

The revised Enrolment of Students in NSW Government Schools policy

Frequently Asked Questions: August 2019

1. I was advised of my school's enrolment cap. How was the cap determined and what does it mean?

The school's enrolment cap is the number of students that may be accommodated based on the number of permanent classrooms.

It is an indicator of whether or not a school may have the capacity to accept non-local enrolments.

It is not a target nor a limit on the number of local students that a school may enrol.

It is not intended to reflect staffing, or current or future demand for enrolment.

2. Our local enrolments exceed the cap; what do we do?

Every eligible child is entitled to enrol in their local school. To meet the Department's obligation under the Education Act 1990, schools that have exceeded their cap will continue to enrol local students.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances approved by the DEL, the school will use the prescribed 100-point residential address check to confirm local enrolment applications.

Schools will continue to be resourced to accommodate current enrolment, including the use of demountable classrooms if appropriate.

Where the school has increased local demand beyond permanent accommodation, the facilities will be assessed as part of the School Infrastructure NSW planning processes.

3. Has the intent of the revised enrolment policy changed from the previous one?

Not significantly. The revised policy includes the prioritisation of siblings and clarification for non-local enrolment processes (100-point residential address check and more specific advice on enrolment panel criteria).

The previous policy required each school to have an enrolment ceiling (the equivalent of the cap in the revised policy), that was based on permanent accommodation. The policy made clear that no additional accommodation (permanent or demountable) would be provided to cater for increased enrolments resulting from non-local placements.

In the revised policy, the enrolment cap for a school is established centrally, based on available permanent accommodation. Demountable classrooms are not usually counted towards the enrolment cap unless new or replacement accommodation planned for or under construction. The revised policy makes clear that no additional accommodation (permanent or demountable) will be provided to cater for increased enrolments resulting from non-local enrolments.

4. How were the caps calculated?

The caps have been designed to take into consideration the average number of students currently in classrooms in our 2,200 schools. The cap does not define the maximum number of students that can be enrolled in a school. Caps were determined by multiplying the number of permanent classrooms with the average number of students currently in classrooms for the school type. The caps take into consideration the range of different classroom spaces in our schools. Schools use a range of strategies when converting their Full Time Equivalent (FTE) into the number of classes.

5. What enrolment rights do siblings of currently enrolled students have?

The revised policy clarifies the enrolment rights for siblings of non-local students in schools with capacity constraints.

- In schools that are allowed to accept non-local students, selection criteria for any non-local enrolment panel will give priority to siblings of existing students, where possible.
- Siblings of currently enrolled students who were local when enrolled but are now non-local because of boundary changes are also entitled to enrol, even if their school is over the buffer or cap.
- Like other non-local students, siblings do not have an entitlement to be enrolled at a school that has reached its cap or local enrolment buffer level.

The revised policy retains its focus on the department's obligation to give paramount importance to the best educational and wellbeing needs of students. Supporting at-risk students will remain a consideration for principals and DELs in making decisions in relation to families seeking to enrol siblings in an at-capacity non-local school.

6. We have reached our enrolment buffer. I have already made offers to siblings of current students for 2020. Do I now have to tell those parents that they cannot attend?

No, any enrolment offers already made and/or accepted prior to Term 4 2019 will be honoured.

However, future decisions about siblings of current students need to be managed through the non-local enrolment criteria and panel process at your school.

7. The policy says that we can enrol students who are out of our local intake area if there are exceptional circumstances. Is there a definitive list of what circumstances might be considered 'exceptional'?

No, there is not a definitive list of the circumstances that could be considered exceptional. The policy does not (and should not) define the range and scope of exceptionality. This supports local and sensible decision making by the people who know the families best.

Exceptional circumstances should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the school's placement panel if the school is near its buffer. If the school is over its buffer level or cap, the decision is made between the principal and DEL. There are subject matter experts in state office who are able to provide advice to support decision making.

As an example, exceptional circumstances may occur when the safety and wellbeing of students could be compromised. We have an obligation to protect and ensure the wellbeing of our most vulnerable students.

Some examples of exceptional circumstances might include:

- Families in a situation characterised by domestic violence. The parent may not be able to prove their residential address at point of enrolment. The principal can waive the 100 point residential address check and enrol the child/ren with the approval of the DEL.
- Sometimes parents with limited resources and support who have a child with unique support needs and who is enrolled in a specialist support class in a mainstream school may seek to enrol their other children in the same school. The opportunity to keep siblings together might be a determining factor in the decision to access support for the child with a disability.
- Some refugee families are initially placed in temporary housing and enrol as local students. When permanent housing is provided this can be out of the school's local intake area. Consideration might be given to siblings coming into school at a later date if separating them from their siblings is likely to cause undue stress or trauma.
- Where a non-local family did not have reasonable expectation that their subsequent children may not have been able to enrol in the same school as their sibling. This expectation should be set by schools at the time of any non-local enrolment, however where that has not previously been the case, this may be considered an exceptional circumstance in consultation with the DEL.

8. Can my school accommodate a support class/unit when we are over our cap?

Yes, support classes/units are provisions for local and non-local students, who are identified through the placement panel process. The location of support classes is determined based on the best interests of the students.

Schools will continue to be supported to provide this important service for students and families. Additional demountable accommodation will be provided to enable the support class provision if it is required as a result of the support class establishment. The school's enrolment cap will be adjusted, if needed.

9. We have reached our enrolment cap. Do I have to discontinue a special program for which we have had a selection process for non-local students, and that includes a partnership with an external organisation?

No, you can continue to offer this type of program, but it would be for your local students to access. Non-local access may need to be grandfathered out, depending on the commitment already made to the program. You could continue to have a selection process for local students to be included in the specialist/extra-curricular program.

Schools will continue to be encouraged to develop and implement special programs, including those that involve partnerships with community organisations, which enhance students' learning, health, wellbeing and welfare outcomes.

Participation in these programs needs to be inclusive and non-discriminatory and should not be limited by a requirement for the student to be enrolled at the organising school.

10. How does the cap impact specialist high schools where many of their students are non-local?

There are currently 33 specialist high schools that have a cap. The types of specialist schools include:

- Creative Arts
- Sports
- Languages
- Performing Arts
- Visual Arts
- Technology
- Rural Technology
- Marine

If a school is identified by the Department as a specialist high school and has an evidence of enrolment based on specialist programs or provisions, then the principal and DEL should discuss the enrolment profile of the school and how the cap could be adjusted to accommodate the specialist provision.

11. My school operates differently to others. What options do I have to adjust the centrally set cap for my school?

The policy is being implemented in two phases to provide the opportunity for DELs and principals to discuss the centrally set cap and any adjustments that might be required to account for local factors or differing operating parameters.

The cap can be adjusted by reducing or increasing the number of designated permanent classrooms that are recorded for the school.

Any local adjustments to the cap need to be agreed with the DEL and endorsed by the Executive Director for the approval of the Deputy Secretary, School Operations and Performance.

12. Has consideration been given to the revised policy's impact on principal classification and school staffing?

Concerns regarding the policy's impact on individual circumstances is understandable.

Principals should be reassured that policy changes are not taken lightly and their potential effects are weighed against the need to manage resources efficiently across the whole school system.

Some schools will see a flow back of local enrolments which may offset the loss of non-local enrolment numbers.