principals, community workers, Centrelink and QLD DET employees relating to SEAM.

SRC also conducted a survey of parents living in the Logan area (south-east QLD) who had at least one compulsory school-aged child in order to explore particular issues, including parents' attitudes towards their children's schooling and SEAM.

Program administrative data

Program administrative data is provided in the form of monitoring data on a weekly, fortnightly and monthly basis. The weekly monitoring reports prepared by Centrelink provide information on compliance with SEAM requirements and an individual-level case report on attendance notices issued. The fortnightly real-time data exchange for attendance in the NT provides student demographic information (age, sex, etc), enrolment details, whether the parents are taking reasonable steps and unauthorised absence information for students who are in scope for the attendance component and meet the defined benchmark for poor attendance. Additionally, SEAM general administrative data including all activities and dates is extracted monthly from the Centrelink database.

3.3.2. Evaluation approach

SEAM was introduced in the NT in the beginning of 2009 and its implementation and effectiveness in the NT in 2009 was previously evaluated using 2007-2008 enrolment and attendance data as baseline. This report focuses on the operation and effectiveness of SEAM in 2010. Where relevant, the enrolment and attendance data from previous years were used to contrast the 2010 data.

SEAM was introduced in QLD in October of 2009 and this is the first time that its implementation and effectiveness has been evaluated. Enrolment and attendance data are available for both 2009 and 2010, the 2009 data used largely as baseline data.

The commissioned research and in-house qualitative research were thematically analysed by either commissioned researchers or by the DEEWR evaluation team. Key quantitative analyses, including SEAM versus non-SEAM and pre/post-SEAM comparisons for enrolment and attendance data were undertaken by the evaluation team.

3.3.3. Limitations in the trial design and evaluation

There are a number of limitations in the design of the trial, as well as in the scope and quality of data which impact on the type of analyses performed and the robustness of the conclusions drawn.

In order for an accurate measure of impact made by SEAM, randomised control groups should ideally be established. Each control group should consist of a population that has no known difference in socio-economic status, site or school to a population that is subjected to the SEAM intervention. However, given the ethical and practicality concerns of establishing such control groups, SEAM has been implemented without such controls.

As SEAM is one tool among many that schools employ to address enrolment and attendance issues, it is difficult to completely isolate its impact. The pre- and post-SEAM analysis and comparison of SEAM children with non-SEAM children, to a certain extent, attenuates this problem. However, the lack of control groups and the significant variation in many relevant factors means that quantifications of the impact of SEAM will need to be treated with caution.

School enrolment and attendance data was available for NT DET and QLD DET schools but not for non-government schools. Having an incomplete dataset precludes the analysis of enrolments and attendance of all SEAM children and all SEAM schools. It also eliminates the potential to estimate student movement between government and non-government schools at some trial sites and therefore reduces the potential to analyse enrolment gaps. Consequently, it

limits our ability to gauge the number of school-aged children falling out of the education system.

The classification of SEAM children and non-SEAM children in NT DET and QLD DET schools for comparative analysis relied on matching between Centrelink data records and NT DET and QLD DET enrolment records. Only fifty per cent of all SEAM children identified in Centrelink records were matched due to the large percentage of children in non-SEAM schools and hence only these children could be used in the analysis. The remaining SEAM children are either in non-government schools, or included in the non-SEAM data set or exited scope before the end of the compliance period, resulting in some error in the results.

4. Evaluation of SEAM program implementation in QLD and the NT

This section reports an evaluation of the first stage of SEAM implementation, including awareness of SEAM in QLD trial sites and parents' understanding of their obligations and SEAM requirements. Qualitative and quantitative research conducted by SRC from April to June 2010 was the main data source used for examining whether the strategies used to communicate SEAM in QLD were effective.¹⁰

The qualitative research consisted mainly of in-depth interviews with parents, school staff and education authorities as well as focus groups with Centrelink officers, QLD DET representatives and other community workers. Quantitative research involved the analysis of 850 telephone surveys conducted with parents living in the Logan area who had compulsory school-aged children.

The types of questions asked through in-depth interviews and telephone surveys included parents' involvement with and awareness and understanding of SEAM. Questions about SEAM processes and perceived effectiveness were also discussed. In addition, parents were asked general questions around attitudes towards schooling including their child/ren's enrolment and attendance.

The operation of both the enrolment and attendance components in the NT and QLD was also examined from a compliance perspective using Centrelink administrative data.

An analysis of program outcomes using more detailed enrolment and attendance data from education authorities is reported in Sections 5 and 6.

4.1. What was the level of awareness of the SEAM trial among stakeholder groups in QLD and which form of communication was most effective?

Awareness of SEAM among parents was low. Forty per cent of parents surveyed recounted that they had not heard about SEAM prior to interview.

The approach adopted by school principals in disseminating and managing information and facilitating program implementation was not consistent. While educators felt adequately informed about SEAM some methods adopted by schools for information dissemination were considered ineffective by parents.

Expectations in SEAM schools also varied as to whether all school staff or just school administrators would be responsible for managing the program.

SEAM awareness in QLD among parents was relatively low, with 40 per cent of parents surveyed recounting that they had not heard about SEAM prior to the survey. Some parents indicated that the first time they were made aware of SEAM was upon being contacted for participation in the survey. Some parents also recounted that they first became aware of SEAM through advertising in Centrelink offices 10 months after the initial information had been disseminated. It was thought that given the limited understanding of SEAM among parents, strategies were needed to facilitate program awareness.

Of those parents who were aware of SEAM prior to interview, 60 per cent recounted that they were informed about SEAM through the media. Parents also recounted that they were informed about SEAM by other parents (21 per cent) or through school personnel (10 per cent). Other

¹⁰ Information on the implementation of SEAM in the NT can be found in the NT 2009 evaluation report.

avenues by which parents became aware of SEAM included Centrelink staff, posters at Centrelink offices or letters from their child's school.

Over half of all surveyed parents who were aware of SEAM prior to interview (65 per cent) reported that they were first informed about SEAM during 2009. Information provided directly to parents from schools about how SEAM could affect their family was found to be understandable and relevant.

Initial communication on SEAM with educators was generally found to be informative and provided the necessary amount of information. While some educators thought that the amount of information was not extensive, it was consistent with the general approach existing in schools in regards to information dissemination.

The approach adopted by principals in disseminating and managing information and facilitating program implementation among staff varied. One school recruited all staff to be involved in implementing the measure as it was the joint responsibility of all staff in the school for achieving attendance goals. Other schools educated all staff on the program but did not expect teachers to be actively involved in the process with the program managed by school administrators.

Community workers reported a range of different ways in which they were first informed about SEAM, from contact by media to official contact from Centrelink. A general feeling expressed by community workers was that they would have liked involvement in the consultation and decision-making process prior to the implementation of the program to discuss how services could be used to support members of the community affected by SEAM.

Communication strategies used in schools to disseminate information were also of relevance. Prior to the implementation of SEAM, a range of information materials had been produced by QLD DET for distribution in the Logan area. Some educators noted that one approach proposed by QLD DET and implemented at some schools included incorporating a 'set piece' about SEAM in the school newsletter or sending a brochure to parents. Results from the parent survey suggest that this approach had not been effective.

4.2. Did parents, educators and people in the QLD communities have a sound understanding of SEAM requirements?

Mixed responses were received to the implementation of the SEAM policy in QLD including some confusion on the aims of SEAM and the roles of some stakeholders. Parents did feel encouraged to make more effort to address their child's attendance issues as a result of SEAM implementation.

When asked to identify the purpose of SEAM, parents in QLD perceived the program as a 'big stick' approach to dealing with attendance issues. The implementation of such an approach was not necessarily regarded as positive. Some principals saw SEAM as an approach that could be used in instances where principals could not see a way forward or felt they did not have any other options. However, it was noted that SEAM negatively affected schools' traditional focus on providing a positive and rewarding school environment. Feedback from other stakeholder groups such as Centrelink officers indicated that the SEAM initiative could be used within existing frameworks similar to other customer-focused programs, and that it acknowledged the 'strengths-based approach to engage people'.

The implementation of the program received some positive initial responses from parents. Of those parents who had heard about the program prior to interview, about half (49 per cent) reported that the implementation of the program had made them think about the importance

of their child's schooling. A further 29 per cent also noted that the implementation of the program had encouraged them to make more effort to address their child's attendance issues. This included such actions as discussing the importance of education with their child. Parents also recounted that they had used the threat of suspension of benefits directly to encourage their children to attend school regularly. Parents, however, were generally unaware or unclear about the aims of SEAM. Parents often confused the initiative with existing programs and similar types of support available through schools.

Stakeholders' views on the ownership of SEAM and who had responsibility for implementing the initiative varied. Views expressed by educators differed, particularly on the level of responsibility schools had for driving the program. Some principals took strong leadership for driving the initiative within their school and the broader community. Other principals took the view that a whole-of-school approach was needed to implement the program and drive overall improvements in attendance. In these cases, while principals would play a large role in driving improvements, classroom staff and specialist area teachers were also key to the successful implementation of the program in the school. One principal expressed the view that Centrelink held ownership of SEAM, despite the fact that the particular school was very active in attendance management. Centrelink staff pointed to parents receiving the services as owners of the program. It was, however, acknowledged that the program required Centrelink staff to implement the program effectively.

There was confusion about the role of Centrelink social workers whose task was to refer SEAM families to further support services in the community. While existing service relationships were identified within communities through initial meetings, community workers were left unsure of their involvement in the trial and what role they should be fulfilling.

Tension existed within the referral process as to who held responsibility for determining outcomes of cases, such as reasonable excuse exemption. Differing interpretations of what engagement and reasonable steps meant was also highlighted.

Views differed as to the types of families who were likely to be referred under the SEAM process, how referral assessments would be made and the complexity of cases referred. Schools were of the view that SEAM would directly target the small number of problem families whose children had chronic or extreme attendance problems. Referrals to SEAM were not implemented uniformly across and within schools as most educators exercised discretion when initiating the SEAM process. Centrelink staff similarly expressed the view that discretion would be exercised when viewing cases where a reasonable excuse could be identified. Centrelink could base this decision upon case notes or direct contact with families.

The attendance referral process as it was operating in 2010 relied on Centrelink to determine cases with a reasonable excuse. As noted by Centrelink officers, schools were only notified about reasonable excuse exemptions and given no involvement in decision making. Schools were therefore placed in a difficult position. This was particularly so in cases where a reasonable excuse was granted on the grounds that a school was unable to deliver services it was legally required to. For example, a reasonable excuse exemption was determined on the basis that the school could not provide appropriate access for a child with a disability.

Stakeholder group understanding differed on the type and level of complexity of cases that would be referred to Centrelink. Schools held the view that a number of families required significant support which the school was unable to provide. Principals considered that referral under SEAM would trigger intensive social support required by these families. In contrast,

Centrelink staff were surprised by the complexity of cases being referred under SEAM. It was their view that they would see a greater number of referrals of cases relating to irregular or minor attendance problems.

There was confusion on what constituted 'reasonable steps' and how parents should engage with schools during the referral process. Stakeholders struggled to define reasonable steps and there were marked differences in interpretation of legislation and how decisions should be implemented. It was noted that there were difficulties in maintaining a consistent application of SEAM policy due to DEEWR staff turnover.

4.3. Were the enrolment processes implemented effectively as measured by participation and compliance in QLD and the NT?

As in the NT during 2009, the design and implementation of the SEAM enrolment process in the NT and QLD during 2010 was effective at gathering enrolment details from parents. Where both the parent and child remained in scope, nearly all parents provided details for each of their children.

The response rate to each stage of the enrolment component of SEAM was generally good. Fifty-four per cent of the 760 letters sent in the NT were successful in prompting the provision of enrolment details within the compliance period, compared with 48 per cent of the 2180 letters sent in QLD. Late responses and follow-up contact gathered most of the outstanding enrolment information, although additional resources were required to collect outstanding details from remote sites in QLD.

While a moderate number of parents (seven in the NT and 104 in QLD) had their income support payments suspended for failure to comply with enrolment requirements, no parent had their payments cancelled. Overall, enrolment details were provided for 83 per cent of all notices in the NT and 87 per cent of those in QLD. The vast majority of the remaining notices were issued to parents who subsequently moved out of scope for SEAM.

The vast majority of enrolment information provided was verified by education authorities. A very small number of parents provided inaccurate information about the enrolment status of their children (and these parents' payments were subsequently suspended). Consequently, the SEAM enrolment component was successful in ensuring that all compulsory school-aged children in-scope for SEAM were enrolled in school or an eligible education alternative.

The first stage in the SEAM enrolment process in the NT during 2009 saw Centrelink send all in-scope parents an enrolment notification letter which requested enrolment details for each of their compulsory school-aged children. This letter was sent on commencement of the SEAM trial or as parents came into scope throughout the year. All enrolment details provided were subsequently verified by the relevant education authorities.

This process was altered in 2010 to reduce administrative burden on Centrelink and the education authorities. Under the new enrolment process, a bulk verification of enrolment details was conducted between Centrelink and the education authorities prior to requesting details from parents. Enrolment notification letters were subsequently only sent to those parents of children for whom no current enrolment record could be found, or who came into scope after the bulk verification was performed.

Consequently, the SEAM enrolment process in the NT and QLD during 2010 consisted of three phases: a bulk verification of enrolment details at the start of the school year, an enrolment notification letter to relevant parents and suspension of payments. Parents had the opportunity to provide enrolment details at any time after receiving the enrolment notification letter.

4.3.1. Bulk enrolment verification process

The bulk enrolment verification between Centrelink and education authorities was completed on 16 April 2010. Of the 1122 children in the NT and the 3994 children in QLD who were identified by Centrelink as in-scope at the beginning of the information exchange, 924 in the NT (82 per cent) and 3289 in QLD (82 per cent) were successfully matched to a current enrolment record. This significantly reduced the number of parents who required an enrolment notification letter, decreasing the administrative burden on Centrelink to gather enrolment details from parents.

4.3.2. Enrolment notification letters

During the 2010 school year, Centrelink issued a total of 2940 enrolment notification letters¹¹ requesting parents to provide their child's school enrolment details to Centrelink within at least 14 days. Around half of these notices (54 per cent in the NT and 48 per cent in QLD) were complied with during the compliance period, while a further group of parents subsequently provided the required information prior to follow-up contact by Centrelink (11 per cent in the NT and 25 per cent in QLD).

Looking at these two groups together, the initial response rate was slightly higher in QLD than in the NT. Table 3 shows that 72¹² per cent of the 2180 enrolment notification letters issued in QLD gathered enrolment details without requiring follow-up contact, compared with 65 per cent of the 760 enrolment notification letters in the NT.

Table 3 SEAM enrolment compliance statistics for 2010

	Overall	NT	QLD
Enrolment notification letters sent during 2010	2940	760	2180
Details provided	2539	632	1907
within compliance period	1446	410	1036
outside compliance period, but prior to contact	623	82	541
after follow-up contact	381	134	247
after sanction	89	6	83
Notice still active at end of 2010	114	25	89
Out of scope	287	103	184
at end of compliance period	265	102	163
after sanction applied	22	1	21
Sanctions applied - total	111	7	104
Cancellations applied - total	0	0	0
Initial response rate – no contact required	70.4%	64.7%	72.3%
Proportion of notices which required follow-up contact (includes all notices where a sanction was applied)	16.7%	18.6%	16.1%
Proportion of notices which eventuated in provision of details	86.4%	83.2%	87.5%

Tables 4 and 5 provide data on enrolment notification letters, disaggregated by trial site. Flowcharts detailing the progression of parents and children through the enrolment stages of the SEAM enrolment component are provided in the Appendix.

¹¹ These 2940 enrolment notification letters were sent in respect of 2916 children. Some children were subject to more than one enrolment notice due to transfers between carers and changes of residence between SEAM and non-SEAM sites.

¹² The sub-group estimates do not add up to the total estimate due to rounding.

Table 4 Compliance with SEAM enrolment notices in the NT – cumulative data for 2010*

	NTER sites – remote servicing arrangements						
	NT Total	Katherine Township	Katherine Town Camps	Hermannsburg	Tiwi Islands	Wadeye	Wallace Rockhole
Parents ever in scope for SEAM	1097	406	117	85	230	251	8
Children ever in scope for SEAM	2036	780	227	143	422	453	11
Enrolment notification letters sent during 2010	760	272	79	44	180	183	2
Details provided	632	202	60	39	165	164	2
within compliance period	410	108	37	26	118	120	1
outside compliance period, but prior to contact	82	36	10	2	18	16	-
after follow-up contact	134	58	13	9	27	26	1
after sanction	6	-	-	2	2	2	-
Notice still active at end of 2010	25	12	3	1	2	7	-
Out of scope	103	58	16	4	13	12	-
at end of compliance period	102	58	16	4	12	12	-
after sanction applied	1	-	-	-	1	-	-
Reasonable excuse or special circumstance granted	17	9	6	-	2	-	-
Sanctions applied – total	7	-	-	2	3	2	-
Cancellations applied – total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Initial response rate – no contact required	64.7%	52.9%	59.5%	63.6%	75.6%	74.3%	N/A [^]
Required follow-up contact	18.6%	21.3%	16.5%	25.0%	16.7%	15.3%	N/A [^]
Eventuated in provision of enrolment details	83.2%	74.3%	75.9%	88.6%	91.7%	89.6%	N/A [^]

* Data is sourced from Centrelink monitoring dated 18 February 2011 and supplemented by administrative data extracted as part of DEEWR's Research and Evaluation Dataset (RED). This monitoring report is the most complete source of information for attendance and enrolment notices issued during 2010. All information related to notices issued during 2011 has been removed where possible.

[^] The number of letters issued in Wallace Rockhole is too small to calculate a meaningful percentage for comparison purposes.

Table 5 Compliance with SEAM enrolment notices in QLD – cumulative data for 2010*

	QLD Total	Logan region					Remote sites	
		Logan area subtotal	Woodridge	Kingston	Logan Central	Eagleby	Doomadgee	Mornington Island
Parents ever in scope for SEAM	3591	3301	1171	1074	255	801	155	135
Children ever in scope for SEAM	6363	5839	2085	1935	469	1350	303	221
Enrolment notification letters sent during 2010	2180	1975	737	623	162	453	122	83
Details provided	1907	1753	647	557	134	415	84	70
within compliance period	1036	1026	374	309	76	267	4	6
outside compliance period, but prior to contact	541	481	194	158	38	91	31	29
after follow-up contact	247	167	53	62	13	39	46	34
after sanction	83	79	26	28	7	18	3	1
Notice still active at end of 2010	89	71	31	23	4	13	15	3
Out of scope	184	151	59	43	24	25	23	10
at end of compliance period	163	136	55	37	23	21	17	10
after sanction applied	21	15	4	6	1	4	6	-
Reasonable excuse or special circumstance granted	59	33	12	14	3	4	23	3
Sanctions applied – total	104	94	30	34	8	22	9	1
Cancellations applied – total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Initial response rate – no contact required	72.3%	76.3%	77.1%	75.0%	70.4%	79.0%	28.7%	42.2%
Required follow-up contact	16.1%	13.2%	11.3%	15.4%	13.0%	13.5%	45.1%	42.2%
Eventuated in provision of enrolment details	87.5%	88.8%	87.8%	89.4%	82.7%	91.6%	68.9%	84.3%

* Data is sourced from Centrelink monitoring dated 18 February 2011 and supplemented by RED administrative data.

The proportion of parents who failed to respond to the enrolment notice without being contacted by Centrelink varied by location. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, response rates were highest in the urban area of Logan, with only 13 per cent of parents failing to provide enrolment details by the end of the compliance period. Hand delivery of enrolment notification letters in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) sites of Tiwi Islands, Katherine Town Camps and Wadeye may have driven a similarly high response rate: only 15-17 per cent of notices required follow-up contact compared with 21 per cent in Katherine Township, where letters were delivered via the postal system. Notably, the resources required to collect enrolment details for children referred to in outstanding notices was highest in the remote QLD sites of Doomadgee and Mornington Island, with almost half (45 per cent and 42 per cent respectively) of all notices in these sites requiring follow-up contact.

Subsequent follow-up contact made with parents by Centrelink at the end of the compliance period resulted in enrolment details for a further 134 children in the NT and 247 children in QLD. Overall, the combination of issuing an enrolment notification letter and follow-up contact was successful at obtaining enrolment details from most parents, with 83 per cent of notices issued in the NT during 2010 and 87 per cent of those in QLD resulting in provision of enrolment details.¹³

4.3.3. Enrolment sanctions

Where a parent failed to provide the requested details and follow-up contact was not successful at gathering the required information, Centrelink issued them with a formal notice informing them their income support payment had been suspended under SEAM. It should be noted that these enrolment sanctions were not applied for a parent's failure to enrol a child in school, but rather for failing to provide enrolment details to Centrelink.

Of the 111 enrolment sanctions applied under SEAM during 2010, seven were in the NT and 104 were in QLD. Six cases in the NT (86 per cent) and 83 cases in QLD (80 per cent) resulted in enrolment details being provided to Centrelink and a subsequent restoration of payments. The remaining 22 cases had payments restored when the parents or children involved left SEAM scope.¹⁴ In all cases where sanctions were applied, the income support payment suspension period was relatively short. No parents had their income support cancelled for failure to comply with enrolment requirements during 2010.

The enrolment sanction rate was higher in QLD than in the NT. The remote QLD site of Doomadgee had the highest sanction rate of all sites, with seven per cent of notices resulting in a suspension of payments. Additionally, a small number of parents (two) provided details which could not be verified by the listed school, indicating that the child was not enrolled at the school reported by the parent.

An issue that became apparent when applying enrolment sanctions was the misalignment of schooling options and schooling requirements in remote sites. A small number of children residing in Doomadgee who were not enrolled during 2010 had already completed the highest level of schooling offered by Doomadgee State School. Consequently, these children would not have been able to continue participating in education without moving residence or enrolling in home schooling or open education. The small number of sanctions applied in these cases were

¹³ The remaining notices were either still active at the end of the school year or were no longer applicable due to the parent or child leaving scope for SEAM.

¹⁴ A definition of 'in-scope' for the enrolment component is contained in the glossary.

lifted upon advice that children in these circumstances would satisfy relevant legislation if they were participating in training or employment.

4.4. Were the attendance processes implemented effectively as measured by participation and compliance in QLD and the NT?

There are two categories for which a child can be considered compliant with an attendance notice; either through parents taking reasonable steps or by children showing improved attendance. Compliance through improved attendance was 11 per cent for referred children in the NT and 55 per cent for QLD.

However, a high proportion of referred children (52 per cent for the NT and 76 per cent in QLD) were granted a reasonable excuse exemption from sanction, for instance, due to moving house or illness. While attendance may have improved for some of these students subsequently, it still suggests that improving overall school attendance is not straight-forward.

The much higher referral rate under the attendance component in the NT (25 per cent of in-scope children compared with three per cent in QLD) indicates the attendance benchmark process for referral of students was more effective in terms of activating the attendance component of SEAM.

4.4.1. Northern Territory

Under the attendance component of SEAM in 2010 in the NT, lists of students with unsatisfactory school attendance (more than five unauthorised absences in a 10-week period) were provided to Centrelink for in-scope fortnightly checks. Families confirmed as 'in scope' for SEAM where parents did not take reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance were sent an attendance notice. Notified parents had 28 days to comply by improving attendance or taking reasonable steps to improve their child's attendance. Notified parents might be granted a reasonable excuse or special circumstances if they faced difficulties or barriers. Parents who did not comply with the notice and were not granted a reasonable excuse exemption or special circumstance would have their income support suspended.

The attendance monitoring data for SEAM children and parents for the NT is shown in Table 6. Over the year, a total of 524 attendance notices involving 491 children were sent to 334 parents in 2010. This represents a referral rate of 25 per cent for SEAM children. Of the parents who were notified, 53 children (11 per cent) were compliant by improving attendance. Reasonable excuse exemptions were granted to just over half of the notified children (256, 52 per cent) and there was also a large proportion of families (involving 250 children, 51 per cent) moving out of scope or having no determination made. Income support suspensions were applied to eight parents involving 10 children (two per cent of notified children).¹⁵

The relatively low proportion of families who complied with the attendance component by improving attendance or taking reasonable steps and the high proportion of families granted a reasonable excuse or special circumstance exemption suggests that improving school attendance is not straight-forward.

The significant proportion of families who moved out of scope for SEAM suggests the SEAM population is significantly transient. Anecdotal evidence, including social worker feedback,

¹⁵ As a student could be granted a reasonable excuse exemption and then move out of scope, some double counting may occur in the figures listed.

raises the possibility that a small number of families deliberately moved out of the SEAM trial schools or sites to avoid the initiative.

Table 6 SEAM attendance compliance statistics cumulative in the NT for 2010*

	Adults	Children
In scope - attendance component	1090	1972
Referred to Centrelink for poor attendance	-	493
Attendance notices issued	334	491¹⁶
Compliant – attendance improved	-	53
Compliant – reasonable steps	-	34
Out of scope or no determination made	-	250
Attendance notice currently active	-	0
Current reasonable excuse or special circumstance		154
Attendance reasonable excuse ever granted	176	256
Attendance special circumstance ever granted	30	-
Payment suspension ever applied	8	10

* Cumulative data for 2010 as at 18 February 2011

4.4.2. Queensland

The attendance component of SEAM operates differently in QLD compared to the NT. Attendance referrals to Centrelink are at the discretion of school principals, who refer students who they deem to have unsatisfactory school attendance. No defined benchmark is used to determine what constitutes unsatisfactory attendance in QLD, but it is usually the case that a SEAM attendance referral is used as a last resort for families who refuse to engage with schools. Once referred, families confirmed as in scope for SEAM by Centrelink were sent an attendance notice. Notified families had 28 days to comply by improving attendance or taking reasonable steps to improve attendance. Notified families might be granted a reasonable excuse or special circumstance exemption if they faced difficulties complying with their SEAM requirements. Those families who did not comply with the notice and were not granted a reasonable excuse exemption or special circumstance had their income support payment suspended.

Attendance monitoring data for SEAM children and parents for QLD is shown in Table 7. From October 2009¹⁷ through to the end of 2010, a total of 92 attendance notices involving 87 children were sent to 70 parents. For parents who were notified, 48 children (55 per cent) were compliant by improving attendance. Reasonable excuse exemptions were granted to 66 children of notified parents (76 per cent) and there were a number of families (28 children) who moved out of scope or had no determination made. Income support suspensions were applied to four parents involving eight children (nine percent of notified children).

Consistent with the NT, the relatively high proportion of families granted a reasonable excuse or special circumstance exemption (60 out of 70 parents referred under the attendance component) in QLD suggests that improving school attendance is not straight-forward. Many families face various difficulties or barriers as discussed previously. Qualitative research indicated that tailored social worker support was considered to be the most critical factor in addressing issues behind school absenteeism. This is discussed further in section 6.3.3.

¹⁶ Some children were subject to multiple notices. The total number of attendance notices issued was 524.

¹⁷ SEAM commenced in QLD in Term 4, 2009.

Table 7 SEAM attendance compliance statistics cumulative in QLD for 2010*

	Adults	Children
In scope - attendance component	2193	3701
Referred to Centrelink for poor attendance	-	99
Attendance notices issued	70	88¹⁸
Compliant – attendance improved	-	48
Compliant – reasonable steps	-	0
Out of scope or no determination made	-	28
Attendance notice currently active	-	12
Current reasonable excuse or special circumstance		0
Attendance reasonable excuse ever granted	51	66
Attendance special circumstance ever granted	9**	-
Payment suspension ever applied	4	6

* Cumulative data for 2010 as at 18 February 2011

Data inclusive of 01/10/2009 - 18/02/2011

** Inclusive of one record for which community could not be allocated

This section has reported on aspects of program implementation including compliance with the enrolment and attendance components in the NT and QLD. Sections 5 and 6 will provide more detailed information on enrolment and attendance outcomes.

¹⁸ Some children were subject to multiple notices. The total number of attendance notices issued was 92.

5. Evaluation of the enrolment component of SEAM

Introduction

The enrolment component is the first of the two main components of SEAM, and is designed to assist in reducing the number of children who are not enrolled in an education institution or eligible education alternative. The effectiveness of the enrolment component is assessed by addressing the following evaluation questions.

- Does the SEAM enrolment component appropriately target the problem of enrolments in the NT and QLD?
- What aspects of SEAM, if any, had an impact on school enrolments, and to what extent?

Student enrolment data from NT DET and QLD DET and Centrelink SEAM administration data were the main data sources for this analysis. As previously mentioned, no enrolment data was available for non-government schools.

5.1. Does the SEAM enrolment component appropriately target the problem of enrolments in the NT and QLD?

During 2010, a third of all children in the NT and a fifth of those in QLD in trial locations were only enrolled for part of the school year, although some of these gaps in education may be due to enrolments in schools for which no enrolment information is available.

The enrolments of SEAM children are shorter and more fragmented than those of other children attending the same schools, and the stability of enrolments among these children deteriorated from 2009 to 2010. In general, enrolments are less fragmented in the non-SEAM population, in urban areas and on island sites.

It is not possible from data available to estimate the number of children who are disengaged from the education system. However, the available data suggests SEAM does not appear to be adequately addressing the significant proportion of children who have enrolment records for only part of the school year or the difference in enrolment patterns between SEAM and non-SEAM students.

The SEAM program may benefit from being more tightly targeted to ensure that children who leave their current school for any reason remain engaged with the education system by rapidly enrolling in a new school or eligible education alternative.

5.1.1. Data limitations

As no enrolment data is available from the non-government schools in either the NT or QLD and residence information is only available for children in families receiving income support, it is not possible to estimate the number of children residing in the trial sites who are not enrolled in the NT and QLD education systems, nor establish the prevalence of non-enrolment among the SEAM and non-SEAM populations. Consequently, we focus on enrolment patterns among those children for whom data is available.

5.1.2. Overall enrolment trends 2009-2010

Table 8 shows overall enrolment trends among the SEAM and non-SEAM populations in SEAM schools by state for the 2009 and 2010 school years. During this period, the number of students in QLD DET SEAM schools increased slightly while the number of students in NT DET SEAM

schools fell slightly. These trends were reflected in both the SEAM and non-SEAM populations in each state.

In both the NT and QLD, the prevalence of partial enrolments (where a child's enrolment records do not cover the whole school year) increased among the SEAM population but decreased among the non-SEAM population. Children in the NT are more likely to be enrolled for only part of the school year, particularly if they are in scope for SEAM. This may be influenced by higher population mobility in the NT sites.

While it is likely that some partial enrolments are due to transfers between schooling systems rather than to children becoming disengaged from the education system, there was no mechanism included in the enrolment component to ensure that SEAM children who left their school remained compliant with SEAM by subsequently enrolling in another school or education alternative.¹⁹

Table 8 Partial enrolments and multiple enrolment spells in SEAM schools, 2009-10

	SEAM children		Non-SEAM children	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
Northern Territory				
Total children	650	585	2161	1961
Proportion partially enrolled (%)	30.8	36.6	33.5	30.7
Queensland				
Total children	3523	3614	16 223	16 283
Proportion partially enrolled (%)	18.4	19.6	24.3	20.5

Although all in-scope children had their enrolments verified by education authorities early in the 2010 school year, school enrolment and attendance data was only available for NT DET and QLD DET schools. It is not possible to quantify the exact number of students who became disengaged from the education system after verification or the number of school days missed due to enrolment information from non-government schools not being available.

Processes in SEAM may need to be adjusted so that the trial is more tightly targeted to address the significant incidence of partial enrolments and ensure that children who move site or leave their current school re-enrol in another school or eligible education alternative.

5.1.3. Enrolment trends by site

Table 9 shows more detailed enrolment information by site for the 2010 school year only. In general, children in remote communities had a higher incidence of multiple spells and partial enrolments. Mornington Island was the exception to this trend, with a comparatively low partial enrolment rate among both SEAM and non-SEAM students. The incidence of partial enrolments was also relatively low among SEAM children in the Tiwi Islands compared to the other NT sites, although this did not hold for the non-SEAM children. This relative stability may be due to the geographic isolation of both Mornington Island and the Tiwi Islands.

¹⁹ It should be noted that NT DET has stringent guidelines to follow when a child leaves school in the middle of the year. These guidelines aim to ensure that children do not become disengaged from the education system.

Table 9 Partial enrolments during 2010 by site

Location	Number of SEAM children			Proportion with partial enrolments (%)
	Total	Partially enrolled	Multiple spells	
Hermannsburg	123	58	37	47.2
Katherine area	362	131	120	36.2
Tiwi Islands	89	20	14	22.5
Wallace Rockhole	11	5	5	45.5
NT total	585	214	176	36.6
Doomadgee	194	76	35	39.2
Logan area	3242	594	493	18.3
Mornington Island	178	38	17	21.3
QLD total	3614	708	545	19.6

Location	Number of non-SEAM children			Proportion with partial enrolments (%)
	Total	Partially enrolled	Multiple spells	
Hermannsburg	117	58	49	49.6
Katherine area	1725	501	327	29.0
Tiwi Islands	90	36	17	40.0
Wallace Rockhole	29	8	6	27.6
NT total	1961	603	399	30.7
Doomadgee	171	67	29	39.2
Logan area	15962	3228	1692	20.2
Mornington Island	150	38	9	25.3
QLD total	16283	3333	1730	20.5

5.2. What aspects of SEAM, if any, had an impact on school enrolments, and to what extent?

Enrolment notification letters sent during 2010 may have had some impact in re-engaging students who had been absent from the schooling system for a short period of time. Of those children who were not enrolled in government schools when the notification letter was sent, 69 per cent enrolled in the next month. However, it is not possible to determine whether these children had been enrolled at non-government schools at the start of 2010.

While new enrolments are not always sustained for the remainder of the school year, sustainability has remained stable from 2009 to 2010. Students in the NT are still less likely to remain enrolled for the full year than students in QLD.

Although only two children were genuinely not enrolled at the time an enrolment sanction was applied, enrolment sanctions appear to have been very effective at re-engaging children with the education system during 2010.

There was no evidence to conclusively identify any children who had been disengaged from the education system for a long period of time, as all SEAM children who were of compulsory school age at the start of the 2010 school year had also been enrolled in school during 2009.

5.2.1. Did enrolment notification letters increase enrolment among SEAM children?

The enrolment component of SEAM is targeted at decreasing the number of non-enrolled children who meet the in-scope criteria. Consequently, the high level of compliance among parents is not in itself sufficient evidence that enrolments increased because of SEAM. In order to measure the effectiveness of the enrolment component, quantitative data provided by the education authorities was linked to Centrelink administrative data in order to identify children who had no enrolment record prior to receiving an enrolment notification letter.²⁰

Table 10 shows the number of children in 2010 in the NT and QLD DET schools who were enrolled when their parent was sent an enrolment notification letter. Of the 1151 children for whom enrolment information is available, 1007 (87 per cent) were already enrolled at the time their parent received the letter. These parents responded by simply providing the existing enrolment details to Centrelink.

The remaining 144 children were not enrolled in a government school at the time the notification letter was sent. Just over two thirds of these children (99 children, 69 per cent) were enrolled in school during the month immediately following receipt of the letter. An additional 31 children enrolled during the rest of the year, while the remaining 14 children left scope for SEAM. This spike in enrolments immediately after receipt of a letter was most marked in Logan and Katherine Township.

Table 10 Enrolments at NT and QLD government schools at and after the date of issue of an enrolment notification letter to parent

Site	Total	Enrolled	Total not enrolled	Not enrolled at notification		
				Enrolled within the next month	Enrolled later that year	Didn't enrol
Northern Territory						
Hermannsburg	32	31	1	1	0	0
Katherine Town Camps	39	34	5	3	1	1
Katherine Township	46	33	13	8	4	1
Tiwi Islands	27	25	2	1	0	1
Wallace Rockhole	2	2	0	0	0	0
NT total	146	125	21	13	5	3
Queensland						
Doomadgee	81	68	13	2	7	4
Logan area	860	757	103	84	13	6
Mornington Island	64	57	7	0	6	1
QLD total	1005	882	123	86	26	11
Whole of SEAM total	1151	1007	144	99	31	14

²⁰ Ideally, definitive quantification of the impact of SEAM on enrolments would require the establishment of an appropriate control group. As the implementation of SEAM precluded selection of any control group, results and conclusions from this analysis should be used with care.

Of the 144 children who were not enrolled when the enrolment notice was sent, 109 children had moved into SEAM trial sites during 2010. Each of the remaining 35 children who had lived in trial sites for both years had an enrolment record for 2009, despite having no enrolment record at the start of 2010. However, the lack of enrolment information for non-government schools means that it is not possible to determine whether these short-term breaks in enrolment for these 35 children are due to transfers between schooling systems, movements to non-SEAM locations or genuine periods of short-term disengagement from the education system.

Consequently, it was not possible to identify any children who had been disengaged from the education system for a long period of time and therefore whether SEAM had an impact on longer-term disengagement. However, SEAM may have had some impact in re-engaging the handful of children who had been absent from the schooling system for a short period of time.

5.2.2. Did enrolment sanctions increase enrolment among SEAM children?

Seven enrolment sanctions were applied in the NT and 104 in QLD during 2010. Only two of these children were genuinely not enrolled at the time the sanction was applied and their parents enrolled them within two weeks of the sanction. The remaining sanctions were applied due to parents' failure to respond to the notification letter and sanctions were lifted when the parents notified Centrelink of enrolment details.

It appears that the notification letter and therefore the threat of a sanction was sufficient to ensure the effectiveness of the enrolment component without progressing to a sanction. However, due to data limitations, including missing enrolment data for children at non-government schools, it is not possible to measure this outcome precisely.

5.2.3. Were SEAM enrolments sustained throughout 2010?

Table 11 shows the extent to which enrolments were sustained over 2010 compared to 2009. Enrolment sustainability in the NT remained relatively stable from 2009 to 2010, with 38.9 of SEAM children who enrolled after receiving an enrolment notification letter in 2010 remaining enrolled for the rest of the school year, compared with 40.7 per cent of those in 2009. New enrolments in QLD during 2010 were far more likely to be sustained to the end of the school year, with 90.2 per cent of students who enrolled after receiving an enrolment notification letter remaining enrolled until the end of the year. SEAM children who were already enrolled when their parents received an enrolment notification letter in 2010 were more likely to remain enrolled, with 90.7 per cent of these enrolments sustained until the end of the school year.

There was some variation in enrolment sustainability between states. The proportion of children in QLD who sustained enrolments to the end of the school year was around 20 percentage points higher than in the NT, which may be influenced by the higher mobility of families living in NT sites. Children in the NT who enrolled within the month after receiving a notification letter were markedly less likely to sustain their enrolment for the rest of the year, indicating that these enrolments may be a short-term compliance response or an indication of the transient population in the NT, rather than a sustained educational outcome.

This data indicates that while the SEAM enrolment process appears to have had some effect at reducing the number of unenrolled children, these enrolments are not always sustained for the remainder of the school year, particularly in the NT. Qualitative field work conducted in the NT and QLD during 2009-10 has shown that social workers are perceived to play a critical role in helping parents to manage any barriers relating to their child's schooling. The role of social work in SEAM is discussed in section 6.3.3.

Table 11 Number of months between notification and the end of the enrolment period

	Number of children – 2009			Total	Proportion enrolled to end of year (%)
	Enrolled for 1-5 months	Enrolled for 6-11 months	Enrolled until end of year		
Northern Territory	123	58	468	649	72.1
Enrolled at notification	89	38	431	558	77.2
Enrolled after notification	34	20	37	91	40.7
<i>within a month</i>	20	6	17	43	39.5
<i>later that year</i>	14	14	20	48	41.7
Didn't enrol				76	
	Number of children – 2010				
	Enrolled for 1-5 months	Enrolled for 6-11 months	Enrolled until end of year	Total	Proportion enrolled to end of year (%)
Northern Territory	20	19	104	143	72.7
Enrolled at notification	10	18	97	125	77.6
Enrolled after notification	10	1	7	18	38.9
<i>within a month</i>	9	1	3	13	23.1
<i>later that year</i>	1	-	4	5	80.0
Didn't enrol				3	
Queensland	39	38	917	994	92.3
Enrolled at notification	28	38	816	882	92.5
Enrolled after notification	11	-	101	112	90.2
<i>within a month</i>	5	-	81	86	94.2
<i>later that year</i>	6	-	20	26	76.9
Didn't enrol				11	
Whole of SEAM	59	57	1021	1137	89.8
Enrolled at notification	38	56	913	1007	90.7
Enrolled after notification	21	1	108	130	83.1
<i>within a month</i>	14	1	84	99	84.8
<i>later that year</i>	7		24	31	77.4
Didn't enrol				14	

6. Evaluation of the attendance component of SEAM

Introduction

Attendance is the second main component of SEAM. The effectiveness of this component was assessed by addressing the following evaluation questions.

- Does the SEAM attendance component of the policy appropriately target the problem of attendance in the NT and QLD?
- Whether and to what extent did SEAM have an impact on school attendance?
What aspects of SEAM had an impact on school attendance?

Student attendance data from education authorities and Centrelink SEAM administration data were the main data sources for this analysis. Limited attendance data was available for non-government schools.

6.1. Does the SEAM attendance component of the policy appropriately target the problem of attendance in the NT and QLD?

SEAM students had lower attendance rates across all school terms for 2009 and 2010 in both the NT and QLD compared to non-SEAM students. The lower attendance rate was largely due to higher unauthorised absence rates. These findings indicate that SEAM is appropriately targeted and that addressing unauthorised absences is still crucial.

The earlier NT 2009 evaluation found that SEAM was appropriately targeted as the attendance of SEAM students was 10 percentage points lower than their non-SEAM peers in DET SEAM schools in 2009. Similar analyses were carried out to examine whether this attendance pattern still existed in the NT and whether QLD showed a similar pattern during 2010.²¹

6.1.1. Attendance patterns by school terms each year

Northern Territory

In 2010, the attendance rates of the NT DET SEAM students were lower than their non-SEAM peers across all school terms (Figure 1). On average, the attendance rate for SEAM students in 2010 was around seven percentage points lower than that for non-SEAM students, compared to around 11 percentage points in 2009. The attendance rate in 2009 gradually declined from Term 1 to Term 4 for both SEAM and non-SEAM students whereas the attendance rate in 2010 spiked in Term 3 before markedly declining in Term 4 (which is consistent with attendance trends in previous years). The introduction of the automatic referral process in the NT in July 2010 may explain this elevated attendance rate in Term 3 2010. It is possible that the existence of SEAM in these schools coupled with changes to the referral process has influenced overall attendance in the NT, that is, for both SEAM and non-SEAM students in trial locations.

A distributional analysis of the 2010 attendance rates in the SEAM and non-SEAM populations showed that while around 54 per cent non-SEAM students had an attendance rate of 90 per cent or higher, the proportion dropped to 31 per cent for SEAM students (Figure 3). Conversely, 43 per cent of SEAM students had an attendance rate lower than 80 per cent compared to 19 per cent of non-SEAM students. A similar pattern was also observed for 2009 attendance data (Figure 2) although the proportion of students who had an attendance rate of 90 per cent or higher was lower for both non-SEAM and SEAM students (45 and 25 per cent) respectively.

²¹ Student attendance data from NT and QLD DETs were the main data sources used. For comparative analyses, the attendance data sets were matched with Centrelink SEAM administrative data to identify SEAM from non-SEAM students.

Figure 1 Attendance rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children by term in NT DET SEAM schools during 2009 and 2010

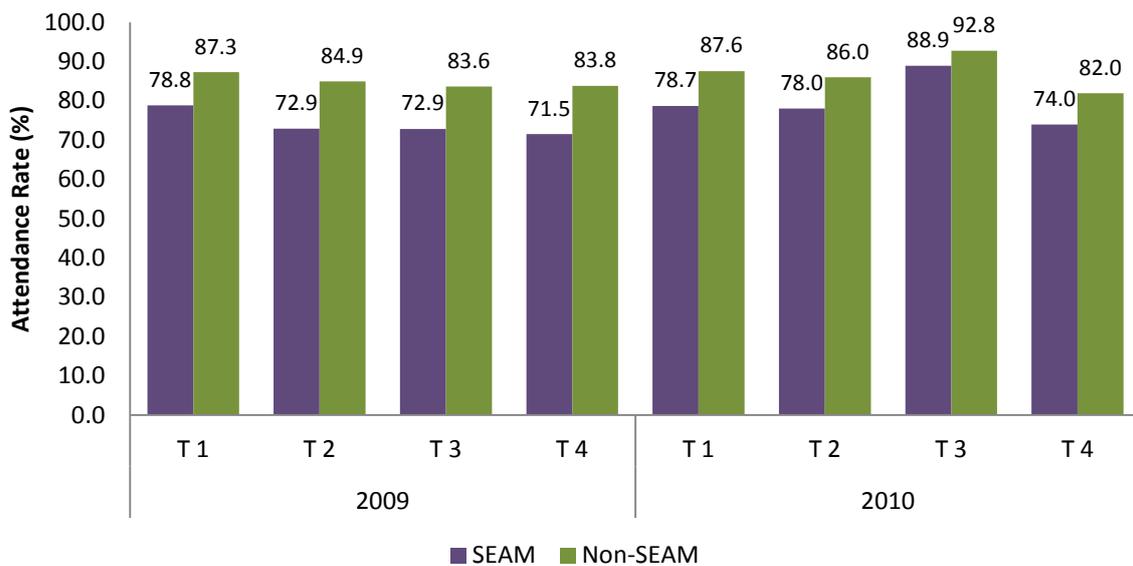


Figure 2 The distribution of attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in NT DET SEAM schools during 2009

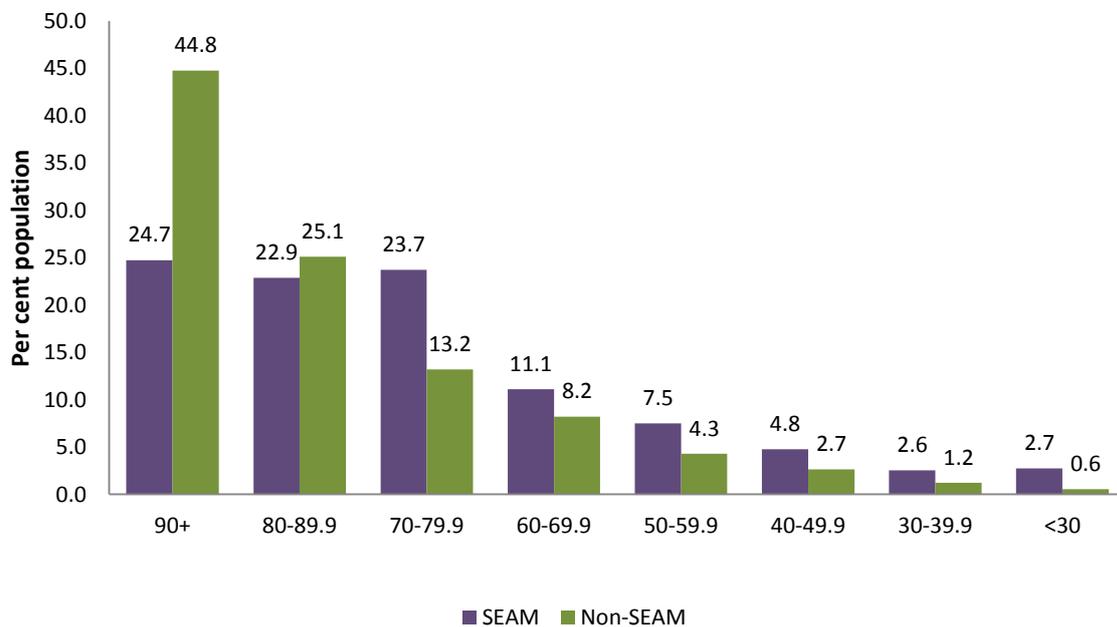
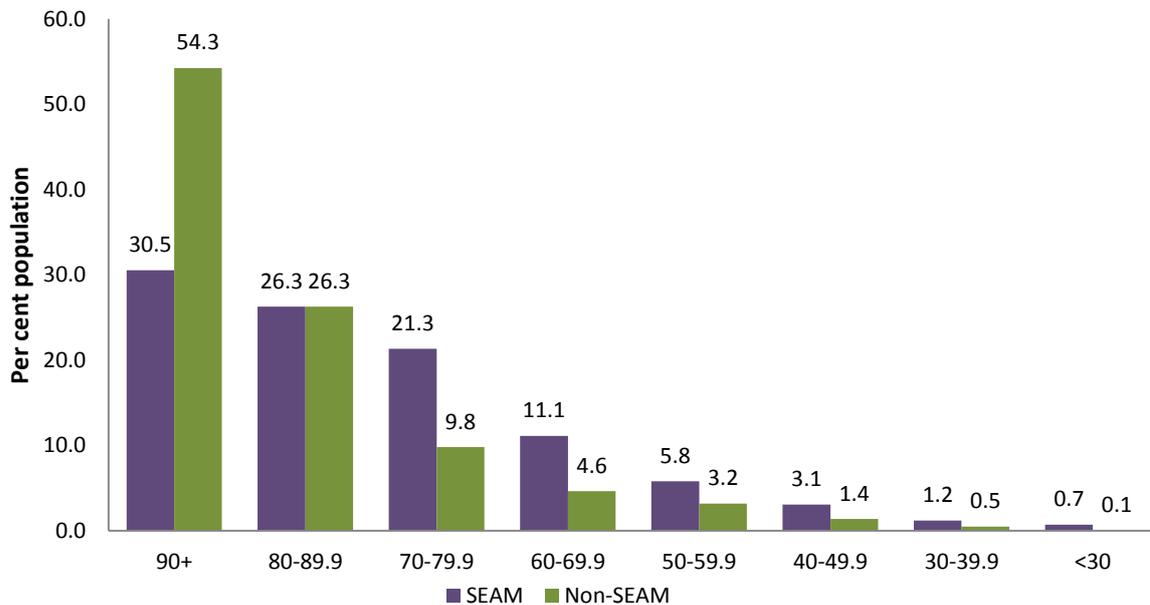


Figure 3 The distribution of attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in NT DET SEAM schools during 2010



Queensland

Figure 4 shows that the relatively poor attendance of SEAM children in QLD is consistent across the whole year: the attendance rates were invariably lower for SEAM children than for their non-SEAM counterparts across all school terms in 2009 and 2010 (and this difference was generally highest in Term 3). For example, close to a seven percentage point difference can be observed between SEAM and non-SEAM attendance rates for Term 3 in 2009. The greatest difference in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM children in 2010 is similarly seen in Term 3 (four percentage points). Figure 4 also shows that the smallest difference in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM children can be observed in Term 4. Results suggest a seasonal pattern in attendance rates can be observed in 2009 or 2010 where attendance rates for both years declined from the beginning of the year before increasing in Term 4.

A distributional analysis of attendance rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children in 2009 (Figure 5) and 2010 (Figure 6) found that while 64 per cent of non-SEAM students in SEAM schools had an attendance rate of 90 per cent or higher in 2009, this proportion dropped to 51 per cent for SEAM students. Twenty-five per cent of SEAM students had an attendance rate of lower than 80 per cent during 2009 compared to only 13 per cent of non-SEAM students. Similar to the NT, a slightly improved picture can be observed for QLD in 2010, with a similar proportion (65 per cent) of non-SEAM students with an attendance rate of 90 per cent or higher compared with an increase of six percentage points to 57 per cent for SEAM students. The proportion of SEAM students with an attendance rate less than 80 per cent dropped to 19 per cent in 2010.

Figure 4 Attendance rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children by term in QLD DET SEAM schools during 2009 and 2010

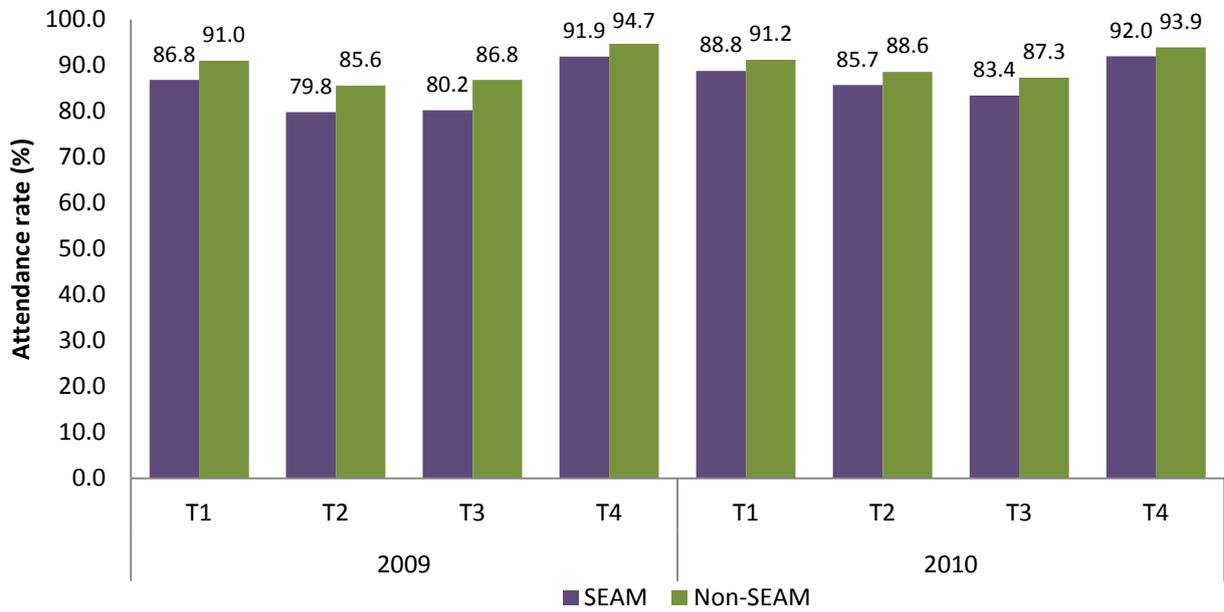


Figure 5 The distribution of attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in QLD DET SEAM schools during 2009

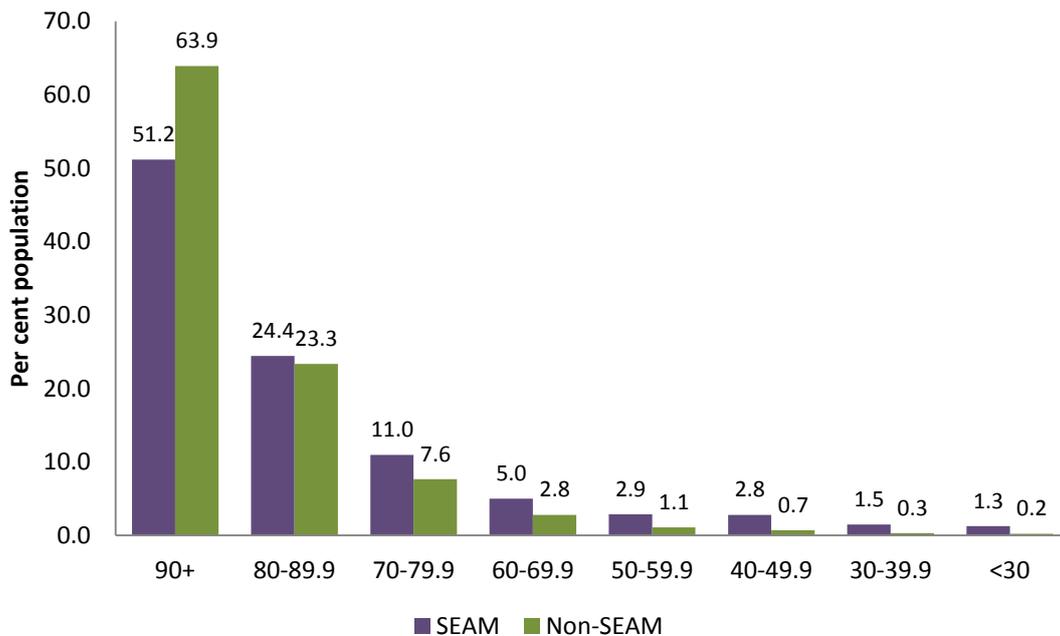
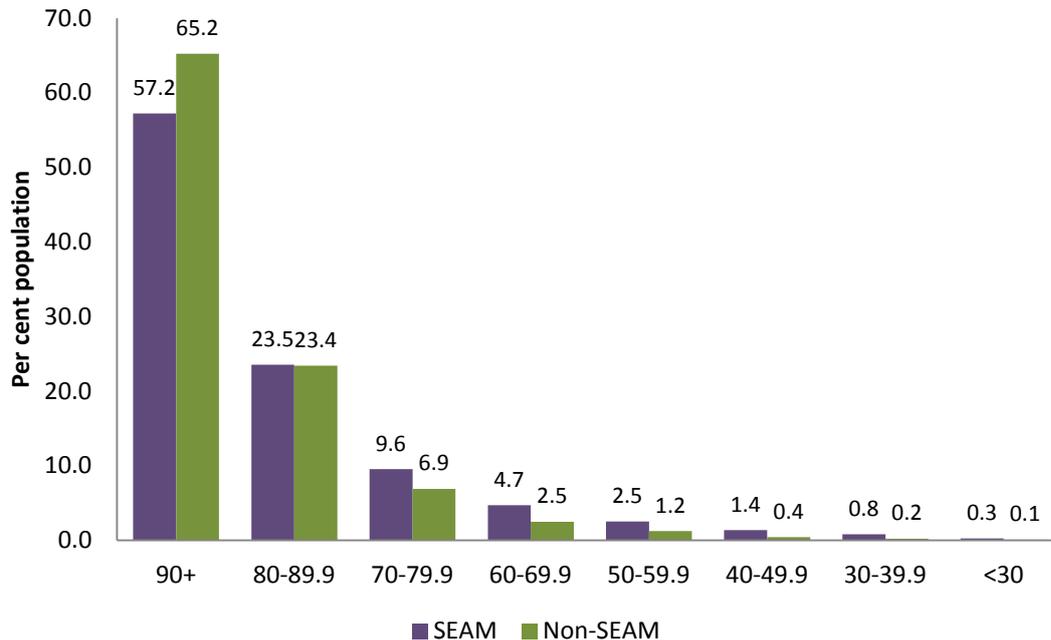


Figure 6 The distribution of attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in QLD DET SEAM schools during 2010



6.1.2. Absence patterns by school terms for 2009 and 2010

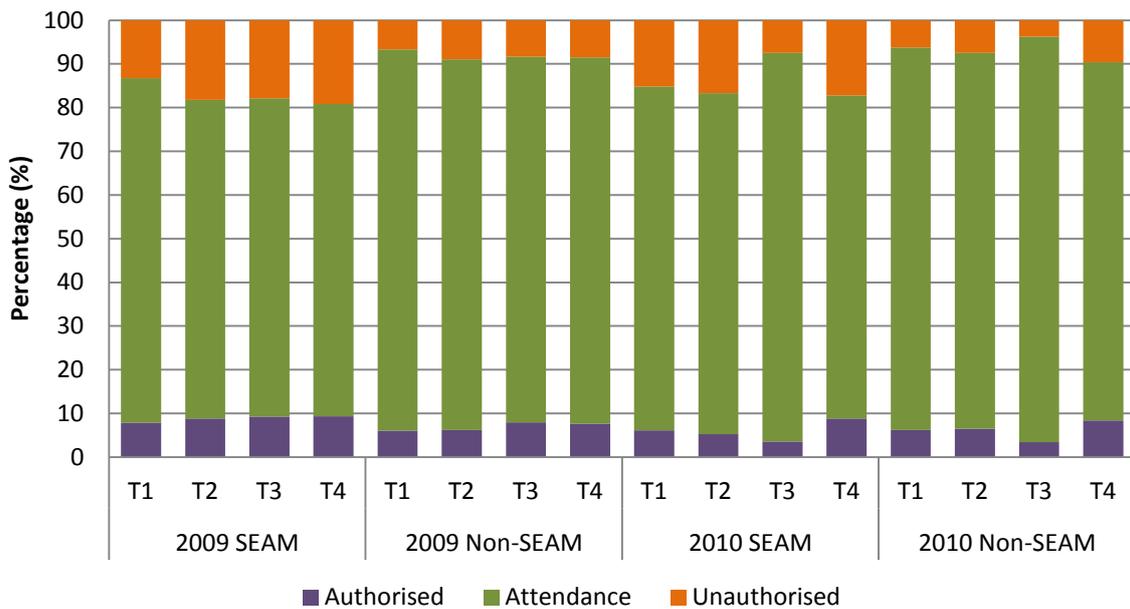
Northern Territory

A critical part of the attendance component of SEAM is addressing unauthorised absences. Student absences were therefore classified into authorised and unauthorised absences based on state education authorities' student absence records.

In NT DET SEAM schools in 2010, the poorer attendance rates of SEAM students were largely due to the higher rates of unauthorised absences (Figure 7). On average, the rates of unauthorised absences for SEAM students were about seven percentage points higher than those of their non-SEAM peers. For authorised absences, there was only a small difference, on average, between the two groups (0.2 of a percentage point). The highest authorised absence rates were in Term 4 for both SEAM and non-SEAM students (17.2 and 9.6 per cent respectively). The better attendance for both SEAM and non-SEAM students in Term 3 was due to lower authorised as well as unauthorised absences.

In contrast, the lower attendance rate of SEAM students in 2009 was due to both higher authorised (an average of 8.8 per cent for SEAM compared with an average of 7.0 per cent for non-SEAM) and unauthorised absence rates (an average of 17.1 per cent for SEAM compared to an average of 8.1 per cent for non-SEAM).

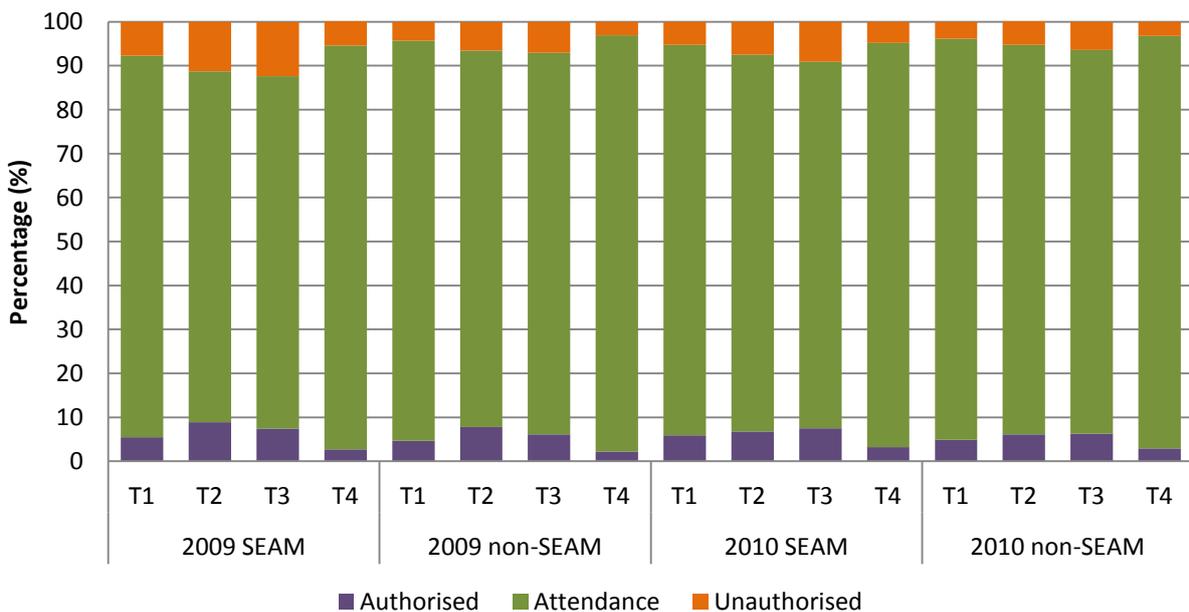
Figure 7 Authorised and unauthorised absence rates by term for SEAM and non-SEAM children in NT DET SEAM schools for 2009 and 2010 (%)



Queensland

The higher absence rates of SEAM children than non-SEAM children in all school terms during 2009 and 2010 were due to unauthorised absences. Data in Figure 8 shows consistently poorer performance by SEAM than non-SEAM children, with SEAM children displaying higher rates of unauthorised absences in all school terms in 2009 and 2010. For 2009, unauthorised absenteeism accounted for more than 10 per cent of total enrolled days for all SEAM students enrolled in SEAM schools during Terms 2 and 3. It was also the case that in 2009 non-SEAM children displayed the highest level of unauthorised absenteeism in Term 2 and 3. The lowest levels of unauthorised absenteeism were seen consistently by both SEAM and non-SEAM children in Term 4 of 2009 and 2010.

Figure 8 Authorised and unauthorised absence rates by term for SEAM and non-SEAM children in QLD DET SEAM schools for 2009 and 2010 (%)



6.2. Whether and to what extent did SEAM have an impact on school attendance?

A critical aspect of the attendance component evaluation is to assess whether SEAM had an impact on improving school attendance. The 2009 NT evaluation found no measurable improvement in school attendance for SEAM students after one year of SEAM intervention. Similar analyses were carried out in the current evaluation to assess whether SEAM had an impact in QLD after just over a year of SEAM operation and to assess whether SEAM had more impact in the NT in 2010. For QLD, 2009 and 2010 attendance data was available with 2009 data used as a baseline. For the NT, SEAM attendance data was available from 2007 to 2010 with 2008 and earlier data treated as a baseline.

The other factors that may impact on school attendance, including school, region, school year level and student gender, were also examined to identify conditions where SEAM may be most effective.

SEAM students showed a greater increase in attendance rates than their non-SEAM peers in both the NT and QLD from 2009 to 2010. The increase was due to a decrease in both authorised and unauthorised absences in the NT and a decrease in unauthorised absences in QLD. The result suggests that SEAM is starting to have a positive impact on SEAM student attendance in both the NT and QLD.

Average attendance varied significantly among SEAM schools in both the NT and QLD and the attendance rates were not linearly associated with the proportion of SEAM students within the school. This provides some indication that school effect plays an important role in improving school attendance.

Aggregated attendance rates for secondary school years were lower compared to primary school years in both the NT and QLD. The difference in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM students was also greater in the secondary school years. These results suggest that SEAM student attendance in the secondary school years may represent a substantial policy challenge.

6.2.1. Overall attendance rates

Northern Territory

Average attendance rates for SEAM students and non-SEAM students, based on student attendance data provided by NT DET, are presented in Table 13. From 2009 to 2010, there was a marked increase in the attendance rate for SEAM students. The attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM students increased by five and two percentage points respectively from 2009 to 2010. The gap in attendance rates between SEAM and non-SEAM students decreased from 10 percentage points (2009) to seven percentage points (2010). While attendance rates for all NT DET schools remained steady at around 82 per cent through the four years analysed, the average attendance for DET SEAM schools improved marginally over the same period (around one percentage point), suggesting a possible impact from SEAM. SEAM schools had slightly better attendance rates than the NT DET average over the four years being analysed.

Table 13 Attendance rates and number of students in the NT by year

	2009	2010
SEAM children* #	74.4 % 331	79.9 % 331
Non-SEAM children*	84.9 % 2154	87.0 % 1961
SEAM schools – all students** (Collection 3, 2009; Collection 1 and 2, 2010)	83.4 % 2155	83.1% 2014
All NT DET schools** (Collection 3, 2009; Collection 1 and 2, 2010)	81.0% 33 018	81.7% 32 941

* Average attendance data from 2010 for NT DET SEAM schools.

** Point in time attendance data.

The number of SEAM students in NT DET SEAM schools during 2010 was 841. The cohort of students analysed has been restricted to those SEAM children who were in participating SEAM schools for both years and were able to be matched.

NB: Estimates have been rounded up to one percentage point.

Queensland

Average attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM students, based on student attendance data provided by QLD DET, are presented in Table 14. The attendance rate for SEAM students increased by four percentage points to 88.7 per cent from 2009 to 2010, narrowing the gap with non-SEAM students whose attendance rates increased by less than one percentage point to 90.4 per cent.

The attendance rate for all children at SEAM schools remained relatively constant from 2009 to 2010 increasing by just under one percentage point to 89.9 per cent. There is a marginal difference between the attendance rates of SEAM schools and that of all QLD DET schools with SEAM schools under one percentage point lower.

Table 14 Attendance rates and number of students in QLD by year

	2009	2010
SEAM children* #	84.7 % 3523	88.7 % 3523
Non-SEAM children*	89.5 % 16 071	90.4 % 16 328
SEAM schools – all students *	89.0 % 19 602	89.9 % 19 951
All QLD DET schools** (QLD DET August Report, 2010)	90.7 % 484 615	91.0 % 485 798

* Average attendance data from 2010 for QLD DET SEAM schools.

** Point in time attendance data.

The number of SEAM students in QLD DET SEAM schools during 2010 was 3934. The cohort of students analysed has been restricted to those SEAM children who were in participating SEAM schools for both years and were able to be matched.

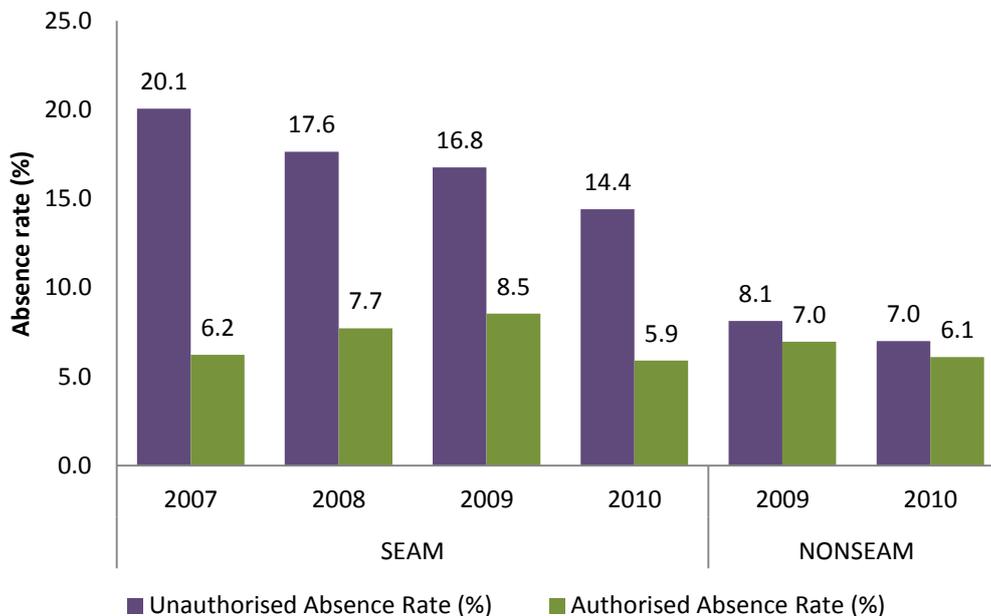
Based on available data, there is evidence of an improvement in attendance rates in 2010 for SEAM students each school term when compared with non-SEAM attendance rates in SEAM schools.

6.2.2. Unauthorised absences before and after SEAM

Northern Territory

The five percentage point increase in attendance rates for SEAM students in the NT from 2009 to 2010 highlighted in Table 13 was due to a decrease in both authorised and unauthorised absence rates (2.6 and 2.4 percentage points respectively). Although there was a decrease in both authorised and unauthorised absences (0.9 and 1.1 percentage points respectively) for non-SEAM students in the same period, the extent of the decrease was not as great as for SEAM students. Figure 9 shows the steady decrease in unauthorised absence rates for SEAM students from 2007 to 2010 accompanied by increased authorised absence rates from 2007 to 2009 before falling in 2010. The fact that SEAM students had a greater decrease in both authorised and unauthorised absence rates than non-SEAM students from 2009 to 2010 suggests a possible impact from SEAM. However, further comparative analysis planned for the final evaluation is necessary to be more definitive on the impact of SEAM.

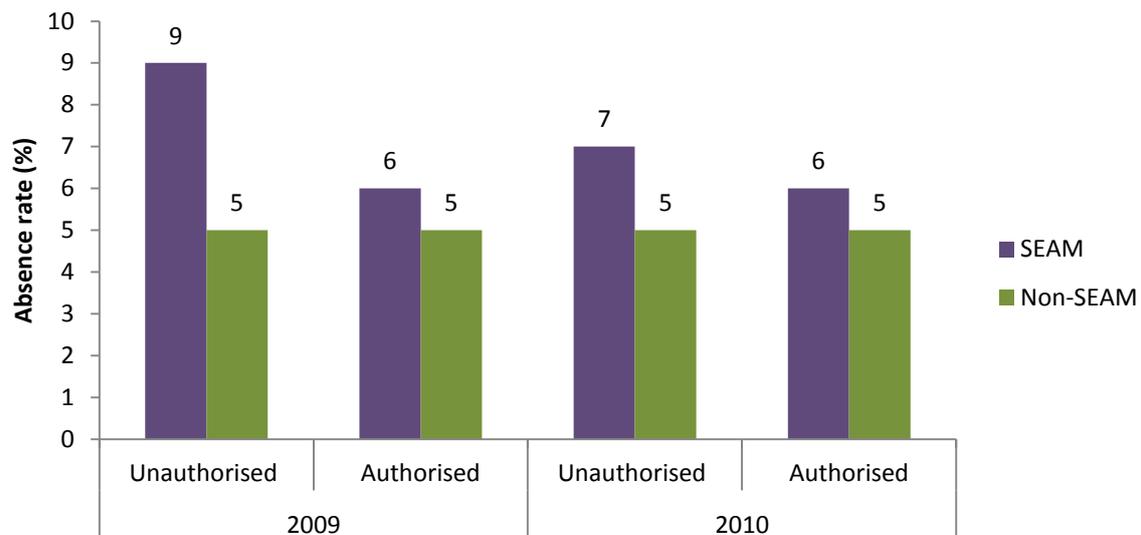
Figure 9 Authorised and unauthorised absence rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in the NT DET SEAM schools by year



Queensland

Authorised and unauthorised absence rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children in SEAM schools in QLD during 2009 and 2010 are shown in Figure 10. As can be seen from the chart, unauthorised absence rate of SEAM children decreased from 2009 to 2010 while authorised absence rates remained stable. The average unauthorised absence rates of SEAM children dropped from nine percent in 2009 and to seven percent in 2010. In contrast to the NT, non-SEAM authorised and unauthorised absence rates remained constant from 2009 to 2010 as did the authorised absence rate of SEAM children. It is encouraging that unauthorised absence rates declined; however, this result alone does not provide sufficient evidence that SEAM has had an impact. Further evaluation work, where the trial group will be assessed against a comparison group, will hopefully provide more definite evidence. Results from this analysis will be presented in the final evaluation report.

Figure 10 Authorised and unauthorised absence rates for SEAM and non-SEAM children in QLD DET SEAM schools by year



6.2.3. School level analysis

Northern Territory

The analysis of the attendance rates at the school level was based on the number of students whose last enrolled school in 2010 was a DET SEAM school and these students' 2010 attendance records. For 2009, school average attendance rates varied considerably with Katherine High School recording the lowest average attendance rate for the SEAM student population (63.4 per cent). Similarly, the non-SEAM population for this school also recorded the lowest average attendance rate (75.1 per cent). Only five SEAM student populations reached or exceeded the average attendance rate for all NT DET schools in 2009 (81.0 per cent). It should be noted that three SEAM student populations in schools achieved greater average attendance rates than their non-SEAM peers in 2009. These schools included Ntaria School, Pularumpi School and Wallace Rockhole School.

In comparison to 2009, there was an improvement in attendance rates for SEAM student populations in 2010 in all schools except two, although the drop for these schools was minimal. The average attendance rate of the SEAM student population of Ntaria School dropped 0.2 per cent along with Wallace Rockhole School who dropped 0.5 per cent in 2010. This is compared with Katherine High School whose SEAM student population showed the greatest improvement of 11.7 percentage points. Only one SEAM school population reached or exceeded the 90 per cent attendance benchmark in 2010 and that was Casuarina Street Primary. Pularumpi School was the only school in which the SEAM student population maintained a greater average attendance rate than their non-SEAM peers in 2010.

Among SEAM schools analysed, there is no correlation between attendance rates and the proportion of SEAM students in the school population. Pularumpi School had a relatively high SEAM student population, but also relatively high attendance rates, suggesting other factors including a school effect can play an important role in attendance.

Table 15 Average attendance rates by DET SEAM schools in the NT for 2009 and 2010

SEAM site	School name	2009				2010			
		SEAM		Non-SEAM		SEAM		Non-SEAM	
		Average attendance rate (%)	Number of children	Average attendance rate (%)	Number of children	Average attendance rate (%)	Number of children	Average attendance rate (%)	Number of children
Hermannsburg	Ntaria School	76.3	123	75.9	117	76.1	113	76.2	105
Katherine Township	Casuarina Street Primary	90.4	11	91.4	296	90.6	11	91.9	289
	Clyde Fenton Primary School	80.2	79	88.5	259	81.2	65	89.9	226
	Katherine High School	63.4	168	75.1	554	75.1	145	85.8	459
	Katherine South Primary School	87.5	26	89.8	354	88.7	22	90.0	337
	Macfarlane Primary School	82.9	71	85.0	246	84.3	58	86.0	201
Tiwi Islands	Milikipati School	79.9	51	82.3	43	81.0	48	82.5	39
	Pularumpi School	87.3	38	85.9	47	88.9	38	87.3	47
Wallace Rockhole	Wallace Rockhole School	88.6	12	84.3	29	88.1	10	91.6	24
Total	-		579*		1945*		510**		1727**

* There were seven SEAM students and 16 non-SEAM students for which a SEAM school could not be identified for 2009 and these are not included in the totals listed.

** There were 76 SEAM students and 234 non-SEAM students for which a SEAM school could not be identified for 2010 and these are not included in the totals listed.

Queensland

As was found in the NT, there is no correlation between attendance rates and the proportion of SEAM students in the school population in QLD in 2010.

Table 16 shows the average attendance rates for SEAM and non-SEAM students in QLD SEAM schools in 2009 and 2010.²² For 2009, Doomadgee State School and Mornington Island State School recorded the lowest average attendance rates for SEAM student populations (64.3 and 70.2 per cent). Similarly, the non-SEAM population for both schools also recorded the lowest average attendance rates (76.1 and 80.8 per cent). Only six SEAM student populations reached or exceeded the average attendance rate for all QLD DET schools in 2009 (90.7 per cent). These schools included Beenleigh State School, Carbrook State School, Harris Fields State School, Logan City Special School, Slacks Creek State School and Woodridge State School. The remaining SEAM student populations all fell below the overall average attendance rate for the year. Three SEAM student populations recorded higher average attendance rates than their non-SEAM counterparts. These schools included Beenleigh Special School, Eagleby South State School and Logan City Special School.

In comparison to 2009, there was an improvement in attendance rates in 2010 for SEAM student populations in 19 out of 30 SEAM schools. The 11 remaining schools saw a slight decrease in average attendance rates for SEAM student populations. There was an increase in the number of SEAM student populations within schools who reached or exceeded the average attendance rate for all QLD DET schools in 2010, with 11 SEAM student populations reaching the average. As in 2009, a number of SEAM student populations recorded higher average attendance rates in 2010 than their non-SEAM populations. Logan City Special School was the only school for which this occurred in both years.

6.2.4. Regional Difference

Queensland

Regional difference can also be observed in QLD between urban and remote schools. The attendance rates of SEAM children in remote areas were 20.9 percentage points lower than for SEAM children in urban areas (66.8 per cent compared with 87.7 per cent) in 2009. The attendance rates of non-SEAM children in remote areas were only 12.1 percentage points lower than non-SEAM children in urban areas in 2009 (78.0 per cent compared with 90.1 per cent).

The difference in attendance rates of SEAM children in remote areas compared to SEAM children in urban areas decreased in 2010 to only 15.4 percentage points (73.8 per cent compared with 89.2 per cent). Similarly, the gap between the attendance rates of non-SEAM children in remote areas compared with non-SEAM children in urban areas also decreased to only 7.7 percentage points in 2010 (82.8 per cent compared with 90.5 per cent).

An analysis of regional difference could not be made in the NT due to the location of the trial sites. Unlike QLD trial sites, the NT trial sites are all located in remote or very remote areas.

²² It should be noted that Education Authority enrolment and attendance data was used to estimate the number of SEAM students. For a more accurate account of the number of SEAM students in SEAM schools see Table 2.

Table 16 Average attendance rates for SEAM schools in QLD for 2009 and 2010

SEAM site	School name	2009				2010			
		SEAM		Non-SEAM		SEAM		Non-SEAM	
		Average attendance rate	Number of children						
Logan Central Kingston Woodridge Eagleby	Beenleigh State High School	81.1	153	86.1	923	83.2	156	87.4	799
	Beenleigh State School	91.9	34	92.0	465	91.0	27	91.8	407
	Beenleigh Special School	87.1	7	86.4	88	86.5	7	90.1	81
	Berrinba East State School	89.3	228	90.5	314	88.2	199	89.6	309
	Burrowes State School	89.4	76	91.4	678	89.6	58	92.3	648
	Carbrook State School	94.1	5	94.5	386	95.2	7	94.2	368
	Crestmead State School	89.9	31	92.7	971	92.2	25	92.2	935
	Eagleby State School	90.2	42	92.3	333	90.8	33	92.0	311
	Eagleby South State School	87.5	39	83.1	248	89.4	35	91.1	256
	Harris Fields State School	91.0	225	93.2	270	91.8	205	93.2	294
	Kimberley Park State School	89.1	20	93.7	905	91.5	16	93.6	892
	Kingston College	81.5	158	88.8	636	85.7	177	91.0	646
	Kingston State School	89.8	291	91.5	323	91.6	268	93.4	313
	Logan City Special School	91.6	25	90.3	84	91.1	27	89.3	82
	Loganholme State School	90.0	12	92.8	436	85.4	8	92.9	426
	Loganlea State High School	77.5	62	85.8	754	81.6	65	86.6	718
	Mabel Park State High School	79.3	127	83.2	499	89.1	157	89.6	392
	Mabel Park State School	87.7	321	91.8	499	89.3	284	91.1	467
	Marsden State High School	83.6	89	88.6	1708	80.7	114	86.9	1738
	Marsden State School	90.5	55	92.1	949	89.0	46	90.9	974
	Shailer Park State High School	85.9	18	86.1	911	82.6	29	87.9	905
	Shailer Park State School	89.5	16	92.2	637	92.8	9	92.1	533
	Slacks Creek State School	94.7	19	95.7	299	91.3	15	93.9	255
	Waterford State School	89.8	30	91.5	570	91.8	28	92.0	588
Waterford West State School	89.7	38	92.8	664	88.4	24	90.8	596	
Woodridge State High School	83.8	266	85.1	759	88.0	365	88.0	683	
Woodridge State School	91.6	377	92.9	309	93.6	408	93.0	294	
Woodridge North State School	90.6	328	93.2	250	90.5	270	93.5	246	
Doomadgee	Doomadgee State School	64.3	250	76.1	121	69.9	172	79.3	154
Mornington Island	Mornington Island State School	70.2	189	80.8	82	77.5	175	86.7	136
Total			3531		16071		3409*		15446*

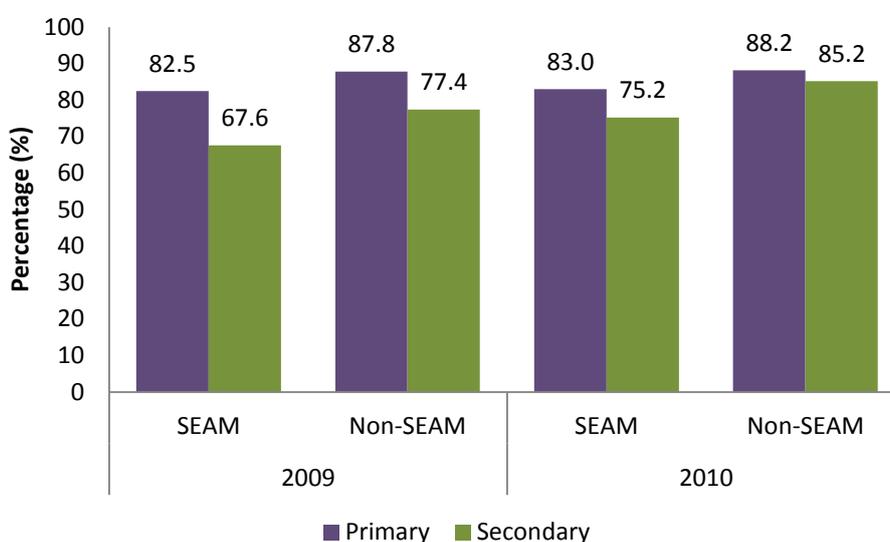
* There were 214 SEAM students and 882 non-SEAM students for which a SEAM school could not be identified and these are not included in the totals listed.

6.2.5. Education level analysis

Northern Territory

An analysis of attendance rates by school year and education levels was conducted for SEAM and non-SEAM students in the NT for 2009 and 2010. Primary students overall had higher attendance rates than secondary students for both SEAM and non-SEAM students in both 2009 and 2010 (Figure 11). While SEAM students showed poorer attendance in both primary and secondary levels in 2010, the difference in attendance rates between non-SEAM and SEAM students was smaller for primary (5.2 percentage points) than secondary (10 percentage points). A similar pattern was also observed for 2009 with the differences for primary and secondary being 5.3 and 9.8 percentage points respectively.

Figure 11 Attendance rates by primary and secondary level for NT 2009-2010



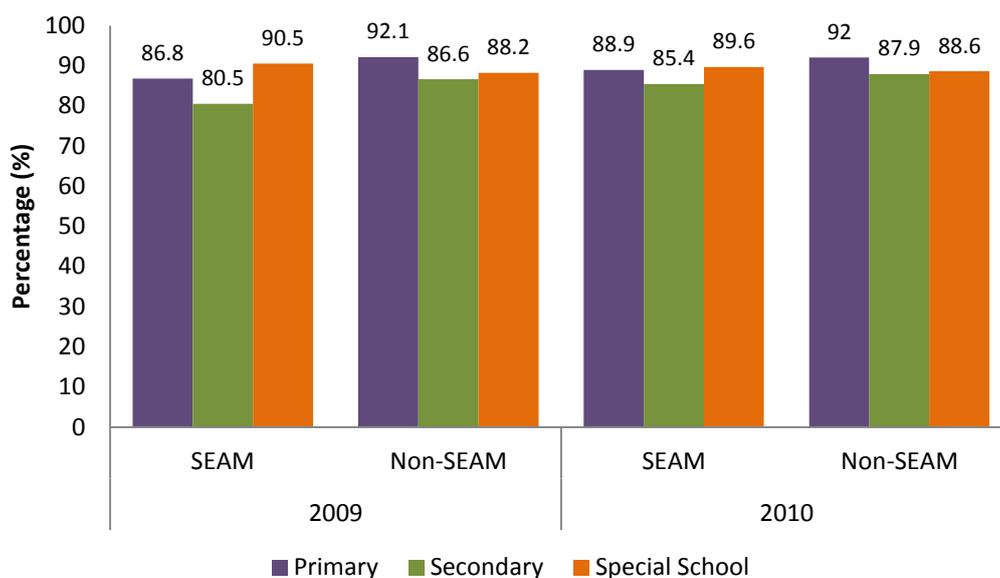
A detailed analysis of the average attendance rates by school year level showed that the attendance rates peaked in the later years of primary school (Year 5 and 6, about 88 per cent) and bottomed in the mid secondary years (Year 9 and 10, about 70 per cent) for 2009. Although overall attendance rates increased for 2010, a similar pattern persisted (Year 5 and 6, about 89 per cent; Year 9 and 10, about 80 per cent). Through Year 1 to Year 11, non-SEAM students showed better attendance rates than SEAM students, although the opposite was true in the transition year (kindergarten) and Year 13²³ for both 2009 and 2010.

Queensland

An education level analysis was completed for 2009 and 2010 comparing attendance rates of SEAM and non-SEAM children in primary and secondary schools. In QLD, primary school includes preparatory year to Year 7 and secondary school includes Year 8 to Year 12.²⁴ As can be seen from Figure 12, higher attendance rates were achieved for both SEAM and non-SEAM students in primary school compared to secondary school. Attendance rates are on average five percentage points lower in secondary school for both populations.

²³ Students repeating Year 12.

²⁴ Secondary school analysis included mature age continuing juniors and mature age continuing seniors.

Figure 12 Attendance rate by year level for QLD DET SEAM schools from 2009 to 2010

A more detailed school year level analysis found that generally, attendance rates peaked in Year 6 or Year 7 for both SEAM and non-SEAM children. Thereafter, attendance rates slowly declined from Year 8, falling to on average six percentage points lower than at their peak.

6.2.6. Gender analysis

Northern Territory

Gender-related differences in attendance rates were also examined. Among the NT DET SEAM school student population (2547) in 2010, 49 per cent were female and 51 per cent were male. For non-SEAM students there is no gender-related attendance difference, whereas for SEAM students the attendance rate of female students was 2.7 percentage points higher than that of male students (81.1 per cent compared with 78.4 per cent). Similarly for 2009, no gender-related attendance difference was observed for non-SEAM students but for SEAM students, female students' attendance rates were higher by 3.3 percentage points (77.7 per cent for females compared with 74.4 per cent for males).

Queensland

There was minimal observable difference between male and female attendance rates for SEAM students from 2009 and 2010. The average attendance rate for female SEAM students in 2009 was 86 per cent compared to 84 per cent for SEAM males. There was no gender difference between non-SEAM students. In 2010 male and female SEAM attendance rates increased slightly to 87 per cent and 88 per cent respectively. While the attendance rates of male non-SEAM students remained stable in 2010, female non-SEAM attendance rates increased by one percentage point.

6.3. What aspects of SEAM had an impact on school attendance?

The two main aspects of the attendance process that were designed to impact on attendance are the attendance notices and income support suspensions. For the 2009 NT evaluation, the impact of both of these was minimal. Both stages only started late in the school year, which did not allow for any meaningful analysis.

The change of referral process in the NT during 2010 resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of students referred. Although QLD retained a discretionary referral process in 2010, the relatively larger SEAM population in QLD ensured a sufficient number of referred students to undertake relevant analysis. The analyses of possible impacts of the attendance notices and income support suspensions on school attendance are presented below.

In addition, an analysis was conducted on what, if any, effect the reasonable steps that parents had taken to address their child's poor attendance had on attendance patterns and the difference in attendance patterns of referred children whose parents had received social work support. The data used for this analysis was sourced from education authority real-time attendance data provided to Centrelink up to February 2011 (where CEO student data is available), education authority school attendance data for 2010 and Centrelink administrative data.

6.3.1. Absence patterns of referred students

Issuing attendance notices to parents had a short term impact, especially during the compliance period. However, attendance relapse after the compliance period was commonly observed in both the NT and QLD. Importantly, a small improvement was sustained one to two months after the compliance period for students in the NT and in the month immediately after the compliance period for students in QLD.

Northern Territory

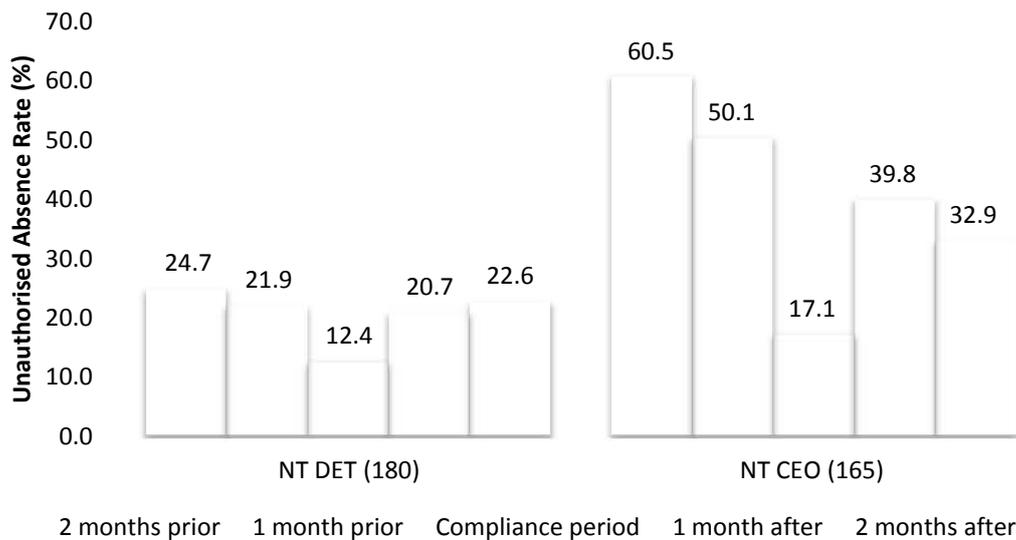
An important component of SEAM was to issue an attendance notice to parents whose children did not attend school regularly (and the parents failed to take reasonable steps to address the issue). In the NT, a benchmark related attendance referral process was introduced in the beginning of July 2010 which removed the discretionary nature of the previous referral process. Students with more than five unauthorised absences in a ten-week period (equivalent to greater than 10 per cent unauthorised absence rate) were automatically referred to Centrelink. For 2009 and 2010, a total of 521 attendance notices (excluding notices still active at the end of 2010) relating to 488 students were issued in the NT. Adequate attendance data²⁵ for evaluation purposes (beyond the compliance period) were available for 345 attendance notices involving 323 students. Among these students, 22 were notified twice. Of the 345 notices, 180 notices were issued to students attending the NT DET SEAM schools and the other 165 to students attending the NT CEO SEAM schools. The following analyses were based on the number of notices as each notice was associated with a low attendance episode.

Figure 13 shows the average unauthorised absence rates for the NT DET and CEO notified students. Overall, the CEO students had much higher unauthorised absence rates than DET students throughout the analysed period. For students from both education systems there were

²⁵ Because a number of attendance notices were issued at the end of 2010, attendance data is not yet available for analysis as this data is only received once a year.

significant improvements in the unauthorised absence rates during the compliance period although relapses were obvious after the compliance period for both groups of students. There was a 2.1 percentage point net improvement two months after the compliance period compared to two months prior to the compliance period for DET students whereas improvement for the same period for CEO students was much greater at 27.6 percentage points.

Figure 13 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children before and after compliance period



The pre- and post-compliance period unauthorised absence rates were further analysed at the individual student level. The proportions of students falling within different absence rate ranges are presented in Figure 14 and Figure 15 for NT DET and CEO student groups respectively.

For the DET student group two months prior to the compliance period, 34 per cent of students had unauthorised absence rates that were less than or equal to 10 per cent (below the referral benchmark). The proportion of students below the benchmark increased to 66 per cent during the compliance period and then edged back down to 42 per cent two months after the compliance period. Conversely, the proportion of students with the worst unauthorised absence rate (greater than 40 per cent) decreased from 20 per cent (two months prior) to eight per cent (compliance period) and then increased again to 16 per cent (two months after). Although the relapse after the compliance period was significant, the proportion of students below the referral benchmark absence rate was still higher and all the other ranges were lower two months after the compliance period compared to two months prior.

For the CEO student group, only five per cent of students were below the referral benchmark (two months prior to the compliance period). This increased dramatically to 62 per cent during the compliance period and then fell back sharply to 22 per cent two months after the compliance period. Conversely, the proportion of students showing the worst unauthorised absence rate (greater than 40 per cent) decreased from 67 per cent (two months prior) to 15 per cent (over the compliance period) and then increased to 36 per cent (two months after). Similar to DET students, there was a relapse observed for the CEO student group but there were still gains in terms of outcomes two months after the compliance period.

Figure 14 Proportion of students who fell within each unauthorised absence range before and after compliance period

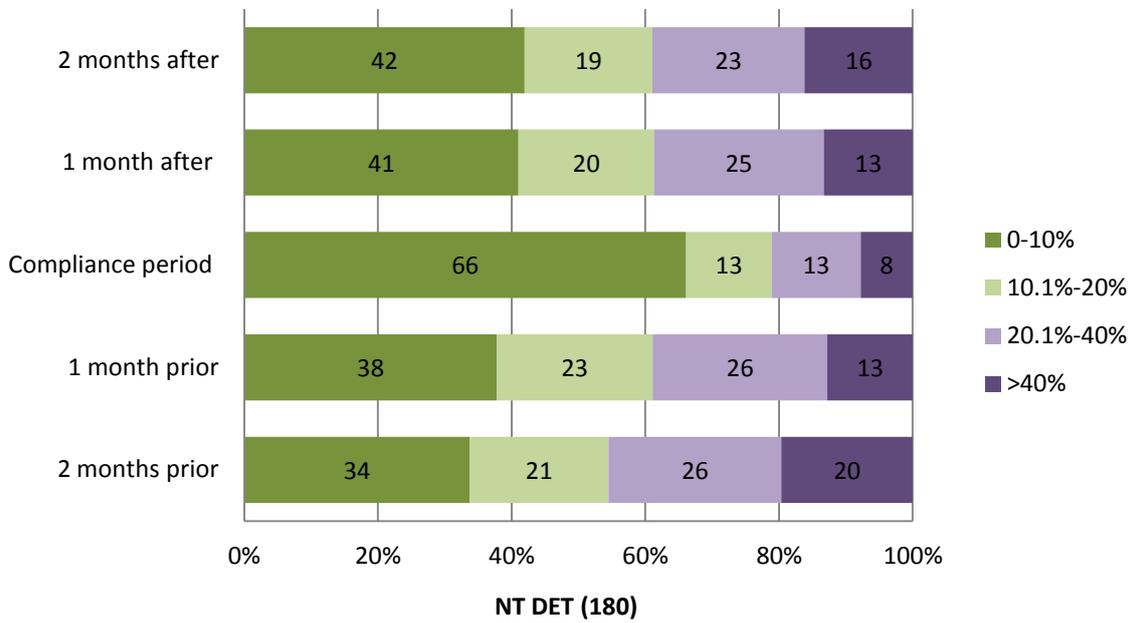
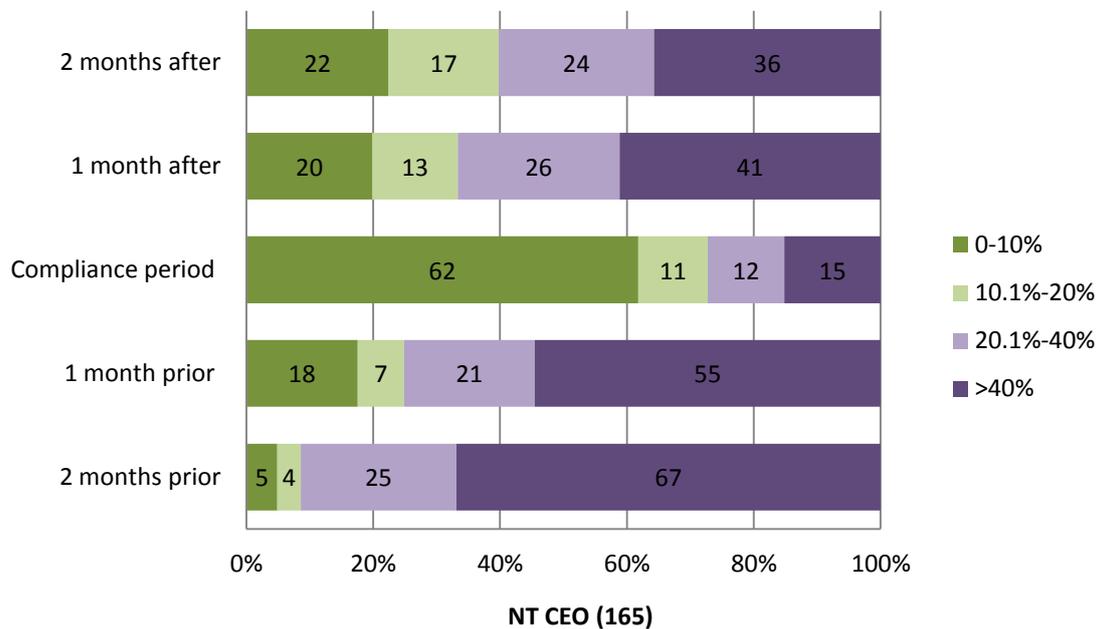


Figure 15 Proportion of students who fell within each unauthorised absence range before and after compliance period

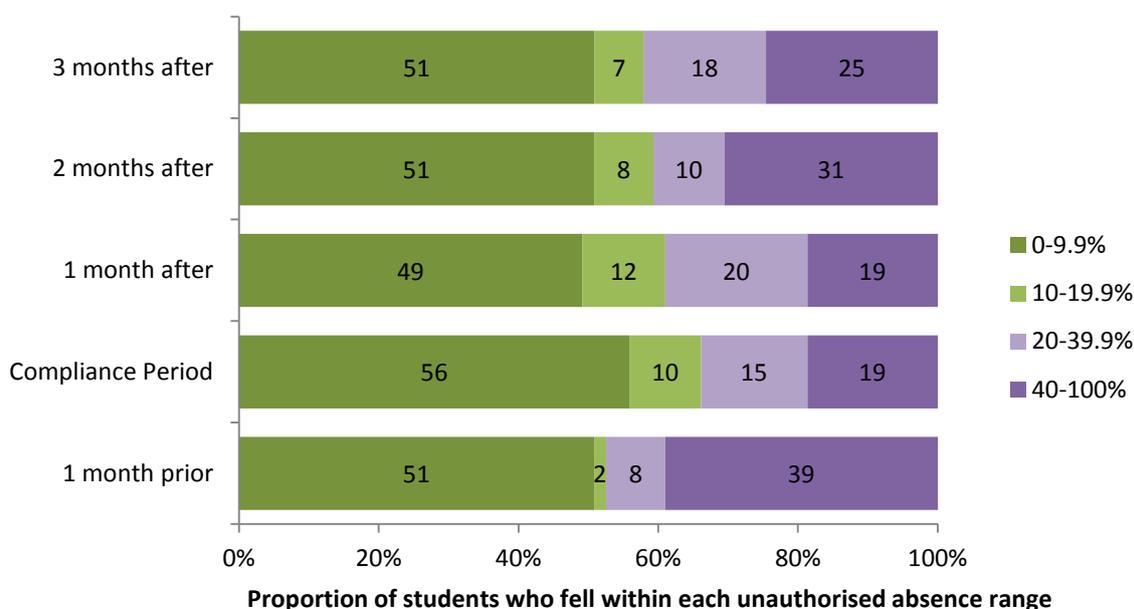


Queensland

QLD student attendance referral was at the discretion of school principals. Parents of the referred students who were deemed in-scope were issued an attendance notice. A total of 101 attendance notices were issued for 2009 and 2010 in QLD. In 93 of these cases, an attendance notice issue date could be determined from Centrelink case reports. Because a number of attendance notices were issued at the end of 2010 and attendance data is not yet available for 2011, there were only 59 attendance notices for which attendance data was available beyond the compliance period. As a result, the analysis below is based on this smaller group.

As can be seen in Figure 16, the unauthorised absence rates of children sent a notice improved during the compliance period. Thirty-nine per cent of students had an unauthorised absence rate of over 40 per cent in the month prior to an attendance notice being issued. During the compliance period this proportion declined to around 19 per cent. The improvement was mostly sustained in the month immediately after the compliance period but a gradual increase in the proportion of students (around 12 percentage points) with an unauthorised absence rate over 40 per cent can be seen two months after the compliance period.

Figure 16 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children before and after compliance period



6.3.2. Attendance changes for students of parents taking reasonable steps

Results show one quarter of all notified parents took reasonable steps to improve their child's school attendance although this was not always reflected in an improvement in attendance. The result indicates that these families may have faced additional barriers which thwarted their attempts to make sure their children attended school.

Of the 622 attendance notices issued during 2009 and 2010 in the NT and QLD, 156 cases (or 25 per cent; all in the NT) were deemed to be compliant because the parent was taking reasonable steps while a final determination of improved attendance was made in an additional 199 cases. No data is available to assess the number of parents who took reasonable steps from these 199 additional notices.

A large number of attendance notices were issued towards the end of the 2010 school year. The compliance periods specified in these notices extended into the 2011 school year, beyond the timeframe of the attendance data provided by education authorities. Where possible, 2010 attendance data has been supplemented by 2011 data obtained from the fortnightly data exchange operating in the NT. As the data collected under this exchange is provided only for those children who remain in scope for SEAM, there are many cases where we don't have sufficient data to examine attendance patterns a month after the end of the compliance period. Consequently, this analysis is restricted to 68 cases (out of the 156 deemed to be taking reasonable steps) where a specific determination of reasonable steps was made and where sufficient data was available to measure changes in attendance behaviour.

Data indicates that a determination of reasonable steps on the part of the parent did not always lead to an improvement in the child's attendance behaviour. Table 17 shows data on attendance behaviour in the months following the determination of reasonable steps. While 36 (53 per cent) of the 68 children for whom data is available had improved their absence behaviour one month after the determination of reasonable steps was made, these gains were generally offset by a slight deterioration in percentage terms during the subsequent month. Of the 30 children for whom data is available two months after the determination date, only 14 children (47 per cent) still demonstrated improved attendance behaviour.

The rate of attendance improvement in cases where the parents were deemed to be taking reasonable steps is relatively low when compared to the marked attendance improvements among the rest of the SEAM population, indicating that these families may have faced additional barriers in addressing their children's poor attendance. Qualitative research conducted for this evaluation during early 2010 indicated that tailored social worker support was considered to be the most critical factor in addressing issues underlying poor school attendance. Continuing social work support into the weeks post-determination may therefore assist these families in making and sustaining improvements in attendance behaviour.

Table 17 Net impact of an attendance notice where determination of reasonable steps was made

	Number of children		
	Month after determination date	Second month after determination date	Third month after determination date
Deemed to be taking reasonable steps at end of compliance period	156	156	156
Sufficient data available	68	30	17
Measurably improved absence behaviour	36 (52.9%)	14 (46.7%)	12 (70.6%)
by more than two days per fortnight	22(32.4%)	8(26.7%)	6(35.3%)
Measurably deteriorated absence behaviour	22 (32.4%)	12 (40.0%)	3 (17.6%)
by more than two days per fortnight	16(23.5%)	5(16.7%)	2(11.8%)
No measurable change	10 (14.7%)	4 (13.3%)	2 (11.8%)

6.3.3. Absence patterns of students whose parents received social worker contacts

Social worker contacts were more likely to be provided to parents whose children had higher unauthorised absence rates although the distributions of the contacts were different for the NT and QLD. In the NT, the contacts were distributed more evenly among referred students whereas in QLD, the contacts were focused on a smaller proportion of referred students in the Logan area.

It is likely that social worker contacts helped to reduce the unauthorised absences of referred students during the compliance period. To a lesser extent the contacts may have also helped to limit the relapse in unauthorised absence after the compliance period.

Under the SEAM trial, Centrelink social workers are required to contact parents who received an attendance notice within seven business days. However, the social workers can be unsuccessful in making contact for a variety of reasons.

Where contact is made, further contacts, assistance and referrals to other services are provided, if necessary and feasible, to help notified families overcome attendance barriers.

Customers are able to decline the offer of Centrelink social work support should they wish to not use this service.

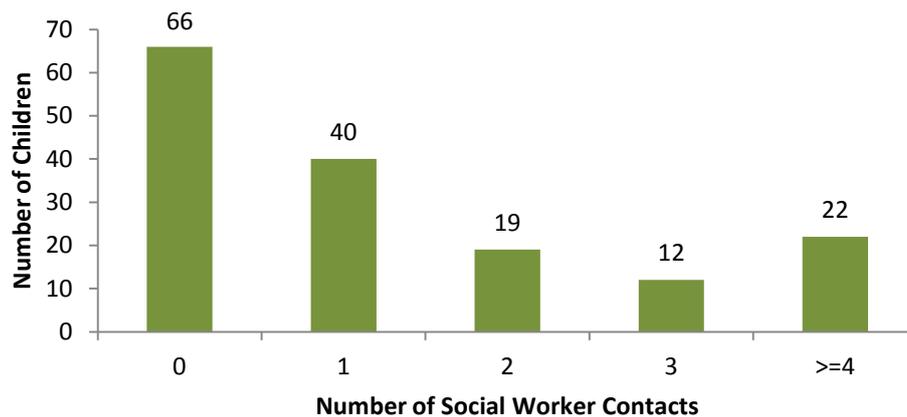
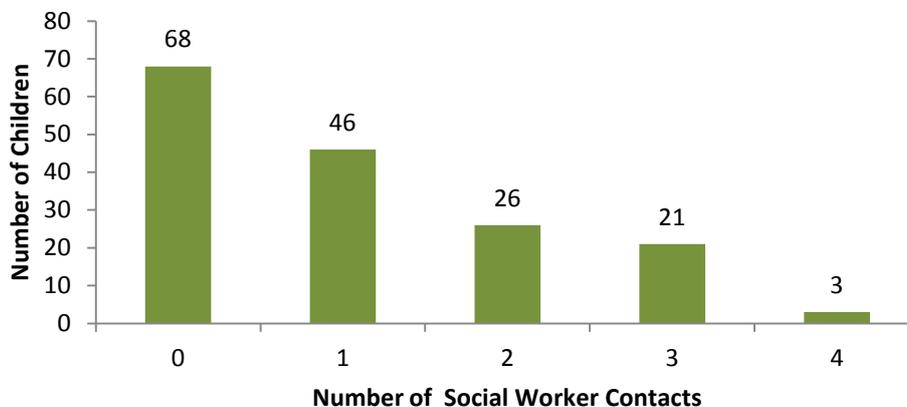
In this section, we analyse the social worker contact frequency and whether the contacts had any impact on reducing unauthorised absences of notified students in both the NT and QLD.

Northern Territory

Among the 345 attendance notices issued to parents of NT DET and CEO SEAM students for which adequate data are available,²⁶ social worker contact data were available for 164 students in CEO schools and 159 students in DET schools. This data together with student absence records were used in the following analyses.

The distribution of students whose parents were sent an attendance notice by whether they received social worker contact in the NT DET and CEO schools is presented in Figures 17 and 18. Fifty-nine per cent of both DET and CEO students who were sent an attendance notice received social worker contact. A large proportion of students sent an attendance notice (25 per cent for DET students; 28 per cent for CEO students) received one social worker contact. More DET students (14 per cent) received four or more social worker visits compared with CEO students (two per cent).

²⁶ Education authority real-time attendance data provided to Centrelink up to February 2011 (where CEO student data is available) was used for this analysis.

Figure 17 Distribution of social worker contacts among referred SEAM students in NT DET schools**Figure 18** Distribution of Social Worker contacts among referred SEAM students in NT CEO schools

Unauthorised absence rates of notified students whose parents received social worker contacts were compared with those students whose parents did not receive social worker contact (Figures 19 and 20). For both the DET and CEO notified student groups, students whose parents were contacted by social workers appeared to have higher unauthorised absence rates prior to attendance notice. In other words, social worker contacts were more likely to be provided to parents whose children had worse unauthorised absence rates. During the compliance period, students with social worker contact performed better than students with no social worker contact by 3.5 and 1.5 percentage points for the DET and CEO groups respectively. For the two months post compliance period, the unauthorised absences of DET students with social worker contacts did not relapse as extensively as the group without social worker contacts. However, a similar pattern was not observed for CEO students.

Figure 19 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children in NT DET schools before and after the compliance period

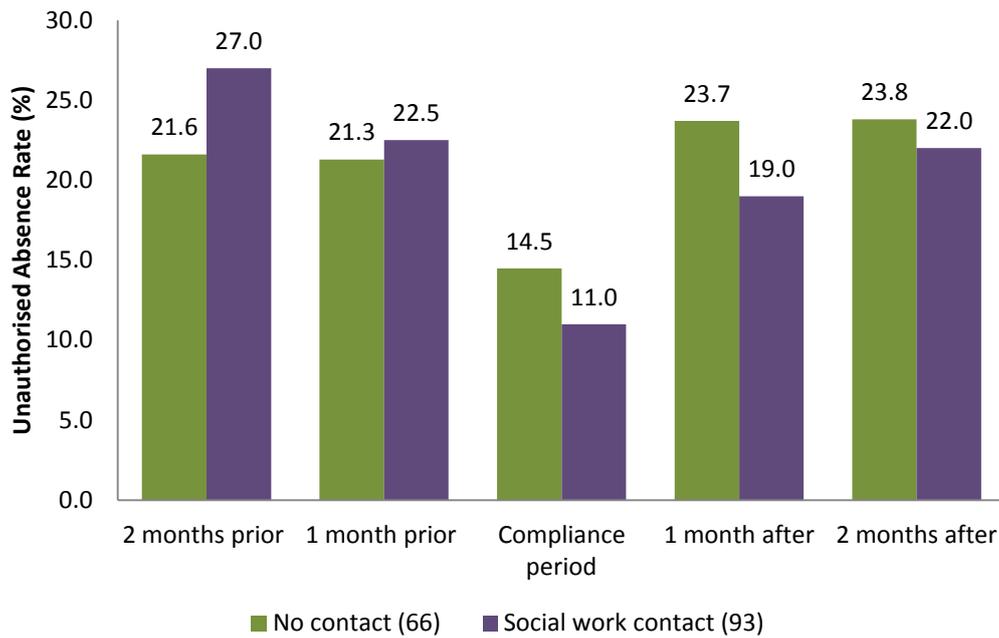
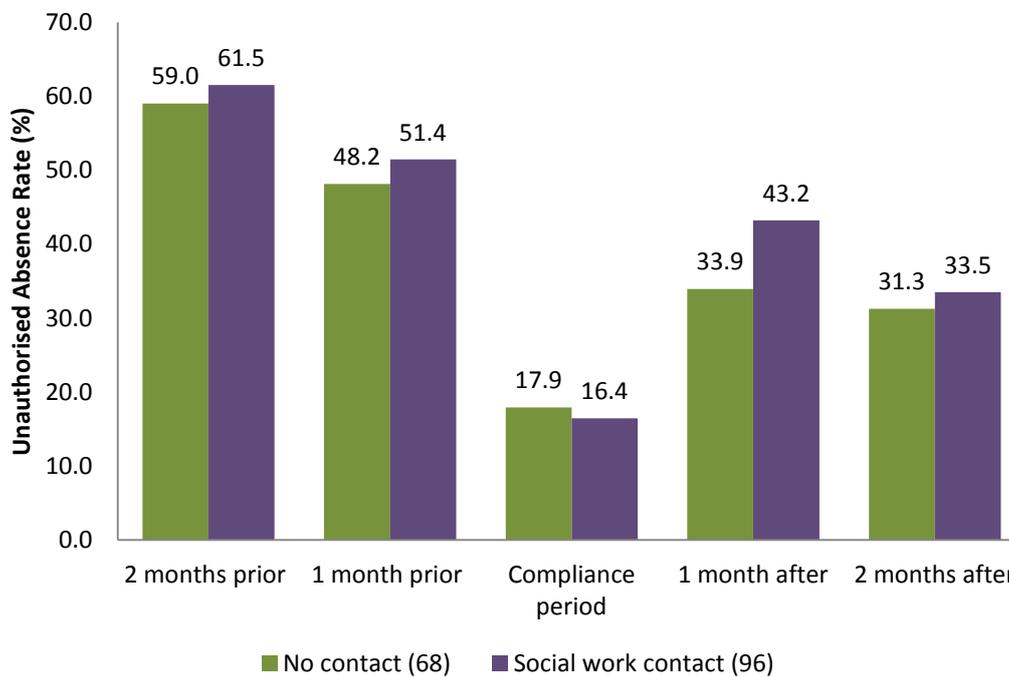


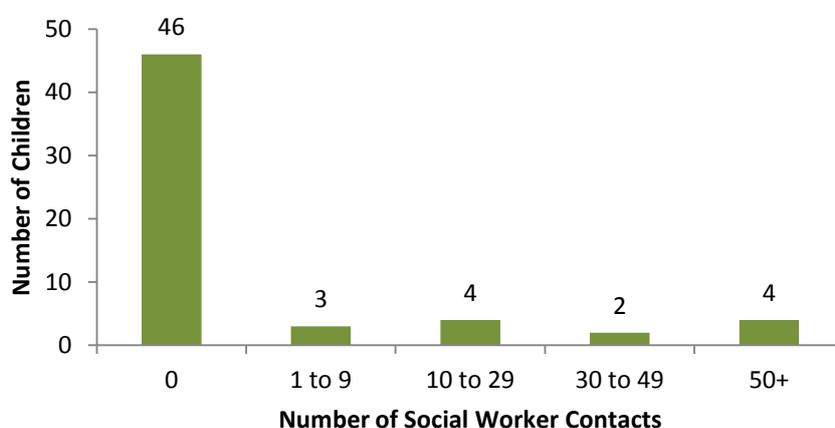
Figure 20 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children in NT CEO schools before and after the compliance period



Queensland

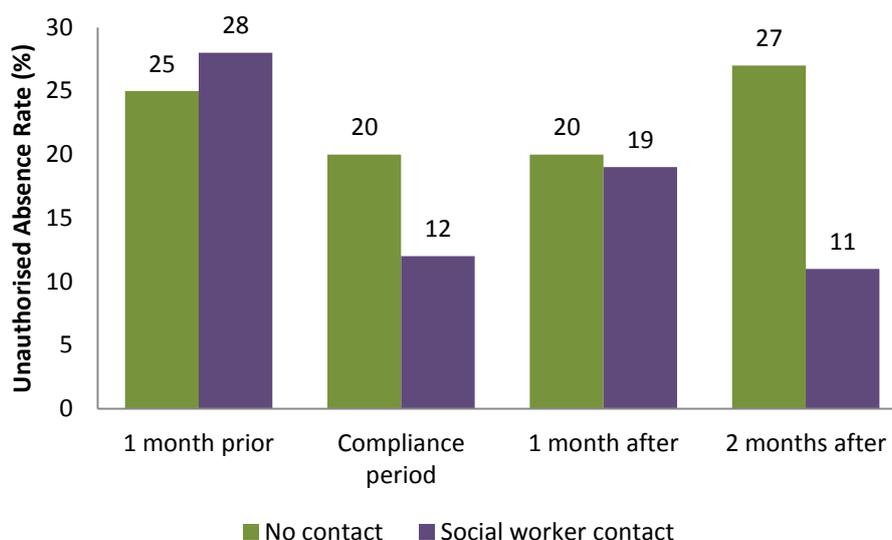
Of the 59 students referred under the attendance component of SEAM in QLD for which attendance data was available beyond the compliance period, eight parents who were responsible for 13 students (22 per cent) received social worker contact. It should be noted that all students were located in the Logan region.²⁷ The distribution of notified students by social worker contact in QLD schools is presented in Figure 21. A larger proportion of referred students in QLD (78 per cent) received no social worker contact when compared with students in the NT (41 per cent). For those students who did receive contact, the distribution shows that contact was intensive with most receiving 10 or more contacts. This is compared with the NT where only two per cent of student received more than 10 contacts. It should be noted that the four students who received more than 50 social worker contacts were from the same family. This is also the case for the three students who received between one and nine social worker contacts.

Figure 21 Distribution of Social Worker contacts among referred students in QLD DET SEAM schools



Unauthorised absence rates of notified students who received social worker contacts compared with those who did not are in Figure 22. Consistent with the NT, QLD students who were contacted by social workers appeared to have higher unauthorised absence rates prior to an attendance notice. In other words, social worker contacts were more likely to be provided to students with worse unauthorised absence rates. During the compliance period, unauthorised absence rates for students with social worker contact improved by eight percentage points. For the two months post compliance period, unauthorised absences of QLD students with social worker contact did not relapse as extensively as the group without social worker contact. This was particularly the case two months after the compliance period in which students who did not receive social worker contact had higher unauthorised absence rates than prior to an attendance notice being issued.

²⁷ There were a number of students from Central North Queensland who did receive social worker contact in 2011, but attendance data is not yet available and therefore they are not included in this analysis.

Figure 22 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children before and after compliance period

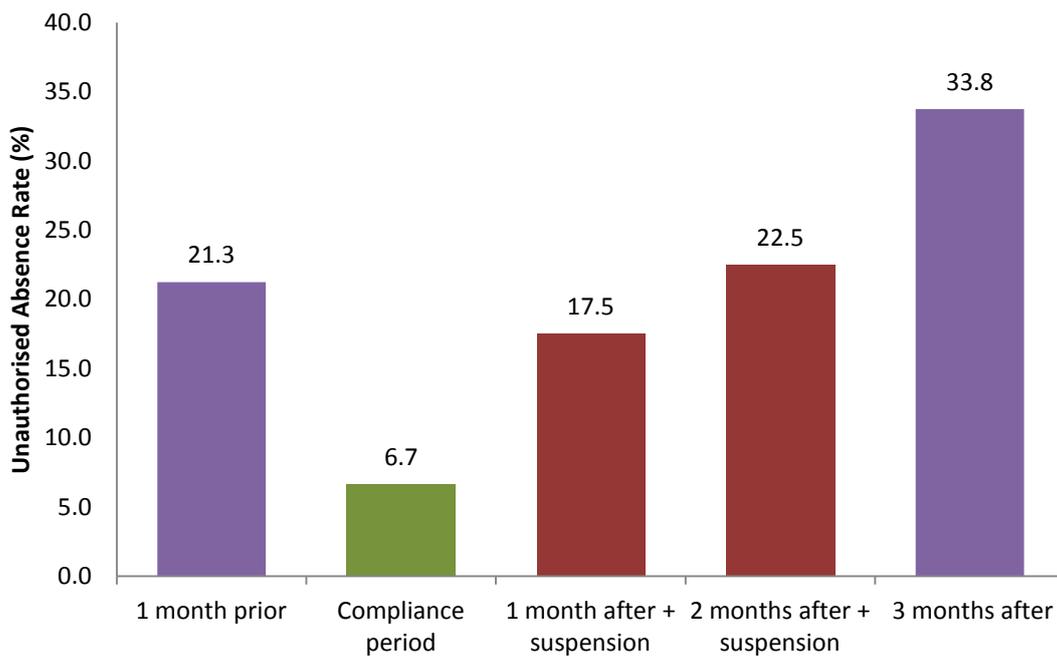
6.3.4. Absence patterns where a parent's income support was suspended

Despite data being limited, preliminary results suggest income support suspensions had no impact on improving school attendance. It appears that the issuing of attendance notices and the potential threat of suspension has had the most impact on school attendance.

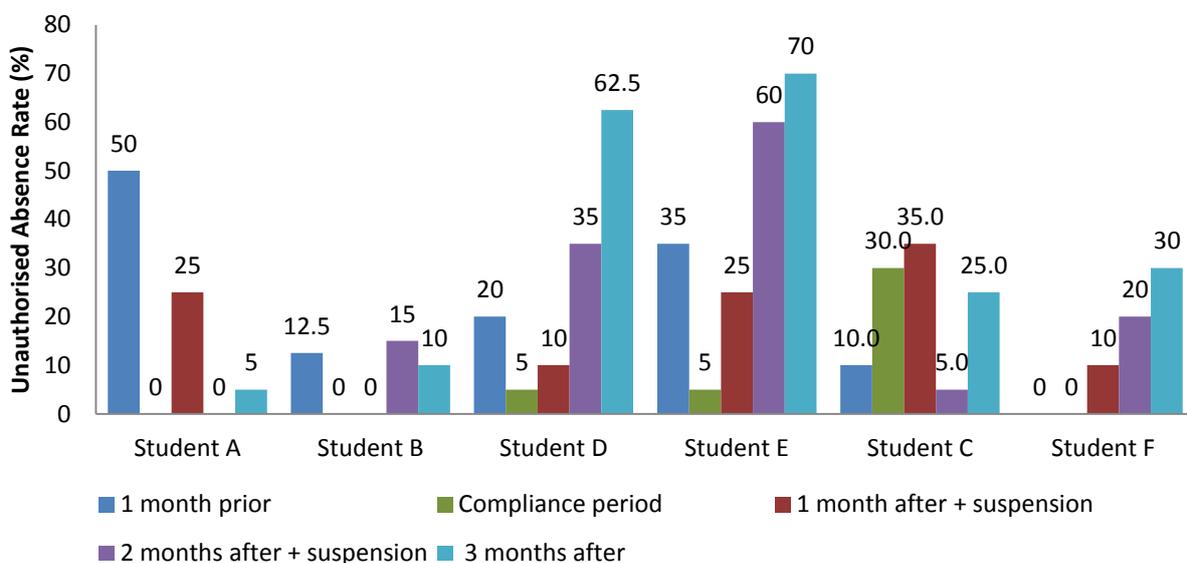
Northern Territory

If referred students failed to show an improved attendance rate and parents did not take reasonable steps to ensure their children attended school regularly, parents' income support was suspended. There were six such suspensions (involving six students and five parents) applied in the NT during the 2010 school year. The unauthorised absence rates of the six students were examined to assess whether there was an improvement associated with the sanction.

The average unauthorised absence rates for the period from pre-sanction to post sanction for the six students are presented in Figure 23. Of the six students, four (Students A, B, D and E) were sanctioned in the month following the compliance period and the other two students (Students C and F) had their compliance period extended and were sanctioned a month later. All the sanctions were lifted within one month except for one student (Student E) whose sanction lasted for around two months. On average, the unauthorised absence rate was lowest within the attendance notice compliance period with a relapse obvious even during the sanction period. It appears that overall sanctions had no impact on reducing unauthorised absence rates for the small number of families affected.

Figure 23 Unauthorised absence rate of referred children before and after compliance period

At an individual student level, the monthly unauthorised absence rates were highly variable and no clear trend was observed in absence rates in response to payment suspension. Although Students A, B, D, and E all had zero or very low unauthorised absence rates during the compliance period, their parents' payments were suspended in the month after the compliance period. Following payment suspension most of these students had increased absence rates except for Student A. Students C and F whose parents experienced delayed payment suspension also had increased unauthorised absence rates after the initial suspension (Figure 24). Given that all the sanctions were lifted within two months of a sanction, it appears that these decisions were not based on any improvement in unauthorised absences.

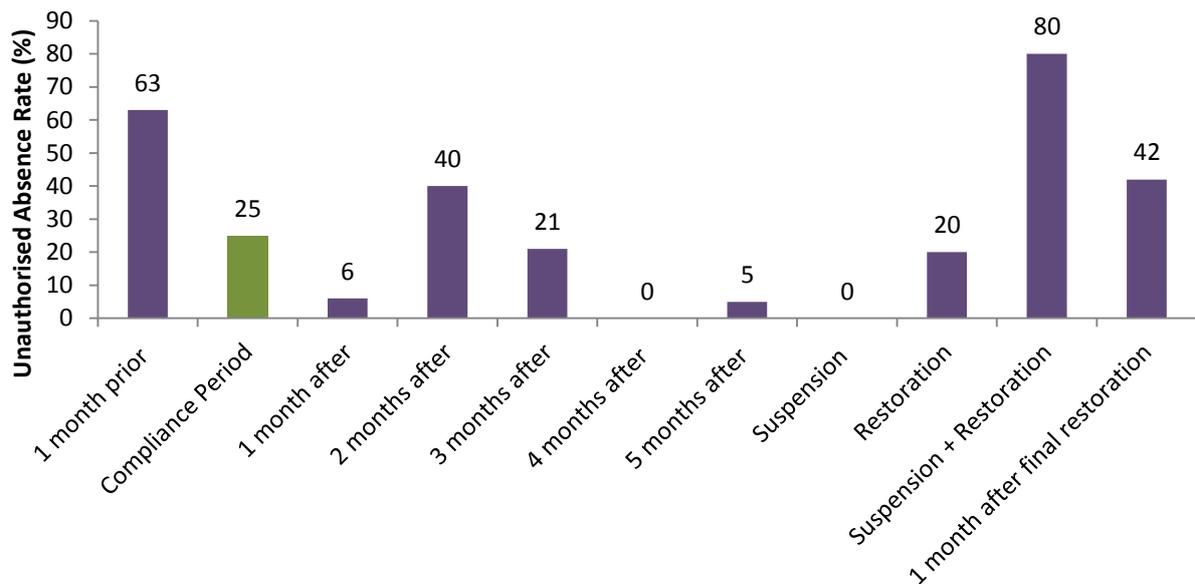
Figure 24 Unauthorised absence rates of referred children before and after compliance period and sanction

Queensland

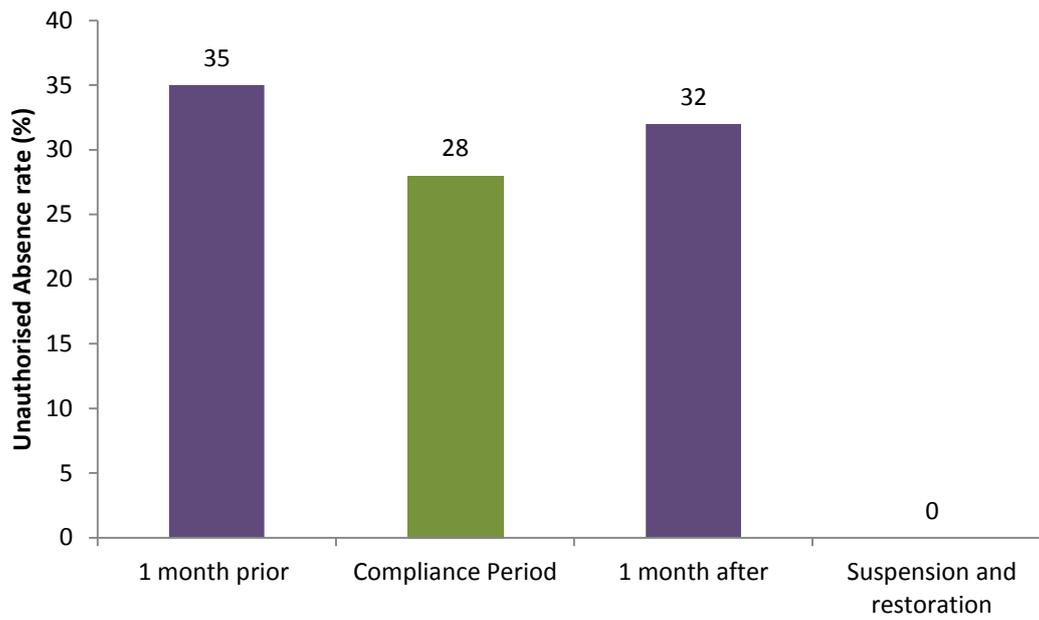
There were very few attendance sanctions applied in QLD during the 2010 school year. Of the two parents who had their payments suspended for failure to comply with the attendance component of SEAM, one was suspended multiple times while the other had a single suspension. Case studies of the unauthorised absence rates over time of the two children whose parents were suspended was completed and case studies are presented in Figure 25 and Figure 26.

Figure 25 shows the unauthorised absence rates of one suspended student in monthly blocks from one month prior to the attendance notice being issued in 2009 up until the final restoration of payment at the end of 2010. The parent of this child was suspended twice under the attendance component of SEAM. The unauthorised absence rate of this child varies from zero per cent four months after the attendance notice was issued to 80 per cent in the month immediately after the first payment suspension was restored. As can be seen from the graph, suspension of the parent's income support payment had no impact on this child's number of unauthorised absences. The child's unauthorised absence rate was at its highest point during the second suspension and restoration period (both the second suspension and payment restoration occurred in the same month).

Figure 25 Time series analysis of unauthorised absence rates of a suspended child: Case study one

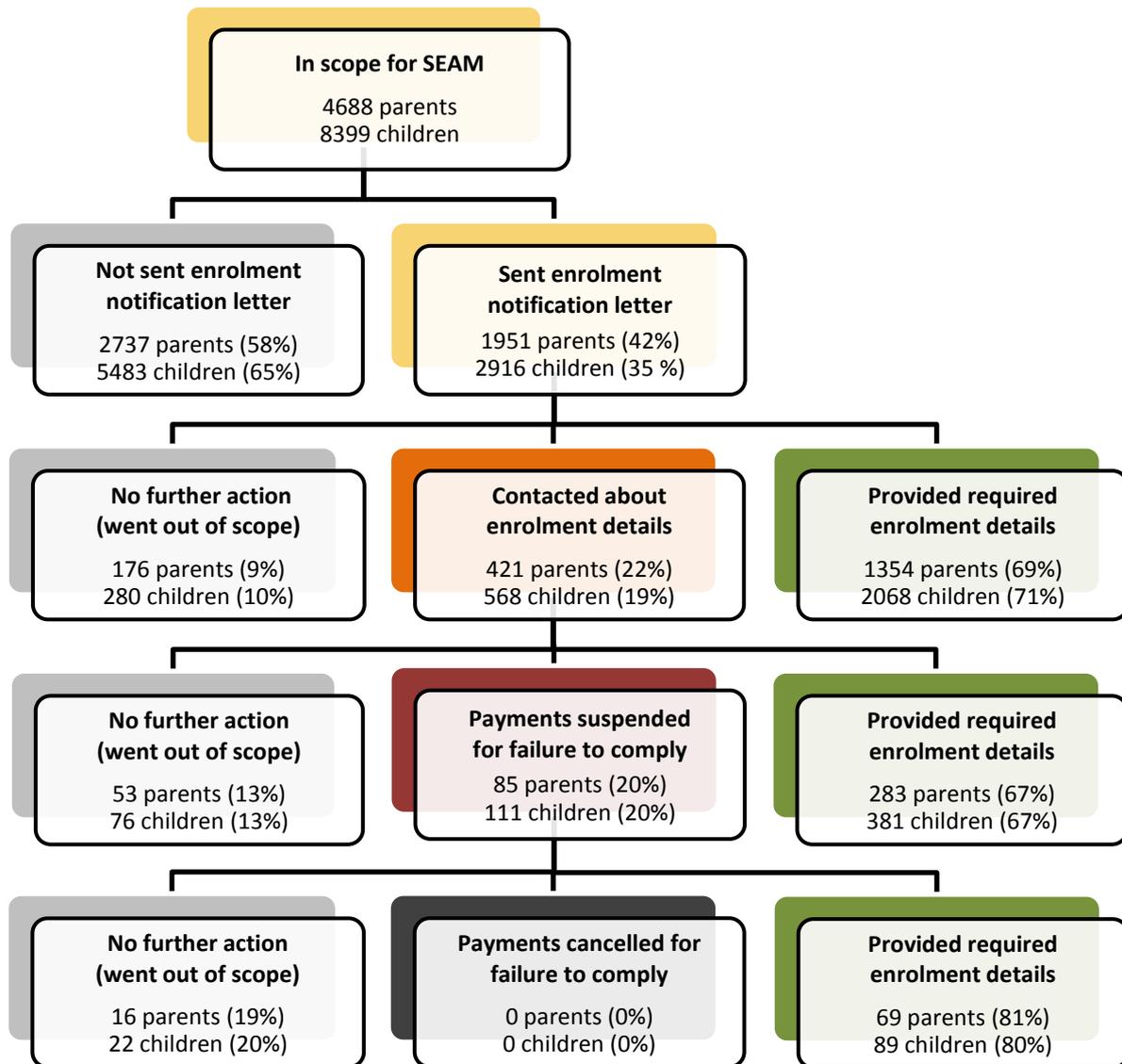


Negligible attendance data was available after payment restoration in case study two (Figure 26). As can be seen from the graph, while the issuing of an attendance notice had a minimal effect on the child's unauthorised absence rate, the child's unauthorised absence rate did improve once payment had been suspended. Consistent with case study one, suspension and payment restoration occurred in the same month. However, this was the end of Term 4 2010 and it is likely that payment was restored for the school holiday period.

Figure 26 Time series analysis of attendance rates of suspended children: Case study two

APPENDIX

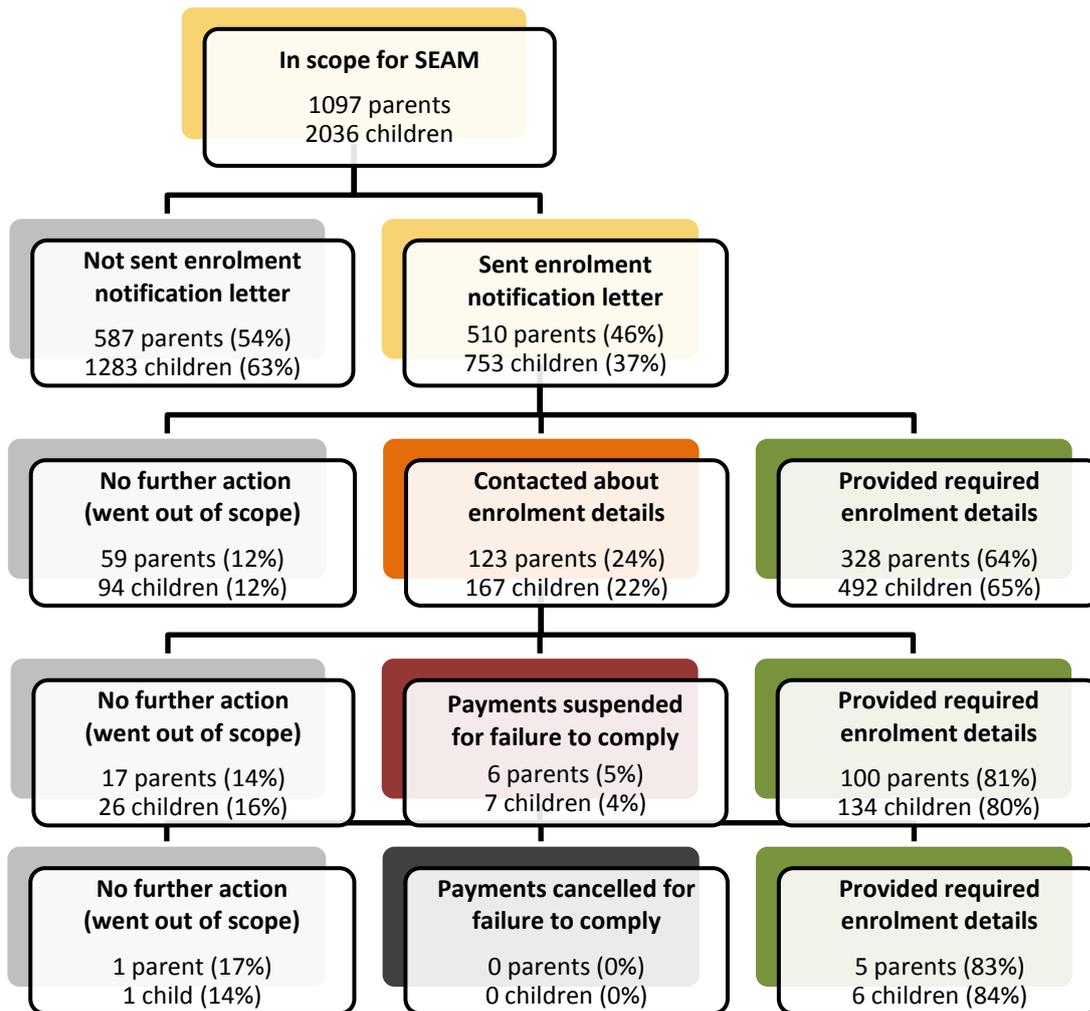
Cumulative number of parents and children who reached different stages of the SEAM enrolment process during 2010



Source: Centrelink administrative data extracted 11 Feb 2011

Note: Percentages are calculated in reference to the stage immediately prior and may not add to 100 due to rounding. Note that parents and children may be subject to multiple notices.

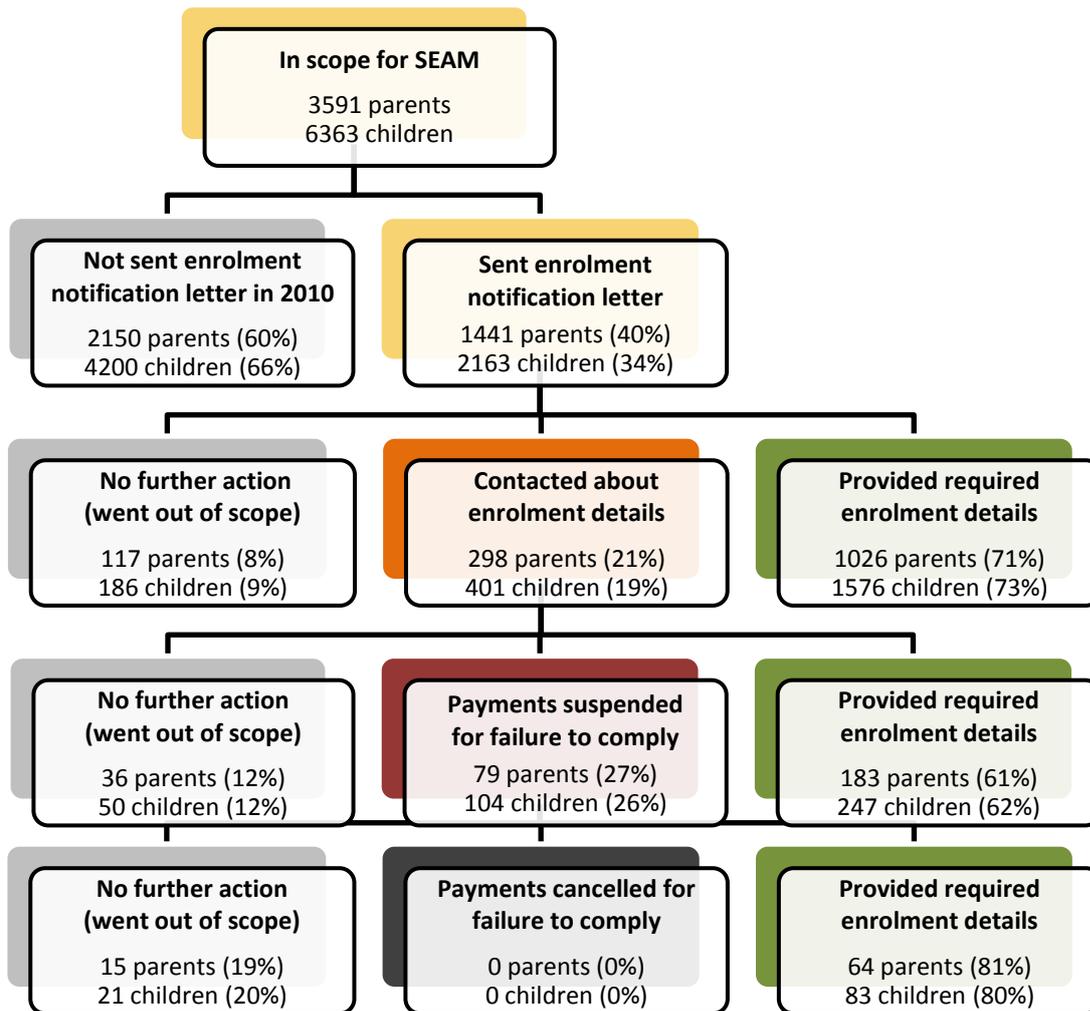
Figure 14 Cumulative number of parents and children who reached different stages of the SEAM enrolment process during 2010 – Northern Territory



Source: Centrelink administrative data extracted 11 Feb 2011

Note: Percentages are calculated in reference to the stage immediately prior and may not add to 100 due to rounding. Note that parents and children may be subject to multiple notices.

Figure 25 Cumulative number of parents and children who reached different stages of the SEAM enrolment process during 2010 – Queensland sites



Source: Centrelink administrative data extracted 11 Feb 2011

Note: Percentages are calculated in reference to the stage immediately prior and may not add to 100 due to rounding. Note that parents and children may be subject to multiple notices.