



Fall 2015 Report Released

Auditor General

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is not doing a good job of monitoring educational services delivered by school boards in Nova Scotia, such as how students are progressing, Auditor General Michael Pickup said in his fall report released today, November 18.

“The department has not set performance expectations for school boards or targets to look at how individual boards do on provincial math and literacy assessments,” the auditor general said. As well, the Education Act does not clearly define the relationship between governing school boards and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

“This leaves uncertainty around elected board members’ responsibility to those who elected them versus the Minister.

The audit also assessed how Chignecto-Central, Halifax and Strait Regional School Boards are monitoring student education in their schools. It found all three boards do a good job of implementing continuous school improvement but, need to receive better information on how students are progressing and whether teachers and principals are meeting expectations.

An audit of funding to universities at the Department of Labour and Advanced Education found the department is not doing enough to regularly monitor the financial health of universities.

“At the time of our audit, there were no standard university financial reporting requirements,” the auditor general said. “And most provincial funding is provided without any accountability back to the province on how funding is spent.”

The report noted there is no overall government direction to indicate how universities will achieve long-term sustainability. While some objectives of the province’s memorandum of understanding with universities were met, others were still being worked on when the memorandum expired. The audit also indicated that the process to allocate funding among the ten universities has not been updated since 2011 and is based on old enrolment data.

The report also examined the province’s monitoring and funding of municipalities.

The auditor general found the Department of Municipal Affairs needs to do a better job of evaluating and monitoring municipal financial risk. Financial information submitted by municipalities was not reviewed in a timely manner and department staff need to discuss negative financial indicators with municipalities.



“The Department does not follow up negative municipal financial indicators with municipalities to determine if there is an adequate plan to address the problems,” Mr. Pickup said.

Additionally, municipal borrowing requests should be analyzed in greater detail before being approved.

Chapter three of the report looked at whether government has plans to ensure critical services can continue in the event of a business interruption. The audit noted that it is not clear which government entity has overall responsibility for this important area. No one is providing central government oversight to ensure various department’s plans will work together and no priorities have been established.

The audit found the new Northeast Correctional Facility, which opened February 2015, did not have a plan to manage significant incidents for several months after it opened. The audit also noted that schools in both Halifax Regional School Board and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial are not conducting all fire, lockdown and relocation drills as required.

“For example, we tested records in 15 schools and found six did not conduct a fire drill in the first week of school and four did not have a relocation drill.”

The report also noted that the Emergency Management Office, while generally having its roles and responsibilities well-documented, needs to update its business continuity plan.

Finally, chapter six examined government efforts in forest management and protection. The audit found that the Department of Natural Resources had a good process to develop its strategic plan. However, the Department could do a better job of monitoring implementation of the plan.

“The Department of Natural Resources does not verify that operators stayed within their annual harvest limits,” said Mr. Pickup. “We found operators are paid for silviculture work without verifying this work was completed.”

The 92-page report contains 38 recommendations to government. For the first time, the auditor general has included a brief video summarizing each audit on his Office’s website.

The full report and related videos are available at www.oag-nb.ca.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

In his fall report, Auditor General Michael Pickup says that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has not established performance expectations for school boards.

In the report, released today (November 18th) Mr. Pickup said the three boards he audited all had some good practices but also need to improve in areas, such as getting additional information on how some students are progressing.

An audit of funding to universities found that the Department of Labour and Advanced Education is not regularly monitoring university financial health. While some objectives of the province's memorandum of understanding with universities were met, others were still being worked on when the memorandum expired.

The auditor general found the Department of Municipal Affairs needs to improve the timeliness of when it reviews municipal financial information and do a better job of following up negative financial indicators with municipalities.

The report also identifies weaknesses in business continuity plans intended to maintain critical services in many government organizations.

The report found that the Department of Natural Resources did a good job of developing its strategic plan for forest management and protection but needs to improve ongoing monitoring.

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