Advertising has begun for an attendance officer position to be based in Palmerston, with a similar position for Alice Springs to be advertised from Friday 7 February, Employment, Education and Training Minister Syd Stirling said today.

Mr Stirling said the officers were part of a program aimed at increasing school attendance rates, with $170,000 set aside in the 2002/03 Budget.

A total of eight attendance officers will be employed throughout the Territory by 2004/05 at a cost of around $680,000.

"The school attendance officers will work with identified schools and school communities where there are significant issues in relation to student attendance, enrolment and retention," Mr Stirling said.

"Applicants will need to be experienced in working with children at risk and their families, particularly in a cross-cultural setting.

"Their main task will be to develop strategies aimed at improving young people’s participation in education.

"They will work closely with other government officers who work with young people at risk, such as Youth Night Patrol workers and Child Protection Officers."

Mr Stirling said the attendance officers were part of the Government’s wider strategy to address truancy and target juveniles at risk of getting involved in criminal behaviour.

"This initiative is about more than simply dragging kids back to school. The officers will work with other government agencies and families to address the underlying issues that may be causing a child to play truant," Mr Stirling said.

"The Government’s Attendance, Enrolment and Retention Strategy also includes a $500,000 initiative to establish alternative education sites for wayward students to reintegrate them back into the school environment."