



A share in the future

Review of Indigenous Education
in the Northern Territory



The painting that forms the basis for the design of this report was provided by Jannette McCormack, an artist, a teacher at Gillen Primary School in Alice Springs and a member of the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council. The painting is called Altyere Nwernekenhe. Jannette says it represents the Arrernte view of the world. Altyere is the spiritual connection to the world. Nwernekenhe means 'ours'. The painting represents the shields of knowledge: the Indigenous world view and the western world view. The centre of the painting is where the learning is taking place.

I am grateful to Jannette for allowing us to use her work.

Bruce Wilson

Hon Peter Chandler MLA
Minister for Education
Parliament House
Mitchell Street
Darwin NT

Dear Minister

I am pleased to submit my final report in response to tender D13-0240 'Review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory' dated 31 July, 2013.

The title of the report, *A share in the future*, is derived from an address by Galarrwuy Yunupingu. In accepting his nomination as Australian of the Year in 1978, he said:

We are at last being recognised as the indigenous people of this country who must share in its future.

The title reflects my optimism about the likelihood that the Northern Territory can materially raise the level of achievement of the majority of its Indigenous students so that they can participate more effectively in society and the economy.

I would like to refer briefly to a number of issues that the conduct of the review has raised. These include reflections on work of this kind, and matters affecting implementation of the recommendations. They also summarise the argument for optimism about the future.

1. The area of Indigenous education raises complex technical and practical issues. The intractable problems in the delivery and conduct of education for this very disadvantaged group of young people require a strategy covering all the many elements affecting student outcomes. A resolution will involve a large number of initiatives, a high degree of coherence across these initiatives, long-term planning and implementation and a thorough respect for evidence. This report provides a strategy that, effectively implemented, can achieve the kinds of improvements that respondents to the review were seeking.
2. The issues are not merely technical. For many people, the resolution of the barriers impeding progress in Indigenous education is as much moral and cultural as educational. The data gathering and consultation processes for this review illustrated how difficult it is to reach agreement in the area. There were widely varying and often opposed views. Some responses were passionate, demonstrating deeply held beliefs not only about education but about the history and experience of Indigenous people in Australia. Some proposals outlined in the draft report were vigorously opposed.

But the levels of engagement, commitment and concern reflected in responses are also encouraging. While there will remain disagreement about details, there is a common view that our current approaches are failing many students. There is widespread public support for a major program of reform and improvement. There were few respondents who would not welcome a whole-hearted effort to transform the educational experience of many Indigenous students.

3. That level of support for change can be recruited to overcome some of the historical barriers to improvement. The area has been bedeviled by uncoordinated projects, unrelated initiatives and an absence of coherence and consistency. Some programs are piecemeal, while others begun with good intentions are diverted or terminated before they can be effective. The problems facing Indigenous education in the Northern Territory are immensely broad and closely intermeshed, yet they have not been addressed with a strategy of this kind.

There is now an opportunity to build the momentum for improvement around this review. The recommendations set out in the report cover considerable territory. They address each of the phases of school education, including the years between birth and the commencement of formal schooling. They focus on a range of operational and structural areas. They address virtually all the matters raised in responses to the review.

Improvement will not occur unless there is a substantial and sustained approach. What is required is a strategy that addresses all the barriers and builds a systematic and integrated program of reform. There is now an opportunity to put such a strategy into action, with the potential to gain broad support.

4. The ambitious and long-term nature of the reform program outlined is both its greatest challenge and the best reason for optimism. As the report itself argues, implementation will be required over an extended period: in human terms, for a generation or more; in political terms, over the lives of a succession of parliaments. I believe there is now an appetite for such a program, and the chance to overcome the obstacles that have limited success in the past.

Such a reform requires cooperation across political and bureaucratic divides, and the review has seen evidence that this is now possible. The various departments and agencies in the Northern Territory will need to cooperate, because many of the obstacles are well beyond the reach of education alone. Darwin and Canberra will need to work together over an extended period. And the different positions in the national and Territory political debate will need to come together to agree on a common position. If the educational outcomes of Indigenous children are to be dramatically improved, the artificial human barriers we place in the way must be removed. There is now a groundswell of goodwill that offers a chance to achieve this result.

The last major review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory was *Learning Lessons*, released in 1999, 15 years ago. The authors of that report, noting the exceptionally poor results for Indigenous students, argued that the loss of a further generation could not be tolerated. The young people who were then being born are now of secondary school age and many of them are illiterate and disengaged. Indigenous young people as a group are now as poorly served by their education system as those referred to in the earlier review. We are now having the same conversation that accompanied the earlier review.

The present review, and the passionate concern for improvement that has accompanied it, provide an opportunity to achieve an historic breakthrough. There is a chance to overcome deep-seated disagreements about how to tackle the problems, short-term and piecemeal approaches, and a lack of coordinated and bipartisan commitment to a long-term strategy. If these issues are confronted and resolved, the Northern Territory can anticipate a different conversation in another 15 years.

I have enjoyed undertaking this work. It has been challenging, stimulating, often difficult and always rewarding. I have been impressed by the shared public enthusiasm for making a difference. I am grateful to those people who took the time to work with me to improve the report and to draw my attention to matters that the draft report did not resolve.

I particularly want to thank the review team. They have been utterly professional, dedicated to the task, prepared to consider new approaches, forthright in testing proposals and generous in supporting and guiding my thinking. I do not underestimate the personal commitment made by members of the team in taking part in this review, and the extent to which they have been the public face in the Northern Territory of a review that challenged a great deal of current practice and stimulated vigorous debate.

Thank you for the opportunity to lead this review. There could hardly be a more important area of public policy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Wilson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bruce Wilson



The present review, and the passionate concern for improvement that has accompanied it, provide an opportunity to achieve an historic breakthrough.

Contents

Glossary	8
Overview	11
Chapter One: Introduction	31
Chapter Two: What we can control	37
Chapter Three: Demographics	41
Chapter Four: School Categories	47
Chapter Five: The education system	61
Chapter Six: Community engagement	77
Chapter Seven: Early childhood	89
Chapter Eight: Primary education	105
Chapter Nine: Secondary education	135
Chapter Ten: Attendance	161
Chapter Eleven: Wellbeing and behaviour	175
Chapter Twelve: Workforce planning	189
Chapter Thirteen: Finance and resourcing	207
Bibliography	221
Appendix One: Learning Lessons: a reflection on the Collins review	239
Appendix Two: School and Site Visits	248
Appendix Three: Employment Pathways	249
Appendix Four: Australian Government Funding Agreements	256
Appendix Five: Indigenous Education Review Survey	266
Appendix Six: School categories	273
Appendix Seven: Comparison of student achievement in bilingual schools 2008 and 2013	281
Appendix Eight: Consultations and submissions	283



Figures and Tables

Table 1:	Student Numbers by Geolocation and Indigeneity	42
Figure 1:	Northern Territory Indigenous Households by Number of Persons usually Resident and Geolocation	43
Figure 2:	Northern Territory Indigenous Population by Language Spoken at Home and Geolocation	44
Figure 3:	Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Population 15 and over, by Indigenous Status	45
Figure 4:	Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over, by Geolocation	45
Figure 5:	Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over, by Census Year	46
Figure 6:	Northern Territory versus Rest of Australia, % of schools in ICSEA bands	51
Figure 7:	Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2012 by Geolocation	52
Figure 8:	Students attending 80% or less by Indigenous Status and Geolocation	53
Figure 9:	Very Remote Indigenous Students by Stage of Schooling and Attendance Band	53
Figure 10:	NAPLAN data by Geolocation, Indigeneity, Year Level and NAPLAN Domain, comparing Northern Territory with the rest of Australia minus Northern Territory, 2013	55
Figure 11:	NTG Indigenous School Students At or Above National Minimum Standard in Reading and Writing by Language spoken at Home (NAPLAN results from 2012 and 2013)	57
Table 2:	Estimate of Numbers of Homelands in Four Population Categories	74
Table 3:	Northern Territory Student Vulnerability by Geolocation	92
Table 4:	Northern Territory Indigenous and non-Indigenous Developmental Vulnerability by Domain	92
Figure 12:	Poor Year 7 NAPLAN performance by vulnerability in number of AEDI domains in pre-primary	93
Figure 13:	Northern Territory Government Schools, 2013 NAPLAN Results – Reading, Writing and Numeracy	108


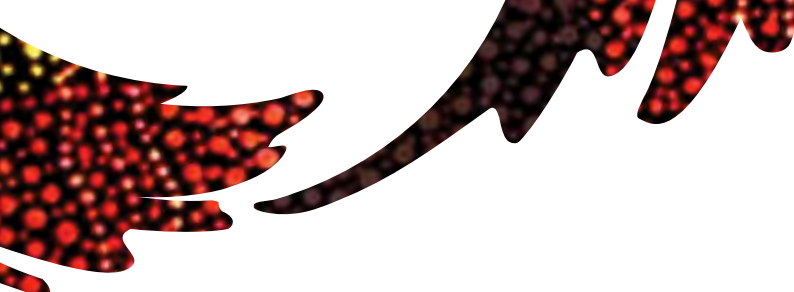



Figure 14: Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Indigenous students by Geolocation	109
Figure 15: Northern Territory Government Schools, 2013 NAPLAN Results – Numeracy	130
Figure 16: Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2013 by Geolocation	138
Figure 17: Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Year 9 Indigenous students by Geolocation	139
Figure 18: NTCE/NTCET Indigenous Year 12 Student Completion rate at Northern Territory Government Schools	140
Figure 19: Very Remote Northern Territory Government Schools - Indigenous NTCE/NTCET completions (not including Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)	141
Table 5: Northern Territory Government Schools Attendance Rates by Geolocation, 2009 and 2012	164
Figure 20: NT Government Indigenous students – % at or above national minimum standard for reading by attendance band	165
Figure 21: NT Government Indigenous students – % at or above national minimum standard for reading by attendance band above 60%	165
Table 6: Northern Territory Government Remote and Very Remote Schools Teacher Tenure	191
Figure 22: \$ per Student by Jurisdiction and Stage of Schooling	209
Table 7: Cost per Student by Geolocation and Stage of Schooling	210
Table 8: Total Cost Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Education by Geolocation	210
Table 9: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Enrolments and Costs per Student	211
Table 10: Cost per NTCET Completion by Geolocation	211



Glossary

AANMS	At or Above National Minimum Standard
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Education Research
ACIKE	Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education
ACTA	Australian Council of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Associations
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
AIEW	Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AL	Accelerated Literacy
AMA	Australian Medical Association
APIF	Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework
APONT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
APPA	Australian Primary Principals Association
ASSOA	Alice Springs School of the Air
ASSPA	Aboriginal Students Support and Parental Awareness
AT	Assistant Teacher
AuSIL	Australian Society for Indigenous Languages
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CET	Community Engagement Team
CFC	Child and Family Centre
CHL	Conductive Hearing Loss
CLC	Central Land Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COPE	Commonwealth Own Purpose Expenditure
DECS	Departments of Education and Children’s Services
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DI	Direct Instruction
DoE	Department of Education
DSP	Director of School Performance
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language / Dialect
EAO’s	Enrolment and Attendance Officers



ENT	Ear, Nose and Throat
ESL	English as a Second Language
FaHCSIA	Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Department of)
FaFT	Families as First Teachers
FASD	Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
GEEPAT	Groote Eylandt English Phonological Awareness Test
HLC	Homeland Learning Centre
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio Economic Advantage
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IECNT	Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory
IEEP	Industry Engagement and Employment Pathways
IEP	Indigenous Employment Program
IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program
IFS	Integrated Family Services
ILNNP	Improving, Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership
ISA	Inclusion Support Assistant
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
KSA	Katherine School of the Air
LBOTE	Language Background Other than English
LIP's	Local Implementation Plans
LLISC	Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
MILAN	Making Improvements in Literacy and Numeracy
MIT	More Indigenous Teachers
MSS	Mean Scale Scores
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NATSIEAP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPA	National Partnership Agreement
NPAIECD	National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development
NPARSD	National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service delivery
NQF	National Quality Framework
NT	Northern Territory



NTBOS	Northern Territory Board of Studies
NTCET	Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
NTCF	Northern Territory Curriculum Framework
NTCOGSO	Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NTIEC	Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council
NTOEC	Northern Territory Open Education Centre
OM	Otitis Media
PAST	Phonological Awareness Skills Test
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PM	Performance Monitoring
QLD	Queensland
RATE	Remote Area Teacher Education
RD's	Regional Directors
RITE	Remote Indigenous Teacher Education
RJCP	Remote Jobs and Community Communities Program
RLPA	Remote Learning Partnership Agreement
RMIE	Regional Manager of Indigenous Education
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SAIS	Student Achievement Information system
SATO's	School Attendance and Truancy Officers
SCPA	School Community Partnership Agreement
SEAM	School Enrolment and Attendance Measure
SEAPART	School Entry Alphabetic and Phonological Awareness Readiness Test
SEE	Skills for Education and Employment
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SFNT	Stronger Futures Northern Territory
SHEP	Secondary Homeland Education Program
SNP	School Nutritional Program
SPAT	Student Phonological Awareness Test
SWPBS	School Wide Positive Behaviour Support
TAFE	Training and Further Education
TIE	Transforming Indigenous education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia



Overview

This is the first comprehensive review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (NT) since *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999). Since that time, another generation of Indigenous children has passed through the NT's schools. Despite substantial investment and dedicated effort, this report suggests that in some areas the position for many Indigenous children is worse than it was at the time of the last review. The generation of children since Collins, especially in many remote schools, has failed to gain the benefits that *Learning Lessons* anticipated.

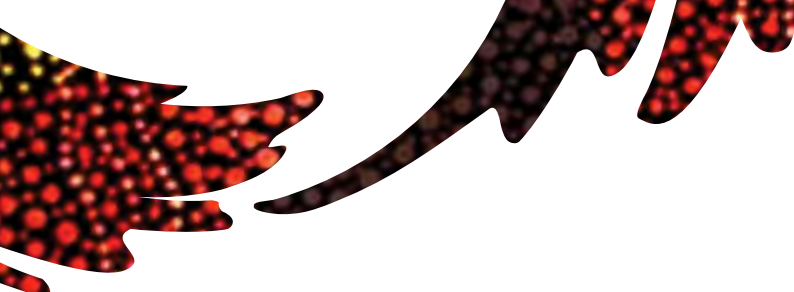
The dimensions of the problem are evident in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results. By Year 3, Indigenous students in very remote schools in the NT are already two years of schooling behind Indigenous students in very remote schools in the rest of Australia in their writing results. By Year 9, the gap is about five years of schooling. These are not comparisons with the general population, but with comparable students in comparable locations.

The starting point for this review is that the children now in our schools, and those yet to arrive, deserve better. The review has taken as a non-negotiable that there must be an explicit focus on improving unacceptably low outcomes for Indigenous children. Some key initiatives established since the Collins report have been ineffective. Substantial progress will not be achieved by marginal improvements.

There is now a large body of research concerning the significance of the early years of learning. Children who fail in the early years to lay a foundation of basic skills are unlikely ever to recover. Indigenous students in remote locations in the NT constitute a test tube demonstration of that body of research. These children, who have been the focus of improvement efforts for a decade and more, are still left irretrievably behind almost as soon as they start school. Unless some means can be found to give Indigenous children in the first eight years of their lives a base in literacy and numeracy, those children will add to the lost generations of Indigenous Australians.

One of the key issues facing the NT is the number and proportion of Indigenous children who enter school with little or no English. In some schools, the proportion of the cohort in this position approaches 100%. In some cases, schools have sought to establish initial literacy in the first languages spoken by these children. The approach to be adopted has been the subject of educational debate, policy shifts and community disagreement.

The review acknowledges and supports the role of students' first languages in education and supports their teaching. They contribute to identity formation, are important elements in student engagement, help children feel at home in the school environment and have educational value including instrumental benefits in learning English. First language and culture should be part of a child's education where qualified teachers are available and communities agree. The review does not, however, support the position argued by some respondents that first language is the only or best means of access to English, or that the curriculum should be predominantly taught in Indigenous languages.



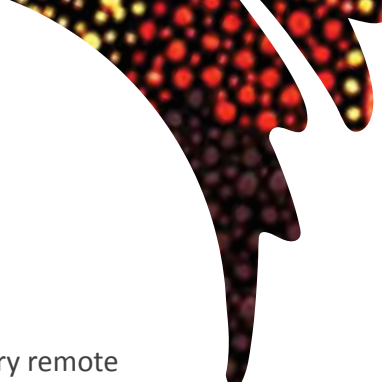
The review focuses on the English language skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system and proposes that these are gained through rigorous and relentless attention to the foundations of the language and the skills that support participation in a modern democracy and economy. This report recommends the explicit teaching and assessment of foundational elements of English literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary.

The Collins review mounted a strong argument to extend secondary education to remote and very remote schools. In the years since that report, the NT has spent hundreds of millions of dollars establishing and supporting secondary provision in these schools. The effort has attracted dedicated teachers and gained the support of many communities. This review's visits to schools and analysis of data demonstrate that the initiative has largely failed. NAPLAN literacy rates for very remote students in Year 9 are about 10%. Almost none of these students gain a certificate at the end of their schooling. Senior secondary education, in particular, is largely unsustainable in most remote and very remote settings.

Heroic efforts to construct a viable senior secondary program in many remote settings are bedevilled by low enrolments, poor attendance, a limited subject range and inadequate facilities. The review found secondary programs without a clear intention to achieve a qualification and with no systematic overall structure, often staffed by teachers with primary school training, responding as well as they could to students seeking a secondary education. Where programs are designed to lead to a qualification, they usually offer students a very narrow range of options. Many students in these locations are still engaged in busy-work. Students are often only minimally literate, largely disengaged from school, attending sporadically, looking forward to the end of their schooling with little prospect of gaining a formal qualification and in many cases without a realistic chance of gaining worthwhile employment locally.

Young people engaged in these programs are fulfilling the legal requirement that they remain at school, without benefiting from the moral requirement that they gain something worth having from this experience. Accordingly, the review recommends a dramatic shift in how secondary education, and particularly senior secondary education, is provided. This report proposes that secondary education should, with some exceptions, be delivered in the NT's urban schools in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. These schools will have to adapt their practice, modify their curricula and establish effective means for inducting and supporting an expanded Indigenous population from remote settings.

A corollary of this approach will be the provision of residential accommodation for remote students. This will require careful management, dedicated resourcing, sensitive negotiation with families and communities and a continuing effort to maintain home links. The work should proceed only with volunteer families and communities and should be carefully monitored to ensure that the approach is refined over time and information disseminated to parents and communities.



There are many reasons for the widespread weaknesses in some remote and very remote schools. They include problems in the management and delivery of education, funding issues, poor attendance, inadequate workforce planning, weak community engagement and difficulties in many other areas. The report discusses these issues and proposes ways to address many of them, suggesting ways to make progress in those areas that are subject to control and influence.

The report also, however, acknowledges that there are some matters that are beyond the control or influence of schools and education systems, including complex demographic circumstances, low median incomes and employment ratios among Indigenous people, dysfunction in some communities, and health and development problems for some children. The report does not blame schools or teachers for failing to overcome intractable problems.

It is important to acknowledge that there are areas where progress has been made: early childhood programs, for example, show some promise of providing children with access to early literacy and better orientation to schooling. The review found examples of wonderful programs in some schools and communities, delivered by people whose ambition, capacity, work ethic and achievement seem beyond what is possible. These people are the measure of what education workers should aspire to. But an education system cannot be built on miracles or miracle workers.

What is missing is a coherent strategic program across all the years of schooling. The recommendations in the review seek to provide the basis for such a program. But even the best strategy is empty if it is not consistently and rigorously pursued over an extended period. The only way to achieve transformational change is to plan for the very long term: in political terms, over the lives of a succession of Parliaments; in human terms, over a generation or more. Unless the NT maintains a consistent approach for an extended period, it will not achieve significant improvement in outcomes for Indigenous young people.

The obstacles faced by the NT in achieving a high quality education for all its children are not a reason to lower ambition; they are a reason to raise and focus the effort. This will require difficult decisions, changes in established practice and challenges to long-held beliefs. These things are worth doing because the children who are the point of this review have the same right to a high-quality education as all other Australian children. They have the right to an education that gives them power over their lives.

Learning Lessons

The last major review of Indigenous education in the NT was the Collins review, *Learning Lessons*. The review reported in 1999, presenting 151 recommendations to government. By 2005, 82 had been implemented fully and 51 were partially implemented with ongoing action. Seventeen recommendations were assessed as being superseded by new policy or legislation, and one, departmental housing for local recruits, had not had any government action (LLISC, 2005: 7 and 64). The *Learning Lessons* review has provided a baseline for our work.



Discussion and recommendations

This review aims to illustrate the kind of strategic approach it proposes for the Department of Education. Where ambitious efforts have clearly failed, it is proposed that they stop. Where resources are limited, it does not propose unrealistic demands. Where solving a problem is beyond the capacity of the Department, the report says so.

The approach is evident in three characteristics of the discussion and recommendations in the report:

1. They are pragmatic. The review makes recommendations, based on what is repeatable across multiple sites and hundreds of classrooms, on what an actual workforce can realistically deliver in the NT.
2. The recommendations do not address everything to do with Indigenous education. They cover a number of major issues and seek to point the way forward for each. The focus is on those areas where action is most needed, is most likely to achieve significant improvement and is likely to require a manageable level of resourcing.
3. The recommendations involve difficult judgments about where to put effort, energy and resources and, correspondingly, where to pull back. This reflects the view of strategy taken in this report: it is as much about what you choose not to do as what you choose to do.

The headings below correspond to the sections of the report. In each case a brief summary of the discussion is provided and any recommendations arising from that section are included.

What we can control

The report begins with a caveat. Before discussing opportunities for improvement, it is important to recognise the limits of the reach of education in achieving outcomes for Indigenous young people. The review identifies areas in which they experience substantial disadvantage, including health, social conditions in some families and communities, nutrition, developmental difficulties, non-English speaking backgrounds and low levels of adult education.

Schools and school systems cannot control these issues and should not be blamed when matters beyond their control limit their achievements. Approaches to Indigenous education from the earliest years should take account of those influences and seek to ameliorate and counter them to the best extent possible. The review proposes that the Department of Education take a lead role in working with other departments and agencies to deliver an integrated approach to services for remote communities to assist in overcoming the barriers to improved educational outcomes.

Our ambitions for Indigenous children should not be lowered because of these difficulties. Our aim should still be to raise levels of achievement in the Indigenous population so that they match achievement in the population as a whole.



Recommendation

1. Take a lead role with other government departments and non government organisations to deliver an integrated and comprehensive approach to the range of social and economic issues that impact on Indigenous education including:
 - a. establishing an inter-agency working group to agree on processes for integration and clear roles and responsibilities;
 - b. establishing small scale trials beginning with the five Child and Family Centres;
 - c. establishing common assessment and referral processes; and
 - d. setting up local steering committees with community representation.

Demographics

The NT has a small, diverse population spread over an area of 1.35 million square kilometres, 1.7 times larger than New South Wales and six times the size of Victoria, but with a population at the time of the 2011 Census of only 228 265. Delivering services to a population spread so thinly poses massive logistical and economic challenges.

About 30% of the NT population, or 68 850 at the 2011 Census, is Indigenous. This population includes the most disadvantaged groups of Australians, with low median incomes and employment levels. The majority (58%) of the NT Indigenous population resides in very remote locations. Indigenous households tend to be more densely populated than non-Indigenous households. The Indigenous population has a median age of 23 compared with 34 for the non-Indigenous population. Only 41% of all Indigenous households, and only 18% of very remote Indigenous households, is connected to the internet. Only 29% of the NT Indigenous population attends school beyond Year 10.

School categories

The review proposes that it is useful to identify categories of schools on the basis of the factors they face in delivering a high quality education to Indigenous children. The report analyses Northern Territory Government (NTG) schools according to their remoteness, Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) scores, enrolments, attendance, NAPLAN achievement, scores in the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) and the number of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

On the basis of this analysis, three categories of school are identified: Priority 1 (where students experience the greatest disadvantage across these scales); Priority 2 (schools with significant factors of disadvantage, but requiring less support) and Priority 3 (all other schools, all of which are dealing with some forms of disadvantage). The review proposes that the categories should be further developed to support decisions about resourcing, support and degrees of autonomy or prescription applying to each school.



Recommendation

2. Recognise the differing capacities and circumstances of groups of schools by:
 - a. constructing a list of schools based on factors of disadvantage and need, starting with the approach outlined in this report;
 - b. varying implementation requirements to reflect these differences, including mandating evidence-based approaches for some schools; and
 - c. determining resource and support allocations for different categories of school based in part on the different priorities in the final list.
-

The education system

The review has identified the lack of a clear, long-term strategic framework and consistent practice as obstacles to improvement in Indigenous education. There are too many initiatives, timelines are too short, and there are constant changes in direction. The department is not clear enough about expectations at each level of the education system, and resources are not effectively targeted to priority areas. Decisions that should be made centrally are devolved to school and regional level.

There is a need for long-term strategic goals, clear expectations of performance, and consistent, measured and evidence-based approaches to implementation. Support and resourcing should be explicitly targeted to department goals, including those approaches that schools are required to adopt. Major initiatives should be monitored and evaluated, and all evaluation should contribute to department goals. A strong management team should lead Indigenous education, and work should start to support the establishment of a strong, independent Indigenous representative advisory body on education.

The position of Homelands education remains problematic. The review recommends that further work be undertaken with the Australian Government to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of options and consider revised funding arrangements. Research should be undertaken to quantify the number of young people on Homelands and a system policy developed to clarify arrangements for resourcing and service delivery. The potential for distance education to be used to provide a more systematic delivery of education should also be explored.

Recommendations

3. Develop a 10-year strategic plan for Indigenous education with long-term goals and interim targets and ensure that it drives action at regional and school level.
4. Establish a strong Indigenous Education unit led by a dedicated senior official to develop the strategic plan, design trials, lead community engagement, support and monitor implementation, and report on progress.
5. Negotiate with Indigenous bodies to determine the level of interest in the establishment of an independent Indigenous representative body to advise the Minister and Chief Executive on Indigenous education.
6. Plan implementation carefully, aiming for slow and measured approaches to ensure the resolution of technical, financial, legal, structural, governance and staffing issues including organisational and reporting relationships.
7. Maintain the current form of education service delivery for Homelands for an interim period while:
 - a. including possible revised arrangements for funding of Homelands education, including a cost-benefit analysis of the different options, in discussions with the Australian Government;
 - b. undertaking research on the number of young people on Homelands with no educational provision;
 - c. identifying successful Homelands initiatives and determining whether they could be adapted for use more widely in Homelands;
 - d. assessing the capacity for more effective use of distance education as part of Homelands provision; and
 - e. developing a system policy to define the approach to Homelands education including clarity about hub school arrangements, staffing, resourcing, service levels and support.
8. Conduct formal evaluation of all major initiatives to collect evidence on the progress of each initiative, and:
 - a. report against goals in the strategic plan;
 - b. specify data required from schools; and
 - c. ensure that all research including that conducted by external agencies is aligned with Department priorities.



Community engagement

The engagement of communities in education is seen as essential to success. Despite various initiatives over the past decade, progress has been slow. School Councils are unevenly effective in remote schools, and formal partnership agreements between schools and communities have often not had lasting results. Among the causes of slow progress, the review has identified changes in direction, weak implementation of agreements and a lack of focus on real change.

A new charter should be developed to define roles and guide improved engagement. The responsibilities of school staff for community engagement should be clarified and effective training provided to improve engagement. Local communities should be engaged to lead induction and cultural training. Principals should be supported in developing school councils and governance training developed for remote communities. Community engagement should focus on existing agreements, community goals and the implementation of department priorities. The Indigenous Education Unit should include staff skilled in supporting community engagement. The potential for NT parents to contribute to their children's education through Student Education Trusts (SETs) should be investigated.

Recommendations

9. Develop a new community engagement charter setting out:
 - a. the department's strategy for community engagement;
 - b. the principles to guide the process and practices to be adopted;
 - c. responsibilities of department work units including regional and school level personnel; and
 - d. the expected involvement of community representatives.
10. Provide effective training for principals and teachers in supporting improved engagement and ensure that school review and staff performance management processes include community engagement as an expectation.
11. Engage local communities to lead induction and local cultural training.
12. Provide support for principals in building precursor school decision-making bodies based on community practice, develop and manage the delivery of school council governance training designed to meet the needs of remote communities, and review legislation to establish a basis for precursor bodies to School Councils.
13. Focus community engagement on existing agreements where these are: valued, community goals and the implementation of specific department strategic goals as set out in the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended in this report.
14. Ensure that the Indigenous Education Unit has staff skilled and experienced in community engagement and able to support regions, schools and communities in developing school improvement plans and establishing effective governance arrangements.
15. Further investigate Student Education Trusts (SETs) and consider mechanisms by which they could be offered to parents in the Northern Territory.



Early childhood

The education system has opportunities to directly shape educational outcomes almost as soon as children are born. The learning experiences of young children help give them access to schooling. The AEDI provides compelling evidence that the level of disadvantage in the early childhood Indigenous population in the NT remains high.

The review recognises work already done to address this situation. The review supports Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in its current form but proposes delivery to more communities including town camps and other urban locations, improvements in implementation and staff training. Greater efforts are needed to sustain and strengthen parent engagement through pre-school programs and into formal schooling. The pre-school program is also supported, but children in pre-school should be explicitly taught the foundations of English literacy as well as maintaining first language. The operation of the Child and Family Centres should be funded for integrated service delivery.

Recommendations

16. Maintain Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in its current form pending data from the evaluation and:
 - a. remove barriers to delivery of FaFT in towns, beginning with town camps;
 - b. consider whether there are additional remote communities with sufficient numbers to justify FaFT programs;
 - c. improve implementation where weaknesses are identified;
 - d. establish guidelines for principals to ensure clear expectations about their role in supporting FaFT and managing FaFT staff;
 - e. ensure that principals establish good communication with and support for FaFT staff and programs; and
 - f. improve the training profile of Indigenous staff by identifying individual training needs and developing targeted training programs.
17. Strengthen parent engagement by requiring all schools to establish a transition program from Families as First Teachers to pre-school, and from pre-school to school, that:
 - a. provides ongoing support for both children and parents;
 - b. supports parents to understand the developmental stages of their children; and
 - c. provides opportunities for parents to engage with their child's education.
18. Define appropriate phonological awareness skills and teaching strategies and implement them in pre-schools in both first language and English, alongside broad balanced early language programs.
19. Seek adequate funding for the implementation and operation of the Child and Family Centres, establish them as trial sites for the delivery of integrated early childhood services and evaluate their effectiveness as a mode for integrated service delivery.



Primary education

The priority in the primary years should be ensuring that all Indigenous children gain English literacy. These children in the NT are performing below comparable groups in Australia, and very remote Indigenous children are well below both national minimum standards and Indigenous children in similar settings.

There are no common approaches to literacy across the NT, despite well-established research about what works. The review supports the teaching of literacy in first language where feasible. For Priority 1 schools, the department should mandate early literacy approaches in English including phonemic awareness, phonics, levelled readers and assessment programs in these areas, and progressively mandate other literacy and numeracy approaches. This should occur through a whole program such as Direct Instruction (DI) and/or through the adoption of specific programs for each key area of literacy. These programs should be supported with training and coaching and included in accountability processes for schools, principals and teachers.

The curriculum should be delivered in English. The Multiple Year Levels materials should be used to deliver the Australian Curriculum in Priority 1 schools. Indigenous culture should be taught where communities support this, and the department should develop advice for the Northern Territory Board of Studies on a curriculum program to teach Indigenous history and experience to all students. An internal review should be conducted to advise on the state of English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) practice.

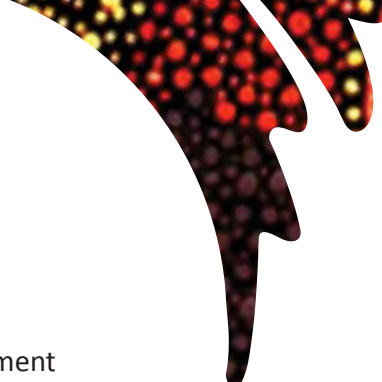
Recommendations

20. Base primary years literacy programs on:

- a. sustained teaching of first language, including literacy, to Indigenous children for whom English is not their first language, where feasible and where a trained teacher is available;
- b. training of Indigenous first language speakers to teach the language both as fully trained teachers and on a Limited Authority to Teach basis;
- c. provision of English language learning from the start of school;
- d. delivery of the curriculum in English; and
- e. the active presence of trained first language-speaking adults in the classroom where the curriculum is delivered in English to Indigenous students whose first language is not English.

21. Give priority to ensuring that all Indigenous children gain English literacy by progressively mandating approaches to early literacy and assessment in Priority 1 schools, including:

- a. mandating a phonological and phonemic awareness teaching program and assessment instruments for all students at school entry, along with sight word, phonics and spelling programs;
- b. undertaking further evaluation of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy model of Direct Instruction with a view to implementing the program, initially in literacy, in one or two clusters of 3-5 remote schools each including one larger hub school;

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- c. undertaking initial research to ensure that teaching programs and assessment instruments are effective with Indigenous students, including those in first language programs;
 - d. mandating a general test of reading progress in all schools;
 - e. following the implementation of the initial literacy program, evaluating the need for commonly used programs related to vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in Priority 1 schools to ensure a balanced literacy curriculum;
 - f. encouraging town schools, especially those with high Indigenous populations, to use programs mandated for Priority 1 schools and supporting them to adopt a broader range of evidence-based literacy programs;
 - g. establishing NT-wide age benchmarks for reading level, phonemic awareness and sight words, reporting against these benchmarks and using the data to monitor school effectiveness and program efficacy; and
 - h. including the effective implementation of required approaches in teacher and principal performance management processes, school Annual Operating Plans and school reviews.
22. Use the Multiple Year Levels materials to implement the Australian curriculum in Priority 1 schools.
23. Strengthen the study of Indigenous cultures in schools by:
- a. encouraging schools to enable and support Indigenous culture programs where the local community is supportive of a school role in delivering culture programs, and where local community members are able to assist with delivery of such programs (and their role is endorsed within the community); and
 - b. preparing a proposal for the Northern Territory Board of Studies to support teaching about Indigenous history, culture and experience in all NT schools.
24. Provide support in implementation of mandatory literacy programs including sustained funding for professional learning and coaching including:
- a. focusing this support in the first instance on high priority schools; and
 - b. providing training and support for teachers of first language in the teaching and assessment of phonological awareness.
25. Conduct an internal review to advise on the state of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) practice and how the area can be effectively supported and improved.
26. Undertake an internal analysis of numeracy teaching to map areas of weakness in numeracy achievement and identify intervention programs with a proven record of success for at-risk students, for mandatory implementation in Priority 1 schools from 2016, potentially involving the use of Direct Instruction numeracy programs in any schools implementing Direct Instruction literacy.
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Secondary education

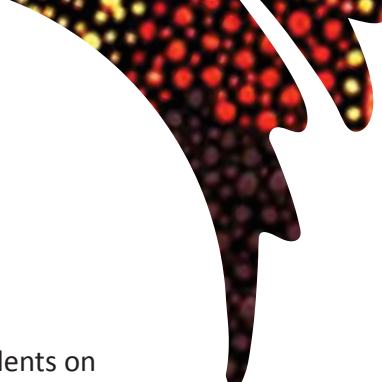
Secondary education is the key to future options for young people. The NT has made substantial efforts to deliver secondary schooling in remote settings for more than a decade, with limited success. Enrolments and attendance in these schools decline rapidly during the secondary years, NAPLAN results show low success rates and there have been very few Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions. The review found evidence of curriculum programs without a clear link to qualifications and with a narrow range of options, and many students engaged in busy-work.


The review argues that secondary education for remote and very remote students should progressively be provided in urban schools (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy), with students accommodated in residential facilities. Trials should be conducted with volunteer parents and communities to evaluate and refine the approach, and comprehensive support arrangements should be established to assist student transition, engage families in the process and enable community consultation.

Implementation of these arrangements should be gradual. This will require urban schools to modify curriculum and student support processes to meet the needs of the full range of students. The *Employment Pathways* program, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) approach, should be trialled to determine its value to urban schools and remote schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria. Negotiations with communities will determine where smaller remote schools can offer middle years programs, but senior secondary education should largely be delivered in urban settings. Work will, therefore, be needed to meet the needs of young people who are disengaged from school or who do not participate in urban senior schooling. Distance education will be an important element of this set of solutions: the current arrangements should be reviewed to ensure they meet the need.

Recommendations

27. Progressively move to deliver most senior secondary schooling and the majority of middle years schooling in urban schools with a critical mass of students, beginning with trials in Tennant Creek and other locations based on the following principles:
 - a. working with volunteer families and communities;
 - b. families deciding the year of schooling at which young people enrol in an urban school;
 - c. undertaking community engagement processes with participating communities to ensure that trials meet the needs of those communities;
 - d. maintaining secondary provision in participating communities if students remain enrolled during the trials;
 - e. evaluating the trials and disseminating information about progress; and
 - f. establishing a representative advisory committee to monitor the trials, report on progress and advise on overcoming obstacles.

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28. Base the longer-term delivery of urban secondary education for remote students on criteria including:
 - a. provision of places in urban schools for all students of secondary age whose families support their involvement;
 - b. progressive cessation of senior schooling (Years 10-12) in Priority 1 schools with extended lead times to enable planning for implementation;
 - c. negotiation with each community regarding the provision of middle years programs in Priority 1 schools, with the expectation that within five years most students from these schools will attend urban schools from at least Year 9 onwards;
 - d. development of curriculum programs in Priority 1 schools to articulate potential education, training and employment pathways to encourage student aspirations;
 - e. design of programs from Year 5 onwards in Priority 1 schools that prepare young people for the experience of attending a school away from their home community; and
 - f. provision for students of short intensive experiences in urban schools during both of the final two years of primary or middle schooling, as negotiated with each community.
 29. Develop residential facilities to accommodate remote students in towns, beginning with trials linked with the urban schooling trials recommended above, including:
 - a. conducting, evaluating and disseminating information about trials in Tennant Creek and other sites with volunteer families and communities;
 - b. negotiating with families and communities through a structured community engagement process to ensure that the form of the residential trial meets their needs;
 - c. establishing strong transition arrangements that are consistent across the system to support students in preparing for participation in residential arrangements;
 - d. maintaining close links with families and communities during the trials;
 - e. requesting the representative advisory committee recommended above to monitor the trials, report on progress and advise on overcoming obstacles;
 - f. taking account of the detailed criteria set out in this chapter in setting up and managing trials;
 - g. using the facilities as appropriate for professional learning programs especially for staff from remote schools; and
 - h. following these trials, making policy decisions about the progressive cessation of senior secondary schooling in Priority 1 schools and other policy issues required to support extended residential arrangements to provide high-quality secondary education to students from remote communities.
 30. Trial and evaluate the Employment Pathways model in Tennant Creek, Katherine and two remote schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria, and:
 - a. determine the effect of the model on student engagement and outcomes;
 - b. consider its applicability to all urban middle and senior schools; and
 - c. develop criteria for remote schools wishing to deliver the program and determine how many remote schools meet criteria to offer the program during the middle and senior years.

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31. Require all urban secondary schools to review and adapt their arrangements for Indigenous students including:
 - a. reviewing curriculum offerings to ensure that they meet the needs of the full range of students;
 - b. ensuring that they provide effective induction, support and wellbeing arrangements for remote students living away from home;
 - c. providing Indigenous staff to assist in student support;
 - d. establishing effective communication with parents of students living away from their home communities, including regular visits by staff to communities and community members to the school; and
 - e. reporting on their plans through review and accountability procedures.
 32. Undertake a planning process involving both the Australian and NT governments to build on current adult education, training and support arrangements to develop a set of mechanisms to meet the education and training needs of students under the age of 17 in remote communities who are not in employment or training, and neither engage with urban schooling arrangements nor attend their local school.
 33. Examine the three-school distance education arrangement and current practice to determine how well they are suited to the changed secondary schooling arrangements proposed in this report.
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Attendance

Attendance patterns in the NT have declined over the last decade, especially in very remote schools. Despite major programs run by the Australian and NT governments in recent years and substantial programs at school level, remote and very remote attendance continues to deteriorate. The evidence is clear that 80% attendance (four days per week) is the minimum for most students to achieve success throughout schooling and to gain an NTCET or equivalent.

Effort should focus on early childhood and primary children to establish regular patterns of attendance, and on secondary children attending on average at least three days per week. Incentives for attendance should be provided and research already done to identify effective attendance strategies implemented systematically. Work should be undertaken to minimise the effect of a wide range of community activities on attendance. The Clontarf Program should be maintained and a similar system-wide program for girls established.

Recommendations

34. Direct attendance efforts preferentially to early childhood and primary children aiming to establish regular patterns of attendance, and to secondary children attending on average at least three days per week:
 - a. focus attendance programs run by primary and secondary schools on children attending at least three days per week;
 - b. focus NT and Australian Government programs preferentially on primary children attending less than three days per week; and
 - c. adopt programs of information and incentives in all schools to encourage student, parent and community responsibility for attendance.
35. Undertake a whole of Department and whole of Government initiative to:
 - a. conduct research into the relative importance of the factors that affect attendance;
 - b. assess the impact of attendance initiatives and base future action on approaches demonstrated to be effective;
 - c. analyse the attendance effect of the range of community activities and initiatives (including football carnivals, rodeos, shows, royalty payments and service policies in community shops) and negotiate to achieve modifications that will reduce the negative effect on attendance of these community activities;
 - d. include in community engagement activities discussions with communities to determine whether communities are prepared to consider the timing and the extent of student participation in some activities to assist in the improvement of attendance and student outcomes;
 - e. investigate the number of students in the NT who have never enrolled in school or have been off the rolls for a substantial period of time, and consider approaches to engaging them with education; and
 - f. investigate the establishment of means by which schools in kinship related communities can work together to encourage students involved in funerals to attend school in the area.
36. Where major NT or Australian government attendance programs are planned, undertake advance planning to ensure that school and regions are equipped to manage increased attendance by previously disengaged students.
37. Maintain the Clontarf Program but jointly plan for improved achievement outcomes, and seek a similar system-wide girls' program with the characteristics outlined in the report.



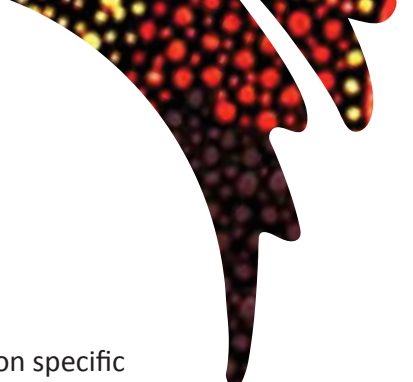
Wellbeing and behaviour

Respondents to the review were concerned that problems associated with student behaviour were a barrier to learning. These arose in part from health (including hearing loss) and social and emotional issues. Many underlying problems were not diagnosed, and schools had adopted a wide variety of programs to address the issues.

The review supports the implementation of a consistent approach to behaviour management in association with the Behaviour Management Taskforce, the development of a new social and emotional learning curriculum and improved arrangements for identifying, diagnosing and treating health and social and emotional issues that form barriers to learning. Priority 1 schools should be required to use School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) and the new social and emotional learning curriculum, and other schools advised to adopt them. Now Hear should be used in all remote schools and other schools with students experiencing hearing difficulty, along with specialist support and attention to the acoustic environment. The department should provide professional development programs, coaching and specialist support for these programs.

Recommendations

38. Work with the Behaviour Management Taskforce to develop and resource a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing, including:
 - a. mandating School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) for Priority 1 schools and advising other schools to adopt it;
 - b. developing a social and emotional learning curriculum for pre-school to secondary school with specific application to Indigenous children;
 - c. mandating the use of Now Hear in all Priority 1 schools and other schools with students experiencing the effects of conductive hearing loss, along with provision of specialist hearing support and the investigation of amplification and acoustic treatment of classrooms;
 - d. providing professional development programs, coaching and specialist support for implementation of SWPBS, social and emotional learning, whole-school approaches and data collection and the implementation of Now Hear; and
 - e. improving school access to psychologists, counsellors and other specialists and services addressing wellbeing and mental health.
39. Require all schools to have a school-wide approach to behaviour management and wellbeing, or to participate in a common approach across a cluster of small schools, including:
 - a. the establishment of a team, led by a member of the leadership group, with responsibility for behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion;
 - b. an explicit plan to deal with the impact of social and emotional problems, cognitive disability and experience of trauma on learning and behaviour;

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- c. the collection and reporting of data on behaviour and related issues and on specific health issues including conductive hearing loss;
 - d. implementation of the social and emotional learning curriculum and a consistent approach to behaviour management; and
 - e. reporting on the plan and progress achieved through the school review process.
40. Consistent with recommendation 1 in this review, establishing cooperative arrangements between the health and education departments and providers to ensure the early identification, diagnosis and treatment of health disorders (including suicide prevention) that impact on, or could be impacted by, student learning.
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Workforce planning


Despite the importance of quality teaching to student learning, the department has no current comprehensive workforce plan. Indigenous teachers and principals are under-represented in the workforce and there have been some failures in programs designed to address this. Assistant teachers are unevenly utilised and employed. Recruitment to remote schools, in particular of high quality principals, needs attention. There is also a need to continue working on the overall quality of teaching and the use of study leave to improve performance.

A comprehensive workforce plan should be developed and programs strengthened to increase Indigenous principal and teacher numbers and quality. Assistant teachers should have employment and performance management arrangements consistent with those of other staff. Remote principals and teachers should be provided with professional development, mentoring and coaching focused on department goals, and a program established to attract high quality principals and teachers, including early career teachers to remote schools. A common framework for pedagogy should be established and all study leave applications should address department priorities.



Recommendations

41. Engage additional expertise and experience to develop a comprehensive workforce plan as outlined in this report, aligned with the department's Strategic Plan, the Indigenous Education Strategic Plan proposed in this report and the Early Years Workforce Plan.
42. Strengthen programs to increase Indigenous teacher numbers and quality including:
 - a. a revised version of the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education program meeting the criteria set out in this report;
 - b. a rationalised approach to attracting school leavers and Indigenous members of the general workforce into teaching and supporting them in their training and induction;
 - c. evaluating co-principalship arrangements and considering extending them to expand the cohort of Indigenous educators with leadership experience;
 - d. providing mentoring arrangements for new and early career Indigenous teachers, using the services of experienced Indigenous teachers and senior teachers; and
 - e. recognising the effect of differential reward structures for Indigenous teachers in their own communities and developing a case for resourcing Indigenous teacher rewards, including housing, on the same basis as non-Indigenous teachers in remote schools.
43. Establish employment and performance management arrangements for assistant teachers consistent with those of other staff and ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and supported by all school staff, particularly classroom teachers.
44. Raise the quality of remote principals by:
 - a. strengthening initial training, including cultural competency training and an introduction to Indigenous languages;
 - b. developing a clear statement of the responsibilities of leadership in remote schools;
 - c. establishing mentoring (professional and cultural) and coaching arrangements for all principals;
 - d. establishing small groups of remote principals to engage in shared professional learning and instructional rounds in each other's schools;
 - e. requiring applicants for senior positions to demonstrate a pattern of relevant professional learning, including specific required programs without which candidates should not be appointed;
 - f. exploring the possibility of attracting a small group of outstanding principals to remote schools; and
 - g. arranging early appointment and release of new remote appointees to ensure effective handover.
45. Raise the quality of remote teachers by:
 - a. improving principal quality;

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- b. enhancing the role of the local principal in staff selection;
 - c. negotiating with NT teacher education institutions to ensure that courses take account of department priorities and the requirements for teaching Indigenous students in remote locations;
 - d. working with interstate universities to establish a substantial program preparing and supporting pre-service teachers in undertaking teaching rounds in NT remote schools;
 - e. providing initial cultural training and some understanding of Indigenous languages to all appointees; and
 - f. ensuring that initiatives proposed in this report are supported with effective professional learning and coaching.
46. Evaluate the implementation of *Visible Learning* in Central Region with a view to its continued implementation in current participant schools, in all Priority 2 and 3 schools in the NT, and later in all schools.
47. Review the roles, responsibilities, employment arrangements and numbers of other school-based education workers with responsibilities for Indigenous education to ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from this important resource, and that allocations of Indigenous staff in ancillary positions (e.g. Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers) are based on need rather than historical practice.
48. Require all applicants for study leave to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.
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Finance

Resourcing issues were prominent among responses to the review. While there was not a universal view that resources were lacking, many respondents commented on the management, distribution, targeting and timing of resources and their sometimes negative effect on planning. There were common stories about funding decisions terminating useful initiatives and changes in funding directions causing difficulties at school and system level. In a significant number of cases, the issues arose from term-limited Australian Government funding or the NT's decisions about this funding.

The department should allocate funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain it for extended periods. This will support longer-term planning at all levels of the department. A proposal and set of criteria should be developed for the allocation of staffing based on need, using the school categories in the review (as modified after further work) as a starting point (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 6). The department should also seek a single, integrated long-term funding agreement with the Australian Government on Indigenous education, based on the goals in the strategic plan and allocated as flexibly as is consistent with effective accountability.



Recommendations

49. Allocate long-term funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain a consistent direction across the life of the plan.
 50. Develop for discussion a proposal for the allocation of staffing resources beyond those allocated automatically through the use of the per capital student multiplier on a more transparent basis, including:
 - a. identifying the level of resources (teaching and non-teaching) falling outside that core allocation;
 - b. considering how they can be allocated to better meet the needs identified through Index of Community Socio Economic Advantage (ICSEA) and also the priority listing identified in Appendix 6; and
 - c. establishing a new needs-based set of criteria for resource allocation and modelling its application to the current staffing position.
 51. Seek a single, integrated agreement with the Australian Government on funding for Indigenous education and, more broadly, committing both governments to:
 - a. long-term goals and targets based on the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended by this review;
 - b. reasonable certainty in funding over an extended period allowing long-term planning;
 - c. flexibility in funding allocations by the NT combined with effective accountability; and
 - d. longitudinal evaluation of all key initiatives enabling progressive modification of the plan in response to evidence.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The scope of the review

In July 2013, the Minister for Education and Children’s Services, Mr Peter Chandler, and the then Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS), requested a review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (NT). The Terms of Reference for the review set out its objective:

Within the context of national and Territory reforms, programs and initiatives in Indigenous education, provide the Northern Territory Government (NTG) with recommendations to optimise education and training outcomes for Indigenous students.

The review was to:

1. map and analyse the context, including the characteristics of the Indigenous student population;
2. analyse evidence for the effectiveness of programs to determine what works and what does not;
3. examine and make recommendations about the structure of the department and current resourcing arrangements (including Commonwealth resources) to support a new effort to close the gap in Indigenous students’ educational outcomes; and
4. advise on partnerships including both the empowerment of local communities and improvement of collaboration with other agencies and the Australian Government.

Process

The reviewer was appointed in early August and work started immediately. A team was established within the department to support the review process. The process began with an intensive data collection process involving five elements:

1. collection and analysis of hundreds of documents (see bibliography), interviews with key department officials and individuals from outside the department;
2. meetings with organisations representing key interest groups;
3. requests to areas of the department for data, background information and commentary on areas related to the Terms of Reference;
4. an intensive program of visits to 32 schools and communities (see full list of schools at Appendix 2); and
5. an online public survey seeking views about the effectiveness of the education system for Indigenous children (see below for a brief discussion of the results, and Appendix 5 for more detailed results).



A project plan in accordance with the requirements of the Request for Tender was provided in August 2013. The interim report was provided to the department's Executive Board in October 2013. This draft report was provided on schedule in December 2013.

Following the launch of the draft report on 7 February 2014, public consultation meetings were conducted and submissions sought. Submissions were initially to close on 9 March 2014, but the due date was extended until 12 March 2014 and a number of additional submissions were received after this date. In total, 118 submissions were received.

Following analysis of the consultation feedback, this final report was drafted and submitted on 8 April 2014. Editorial and design processes were completed following this date.

Requests for data and support from departmental units throughout the review imposed a significant workload at a difficult time for many units. The reviewer wishes to thank those involved for a helpful and thorough response. That response was maintained right to the end of the process; important additional information was provided willingly in the few days prior to completion of this report.

The review team provided highly professional, thoughtful and dedicated support to the review process. They managed the logistics of the review, provided continuing advice on directions for the review and brought a deep understanding of conditions in, and the history of, the NT education system. They established a strong, collaborative and intellectually rich working environment for the review. No project of this kind is feasible without a strong team in support. This reviewer was privileged to work with an outstanding, committed and talented group of people.

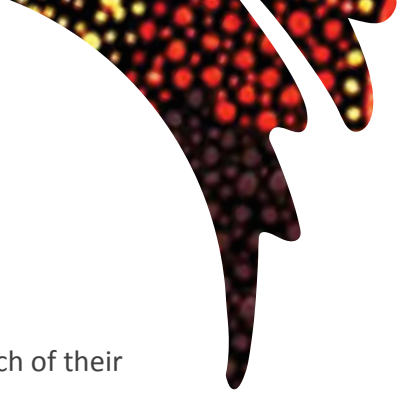
The structure of the report

This report analyses the current state of play in the education of Indigenous young people in the NT, outlines findings, discusses the basis of those findings and makes recommendations. The Overview summarises the argument and provides all the report's recommendations. This introductory section sets out the background and processes of the review. The report proper starts with three preliminary sections intended to set the context for the key findings:

- a caveat about the areas that educators can and cannot control;
- a discussion of the demographics of the NT; and
- an outline of the review's approach to different categories of school in the NT.

The report then addresses those areas where changes are needed to improve outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous young people:

- the structures and practices of the Department of Education (DoE);
- community engagement: how schools and the education system can most effectively work with parents and communities to benefit the children they serve;

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- the early childhood years: the period before children enter school when much of their capacity to benefit from schooling is shaped;
 - primary education, where children ought to gain the foundations on which a high quality education is built;
 - secondary education, including middle schooling and senior schooling, when young people gain the learning that will shape their opportunities in life and give them power over their lives;
 - attendance, which is the principal school-level barrier to improved outcomes;
 - wellbeing and behaviour and their links to effective learning;
 - workforce planning: teacher quality and supply, addressing the core lever for change in schools; and
 - the financial basis for NTG education, including allocation of resources to schools and relationships between the Australian and NT governments.

Each chapter of the final report notes relevant issues raised in consultation meetings and submissions.

There is also a series of appendices providing additional material relevant to the report.

Learning Lessons

The last major review of Indigenous education in the NT was the Collins review, *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999). In 1998, the NTG established a Review Team, comprising the Hon. Bob Collins, Tess Lea and a team of departmental personnel, to fulfil the Terms of Reference to establish:

- the views and educational aspirations of Indigenous parents and community members in relation to their children's schooling, with particular reference to English literacy and numeracy;
- the key issues affecting educational outcomes for Indigenous children; and
- supportable actions for educational outcome improvements.

The review reported in 1999, presenting 151 recommendations to government. The recommendations touched on virtually every area of the work of the department, highlighting system changes urgently required to better support schools. In 2005, the department compiled an implementation status report on the recommendations. Of the 151 recommendations, 82 had been implemented fully and 51 were partially implemented with ongoing action. Seventeen recommendations were assessed as being superseded by new policy or legislation, and one, departmental housing for local recruits, had not had any government action (LLISC, 2005: 7 and 64).

The current review has taken account of the *Learning Lessons* discussion and recommendations, and they are referred to at points throughout this report. The earlier review has provided a baseline for this work. A more detailed discussion of *Learning Lessons* and the department's response to it is provided in Appendix 1.



Community survey

As part of the data-gathering exercise, a survey of attitudes to education was developed and made available online. Appendix 5 provides the results from the data questions. In addition, respondents were invited to provide written responses to a set of open-ended questions.

The survey received more than 400 responses. Respondents were most positive about the performance of government schools in preparing all children (not specifically Indigenous children) for early years learning, transition into primary school then into middle schools, parent engagement and the value placed by parents on education.

Responses to statements about Indigenous education were more negative. The most highly negative response was to the statement 'I think the government education system in the NT is meeting the needs of Indigenous children'. Other statements receiving negative responses concerned improving learning outcomes for Indigenous children, and teaching English literacy to Indigenous children with English as an additional language or dialect.


These responses suggest that among those who answered the survey, there is a reasonable degree of confidence in the education system in general, but a significantly negative view about the extent to which the government education system meets the needs of Indigenous students.

Draft report and consultation

The review prepared a draft report as a basis for consultation on the findings and recommendations from the first round of data collection. The draft report was launched on 7 February 2014 and consultation forums were held across the NT to seek feedback on the report's findings and recommendations. Appendix 8 includes details of individuals and groups involved in consultations, meetings held and submissions received.

A number of submissions provided commentary on the broad intent of the recommendations. Submissions were received from individuals and a wide range of organisations, including educational associations and groups and Indigenous representative groups. Many submissions and meeting contributions expressed support for some of the draft report's recommendations, while there were also very strong and carefully argued views in opposition to some recommendations. Many respondents stated strongly held views on bilingual education and on the proposal for secondary education to be principally provided in towns. There was also extensive commentary on the role of first language in education, the place of Indigenous culture in schools, aspects of community engagement, the effectiveness of the DoE, support for increased numbers of Indigenous staff in schools and the adequacy and management of resourcing of Indigenous education. These were the issues that prompted the most general debate in the consultation process.

It is clear that there are many people interested in and committed to Indigenous education in the NT, and the arguments have been vigorously conducted. Submissions also raised issues



about methodological approaches adopted in the review, what was regarded as a short timeline for the conduct of the review and concern about the extent and style of consultation.

The process has been challenging at times. This reflects the passion and commitment that people feel about these issues. The reviewer wishes to thank all respondents, both those who attended community meetings and those who provided submissions. All submissions, including those received after the due date, were read and analysed by the reviewer and members of the review team and, in many instances, suggestions and recommendations have been taken up in the report. The submissions and the discussion in meetings have made a very substantial difference to the breadth, accuracy and quality of the final report. If there are remaining inaccuracies or weaknesses in this final report, they are the responsibility of the reviewer. They do not reflect a lack of attention or effort by those who read and responded to the draft.

Approach to recommendations

The recommendations from each section of the report are provided in the Overview and in the relevant chapters of the report. This review aims to illustrate the kind of strategic approach it proposes for the DoE. Where ambitious efforts have clearly failed, it is proposed that they stop. Where resources are limited, it does not propose unrealistic demands. Where solving a problem is beyond the capacity of the department, it says so. The approach is evident in three characteristics of the discussion and recommendations in the report:

1. They are pragmatic. The review makes recommendations based on what is repeatable across multiple sites and hundreds of classrooms, on what an actual workforce can realistically deliver in the NT.
2. The recommendations do not address everything to do with Indigenous education. They cover a relatively small number of major issues and seek to point the way forward for each. The focus is on those areas where action is most needed, most likely to achieve significant improvement and likely to require a manageable level of resourcing.
3. The recommendations involve difficult judgments about where to put effort, energy and resources and, correspondingly, where to pull back. This reflects the view of strategy taken in this report: it is as much about what you choose not to do as what you choose to do.

So the review argues for a vigorously pragmatic approach, priority attention to a limited range of areas, and focusing resources where they are likely to achieve the greatest benefit.

It is also important to acknowledge from the outset that this review has made a pragmatic decision to focus on the skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system. Some people will find this a challenging position. The review has taken as a non-negotiable that there must be an explicit focus on improving unacceptably low outcomes for Indigenous children and that this will not be achieved unless there is rigorous and relentless attention to learning English and gaining the skills that support participation in a modern democracy and economy.



Some Indigenous students already perform at the highest level. The education system should aim to raise levels of achievement in the Indigenous population so that they match achievement in the population as a whole.

Chapter Two

What we can control

The report begins with a caveat. Before discussing opportunities for improvement, it is important to recognise the limits of the reach of education in achieving improvement in outcomes for Indigenous young people. The review addresses those elements that schools and the schooling system can influence, and for which they should be held accountable. It also, however, notes the circumstances in which that work takes place and their effect on the capacity of schools to achieve their goals for young people. These factors are not excuses. Regardless of circumstances, there is a responsibility to offer every child an education worth having, and this review aims to point the way towards that outcome.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- general support for the recognition that there are many factors that schools and education systems cannot control;
- some concern that the picture painted of the lives of Indigenous people was excessively negative; and
- some concern that the conclusion of the chapter was naïve or optimistic in insisting on high ambitions for Indigenous students.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has commissioned research on the impact of adversity and disadvantage in early life on the development and health of young Indigenous people. The most recent report, issued as part of its Report Card series (AMA, 2013), was viewed in draft. The report notes that:

Gestation, early childhood and adolescence are the life stages where environmental conditions have the greatest influence on trajectories of development, learning, behaviour and health over the life-course (ibid.: 2).

Among the health factors identified by research as disproportionately affecting Indigenous children are the following:

- about 50% of Indigenous children are raised in ‘community and family environments which are replete with early childhood adversity’ (ibid.: 3);
- high levels of family stress, sub-optimal nutrition and recurrent infection;
- higher rates of drug and alcohol use by Indigenous Australians;
- higher rates of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder among Indigenous children. This was estimated at 30% (George Institute, 2013) or 50% (House of Representatives, 2012A: 32) in the Fitzroy Valley in Western Australia (WA), but the true incidence in Australia, the Northern Territory (NT) and among Indigenous people is unknown (ibid.);
- Indigenous women have a higher birth rate, have children at a younger age, are twice as likely to die in childbirth and markedly more likely to experience pregnancy complications and stress during pregnancy;

- about half of Indigenous women smoke during pregnancy;
- twice as many Indigenous babies (12%) are of low birth weight;
- Indigenous children are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to die before the age of 5 and 1.4 times as likely to be hospitalised;
- Indigenous children have higher rates of stunting, both underweight and obesity in urban areas, and nutritional anaemia (AMA, 2013); and
- Indigenous children are dramatically more likely to suffer from hearing loss.

In addition, the Census data show other forms of disadvantage affecting Indigenous children:

- the median personal weekly income of Indigenous Territorians 15 years and over is \$269, compared with \$925 for non-Indigenous residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011);
- the employment to population ratio¹ in the NT was 33% for Indigenous and 77% for non-Indigenous people in 2011. In very remote locations it is below 30%; and
- Indigenous households tend to be more densely populated than non-Indigenous households, especially in very remote locations, where 51% of Indigenous households have six or more residents.

McKenzie compared very remote schools in the NT with those in Queensland (QLD) and WA that the MySchool website lists as 'similar'. The research found that the NT had many more non-English speaking households that were much poorer and far more overcrowded, and a much less educated adult population. These factors are among the best predictors of school attendance and reading and writing scores. Reinforcing the message of this chapter, McKenzie also found that once demographic differences were accounted for, there were no statistically significant differences in outcomes between NT and the other jurisdictions (McKenzie, J, discussed in Silburn et al, 2011: 100-101).

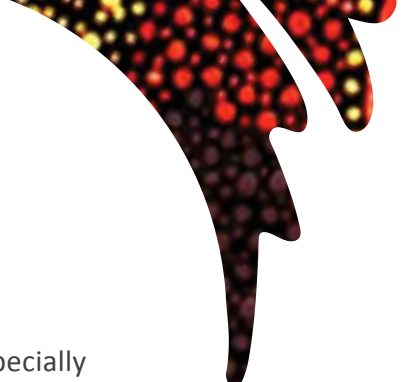
Clear evidence of the extent of the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous children is provided in the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), a population measure of how children are developing in communities across Australia². In summary terms:

- 59.2% of Indigenous children in the NT (compared with 22% of children nationally) are developmentally vulnerable on one of the five domains. This means they are likely to experience some difficulty in making the transition into formal schooling; and
- 38.2% of Indigenous children in the NT (compared with 10.8% of children nationally) are developmentally vulnerable on two of the five domains. This means they are likely to need special support to keep up with their classmates.

All these factors have a material effect on some proportion of the Indigenous school population. Factors of disadvantage such as these affect Indigenous children from before birth and throughout their lives.

1 The ratio refers to the number of employed people expressed as a percentage of those aged 15 years and over.

2 More detailed analysis of the AEDI is provided in Chapter 7: Early Childhood.



Most disturbingly, rates of suicide among Indigenous people in the NT, and especially among the young, are substantially higher than among the non-Indigenous population and higher than elsewhere in Australia. Rates per 100 000 people among Indigenous people in the NT are 30.8, compared with a national Indigenous rate of 21.4, and a non-Indigenous rate in the NT of 16.4 and nationally of 10.3. National rates for Indigenous males peak at ages 25-29 (with a rate of 90.8 per 100 000 people), while those for women peak at 20-24 (a rate of 21.8). No similar pattern of suicide among the young exists for the non-Indigenous population. Rates for self-harm are similarly higher among Indigenous people, although female rates are somewhat higher than those for males.

What to do?

This chapter argues that there are many factors that schools and school systems cannot control. Many of these factors, however, can be addressed through long-term improvement efforts operating across a range of agencies.

Each of the issues discussed in this chapter (eg housing, poverty, community safety, drug and alcohol use, physical and mental health, nutrition, hearing loss, child development difficulties, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), suicide and self-harm among young people) falls into the area of responsibility of one or more government departments and is often addressed as well by non-government organisations. While these issues sit well outside the specific terms of reference of this review, it is clear that the capacity of schools to address their responsibilities will remain limited by the continued impact of other factors of disadvantage.

In these circumstances, there is a demonstrable need for the relevant agencies and organisations to work together to address issues that are important in themselves, and that have a cumulative impact on educational outcomes for Indigenous children. There are some initiatives referred to in this report that involve a degree of integration of services: the Families as First Teachers program involves work with health professionals in some communities, and the Child and Family Centres (CFCs) will provide an opportunity in five communities to establish better integration.

The department should take a lead in seeking support from other government departments and the range of non-government agencies and organisations in delivering an integrated and comprehensive approach to the factors that impact on Indigenous education. It is proposed that an inter-agency working group be established to agree on processes for integration and clear roles and responsibilities for the partner organisations. One starting point could be the establishment and management of the new CFCs, which have integrated service delivery as one of their goals. Trials should be conducted in these centres focused on early childhood and probably beginning with setting up common assessment and referral processes. The review also recommends that at each trial site, a local steering committee be established with community representation to ensure local input and support for the initiative.



The review does not underestimate the scale of this task, but it also recognises that without concerted action, even a very faithful implementation of the recommendations in this review will be limited in its success.

Conclusion

Schools and school systems cannot control these issues and should not be blamed when matters beyond their control limit their achievements. But such factors do not represent inevitable fate. Approaches to Indigenous education, and broader initiatives across agencies should take account of those influences from the earliest years and seek to ameliorate, counter and overcome them to the extent possible. Ambitions for Indigenous children should not be lowered because of the difficulties they face. These factors of disadvantage affect the work of schools and should help shape educational responses, but they do not entirely control what can be achieved. Some Indigenous students already perform at the highest level. The education system should aim to raise levels of achievement in the Indigenous population so that they match achievement in the population as a whole.

Recommendation

1. Take a lead role with other government departments and non government organisations to deliver an integrated and comprehensive approach to the range of social and economic issues that impact on Indigenous education including:
 - a. establishing an inter-agency working group to agree on processes for integration and clear roles and responsibilities;
 - b. establishing small scale trials beginning with the five Child and Family Centres;
 - c. establishing common assessment and referral processes; and
 - d. setting up local steering committees with community representation.
-



Chapter Three

Demographics³

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- the need to emphasise language as a key demographic factor affecting the delivery of education; and
- the importance in developing policy approaches that take account of the demographic variety of the Northern Territory (NT).

To a substantial extent, the policies, practices, structures and traditions of education are a function of geography and demography. The NT has a small, diverse population spread over an area of 1.35 million square kilometres, 1.7 times larger than New South Wales and six times the size of Victoria, but with a population of 231 292⁴.

The clearest measure of the geographic challenge facing the jurisdiction is its population density of 0.17 people per km² or 5.7 km² per person. Victoria is 147 times more densely populated, and New South Wales 54 times.

Delivering services to a population spread so thinly poses massive logistical and economic challenges. Delivering education within a reasonable distance from the home of every enrolled child requires many small schools and extended supply chains. It imposes substantial additional costs over those jurisdictions that service more densely settled populations. The other states also have far greater populations, larger economies and a correspondingly larger tax base to fund education, and the advantages of economies of scale.

About 30% of the NT population, or 68 850 at June 2011 are Indigenous. The NT Indigenous population is growing at about 1.3% per year. By contrast, Indigenous people represent about 3% of the Australian population as a whole. Indigenous people in the NT represent about 10% of the national Indigenous population of 669 900.

Economic factors

This population includes the most disadvantaged groups of Australians. The median personal weekly income of Indigenous Territorians 15 years and over is \$269, compared with \$925 for non-Indigenous residents. Indigenous households made up 34% of households with the lowest household income, but only 12% of households with the highest household income⁵.

3 Unless otherwise stated, data are derived from the ABS Census figures for 2011, 2006 and 2001.

4 ABS 3238.0.55.001; Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011.

5 'Lowest household income' is defined as the lowest four bands of income in the 2011 census, between \$0 and \$399 household income per week. 'Highest household income' is defined as the four highest bands in the census, from \$1 500 per week to over \$3 000 per week.



The employment to population ratio⁶ in the NT was 33% for Indigenous people and 77% for non-Indigenous people in 2011. For the Indigenous population, the ratio in remote and very remote NT is below 30%.

Location and mobility

The location of the NT’s Indigenous people is a further key factor. Nationally the largest proportion (35%) of the Indigenous population reside in major cities. In contrast, the majority (58%) of the NT Indigenous population reside in very remote locations. Three-quarters (75%) of the NT’s very remote population are Indigenous and for the school-age population the Indigenous proportion is higher at almost nine out of ten people. Very remote Indigenous people in the NT account for 44% of the entire very remote Indigenous population nationally. Although the distribution of the Indigenous population in the NT is distinctively skewed towards very remote, it is widely dispersed throughout the NT, with approximately 40 000 in very remote areas, 15 000 in remote areas and 14 000 in the Darwin area.

The concentration of Indigenous people in very remote locations seems to be continuing. Growth in the NT Indigenous population from 2006 to 2011 was strongest for very remote locations. This was particularly the case for the school-age population; while the very remote cohort grew, both the provincial (apart from 15-19 year olds) and remote cohorts declined.

Although Indigenous people are considered to be highly mobile, long-term migration from very remote locations in the NT is relatively rare. In 2011, only 6% of the very remote NT Indigenous population had a different address from the previous year and only 11% had a different address from five years earlier (though a different concept of ‘address’ may be a factor in these low numbers).

Student numbers are distributed across geolocations as indicated in Table 1, with a notably high representation of Indigenous students in very remote locations.

Table 1: Student Numbers by Geolocation and Indigeneity⁷

Indigenous Status	Geolocation	Enrolments
Indigenous	Provincial	3 436
	Remote	2 962
	Very Remote	8 351
	Total	14 749
Total	Provincial	17 530
	Remote	6 283
	Very Remote	9 610
	Total	33 423

⁶ The ratio refers to employed people expressed as a percentage of those aged 15 years and over.

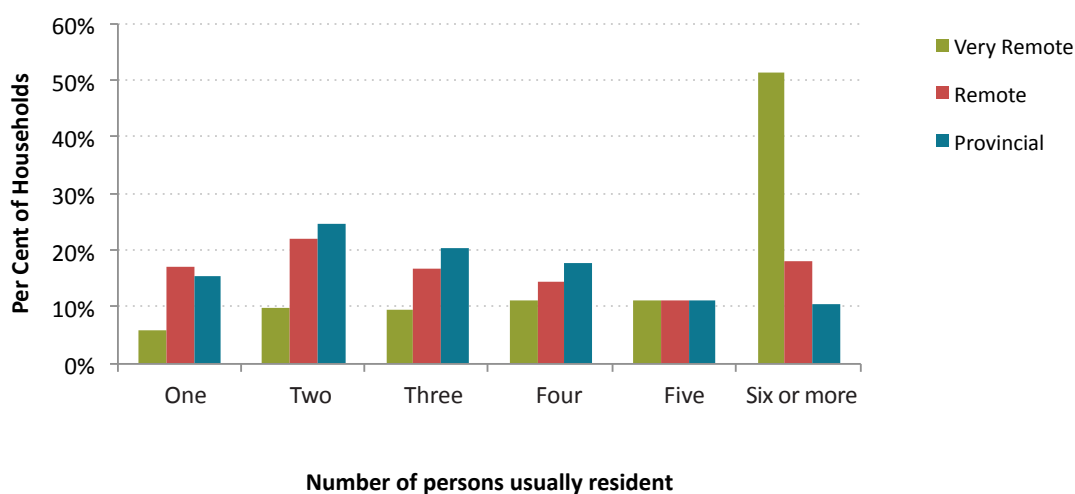
⁷ DoE, Enrolment and Attendance data, 2012.

Social structures

Population differences in social structures and housing affect schooling. In 2011 there were almost 61 000 households in the NT, of which approximately 12 000 included at least one person who identified as being Indigenous.

Indigenous households tend to be more densely populated than non-Indigenous households. A much greater proportion of Indigenous households are multiple-family households and a much smaller proportion are lone-person households. The average household size for Indigenous people is 4.2 people per house compared with 2.6 for non-Indigenous residents. Indigenous households have an average of 1.7 people per bedroom compared with 1.1 for non-Indigenous households. Figure 1 shows that Indigenous households most commonly house six or more people, especially in very remote locations, where more than half (51%) of Indigenous households have six or more residents.

Figure 1: Northern Territory Indigenous Households⁸ by Number of Persons usually Resident and Geolocation



The Indigenous population has a median age of 23 (up from 21 at the 2001 Census), compared with 34 (and stable) for the non-Indigenous population, so while only 30% of the NT population is Indigenous, the school population is about 40% Indigenous.

⁸ An Indigenous household is any household that had at least one person of any age as a resident at the time of the Census who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.



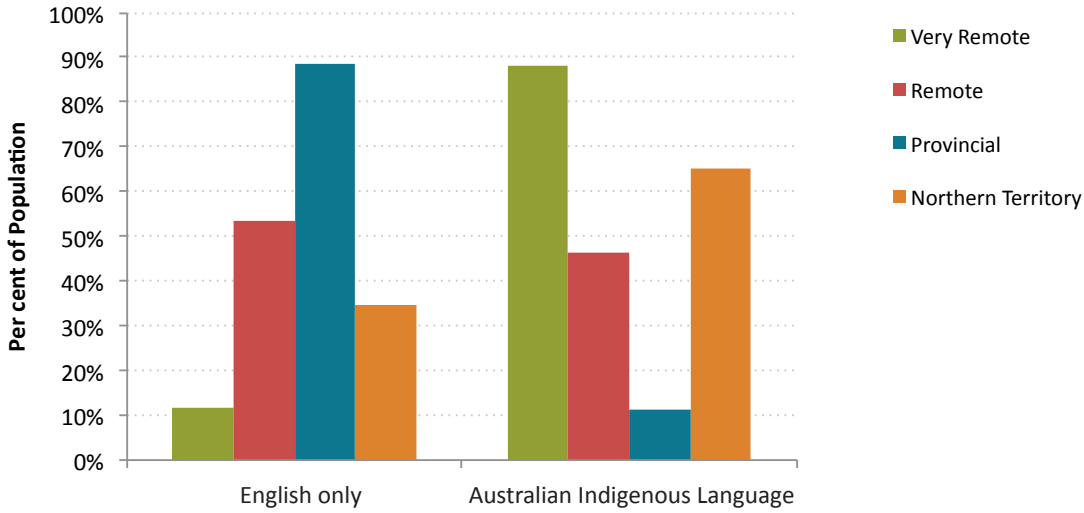
Internet connectivity

Internet connectivity gives a sense of the remoteness and isolation of many parts of the NT. The large majority of non-Indigenous households have internet connections while less than half (41%) of all Indigenous households and only 18% of very remote Indigenous households are connected. This data is a corrective to those who believe that most educational problems will be solved by the Information and Communication Technology revolution; in many Indigenous households, the revolution is yet to arrive.

Language use

Language use is also a factor. Many respondents to the draft report noted this issue as a critical factor in determining approaches to be taken to literacy, and especially early literacy. A minority (35%) of the NT Indigenous population speak English at home, with the majority (65%) speaking an Australian Indigenous language. Many people speak more than one Indigenous language. More than 13% of the NT Indigenous population, who speak at least one Indigenous language, do not speak English well or at all. The ability to speak English is, however, strongly differentiated by remoteness. Many people speak more than one Indigenous language. Of the provincial Indigenous population, 89% predominantly speak English in the home compared to 54% of remote and only 12% of the very remote Indigenous population.

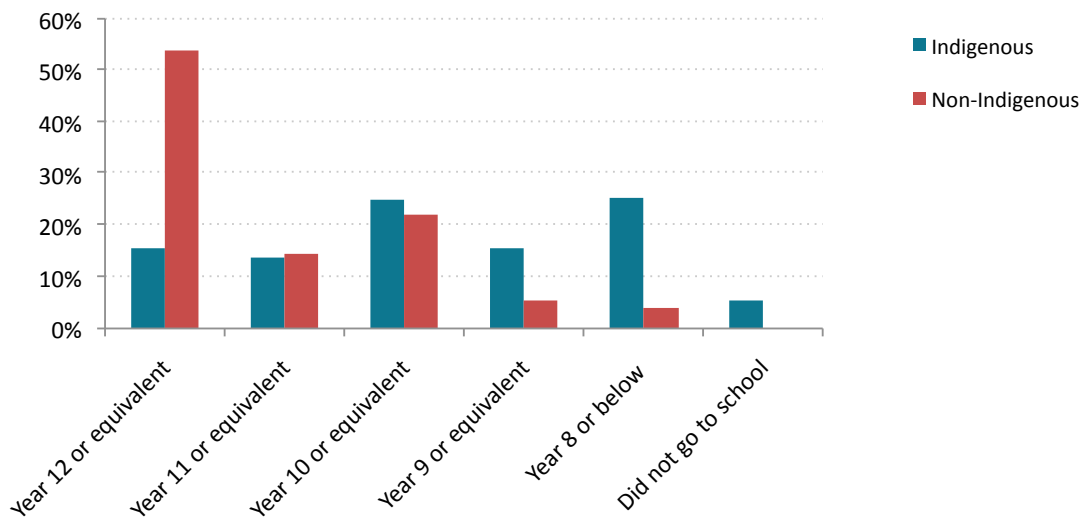
Figure 2: Northern Territory Indigenous Population by Language Spoken at Home and Geolocation



Schooling

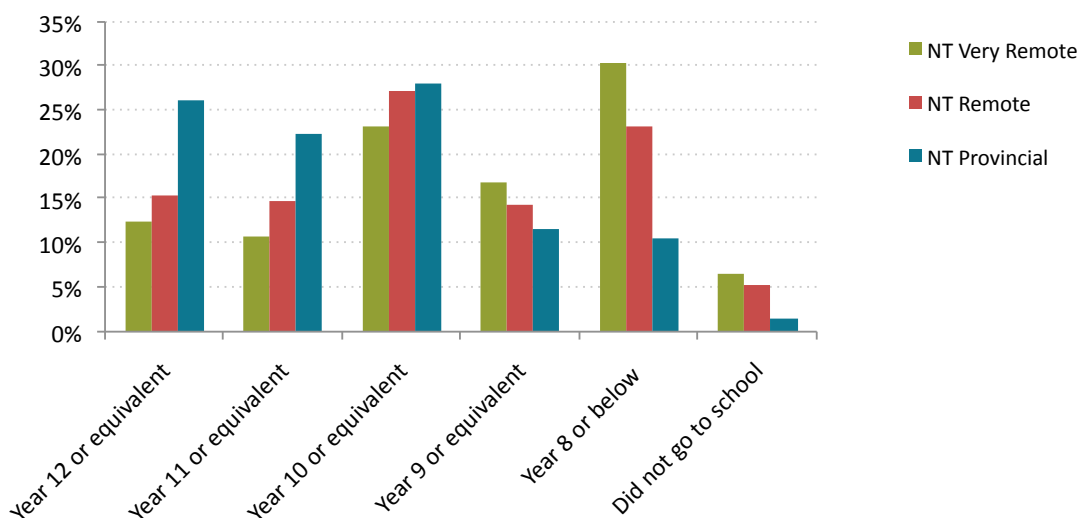
Only 29% of the NT Indigenous population aged 15 and over has attended school beyond Year 10. The majority (54%) of the equivalent non-Indigenous population has completed Year 12.

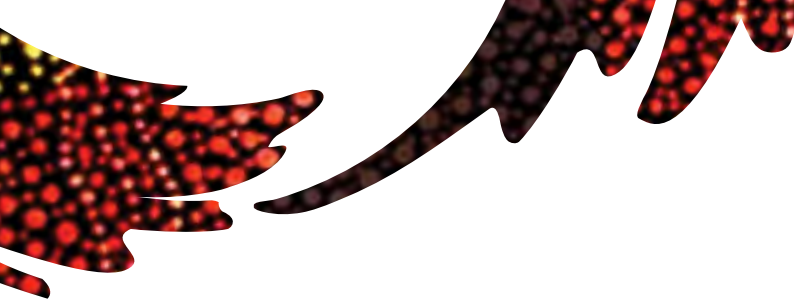
Figure 3: Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Population 15 and over, by Indigenous Status



The level of schooling completed for the NT Indigenous population is higher for the provincial cohort than for the remote and very remote cohorts.

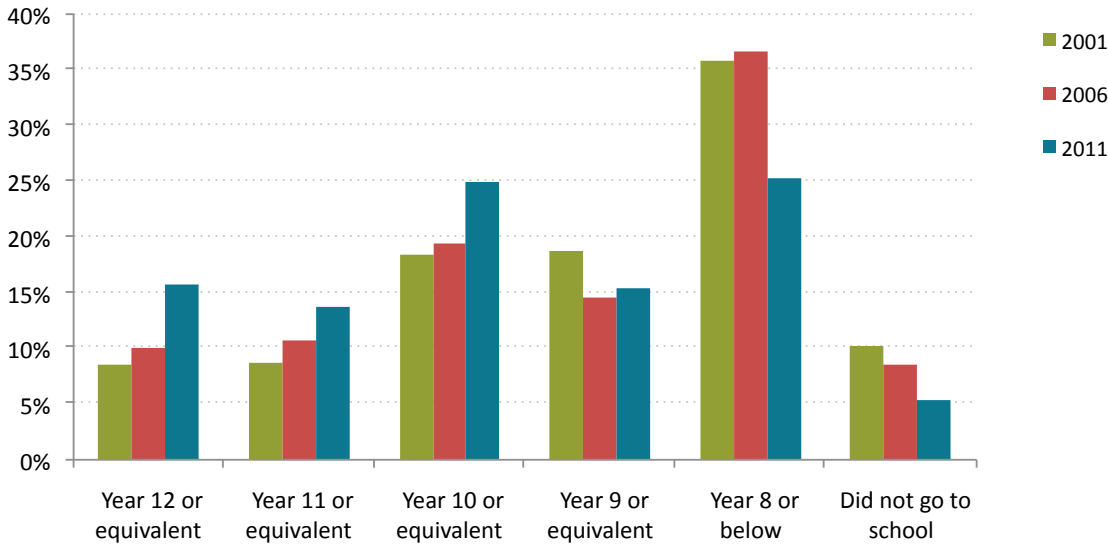
Figure 4: Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over, by Geolocation





While these numbers indicate a substantial disadvantage for Indigenous young people, the highest level of schooling for the NT Indigenous population aged 15 and over improved somewhat during the decade from 2001-2011.

Figure 5: Highest Level of Schooling in Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over, by Census Year



There are also substantial differences in attainment of formal qualifications and levels of achievement on such measures as National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores. These are discussed elsewhere in the report (see Chapters 8 and 9).



Chapter Four

School Categories

One of the significant elements of the analysis in the draft report was the view that government schooling in the Northern Territory (NT) consists of groups of schools that share characteristics with each other, but have dramatically different needs from other groups of schools in the NT. The draft report suggested that this phenomenon was clear enough to constitute two systems of education. The draft suggested that one of these systems was concentrated in the towns (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek), describing these schools as ‘town’ schools. The other was concentrated in other remote and very remote communities, described as ‘bush’ schools. The argument was based on dramatically different patterns of enrolment, attendance and achievement across the two groups of schools, matched by patterns of socio-economic disadvantage. The draft report also suggested substantially different approaches to improvement in the two groups of schools.


Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- widely differing views of the ‘two systems’ approach, ranging from enthusiastic support to suggestions that it could lead to a lower quality of education in remote schools;
- concern that the analysis led to an unnecessarily strong focus on bush schools and too little attention to the issues facing town schools;
- an argument that the analysis focused too much on school performance and not enough on demographic and social causes for low performance;
- suggestions about other factors that ought to be taken into account in allocating schools to categories;
- an argument that the analysis in the McKinsey report referred to in the draft report did not easily apply to the NT; and
- some reservations about the naming of ‘town’ and ‘bush’ schools and the use of geographic indicators to describe disadvantage.

Terminology used in the report

Much of the discussion in this chapter is based on geolocations. This is because key data are collected by geolocation. The review report uses several different forms of terminology to refer to schools and those who work and learn in them:

- where the report concerns data collected by geolocation, it uses the language of geolocation: ‘provincial’, ‘remote’ and ‘very remote’;
- where the discussion concerns analysis or recommendations for the different categories of school the terms ‘Priority 1’, ‘Priority 2’ and ‘Priority 3’ are used to define them. The meanings of the terms and the basis for allocation of schools to these categories are outlined in this chapter; and

- 
- where the report makes general points about schools in relatively isolated locations (i.e. all remote and very remote schools), it sometimes uses the term ‘remote’ as a generic descriptor. Where ‘remote’ is used alone, it is always used in this broad, generic sense (and not to refer specifically to the remote geolocation).

Schools


There are 154 government schools in the NT. Three of these are distance education providers. Of the 151 other schools, 43 are provincial (all in Darwin and Palmerston), 28 remote (Alice Springs and Katherine) and 80 very remote. Four of these are special schools.

This final report does not use the terms ‘bush’ and ‘town’ schools. Further analysis (see below) suggests that these terms are not sufficiently clear, and the simple division into two categories can blur important differences. For practical purposes, however, some categorisation of schools is useful in achieving a systematic response to relatively like schools. For policy development, resource allocation, provision of support and accountability, some recognition of the different challenges faced by schools is important, but for efficiency and rational planning it is valuable to group schools into relatively like categories.

On the basis of more recent analysis, the report has adopted a different set of categories. These are:

- ‘Priority 1’ referring to those schools in which students experience the greatest disadvantage on a number of scales. The report proposes that these schools should be allocated resources and support based on the areas of need identified and should also be required to adopt specific evidence-based approaches in key areas;
- ‘Priority 2’ referring to those schools that have significant factors of disadvantage but that are likely to need lower levels of support, usually being either schools located in town centres but with high scores on some factors of disadvantage, or schools in remote locations with some factors of disadvantage but often better student achievement. The report argues that these schools should be encouraged to adopt the approaches mandated for;
- Priority 1 schools and should have access to additional support where they take up these approaches; and
- ‘Priority 3’ referring to all other schools, all of which are located in town centres, and all experiencing some factors of disadvantage, though at lower levels. Where appropriate, these schools may decide to adopt specific evidence-based approaches and may be eligible for resources and support depending on levels of disadvantage.

The three distance education providers, the four special schools and Tivendale School in the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre have not been included in these classifications, since their contexts and the issues they face are materially different. For this reason 146 schools are categorised. A preliminary list of schools proposed for the three categories is provided at Appendix 6.



This review uses the characteristics discussed in this chapter to allocate these schools to the three categories, Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 3. The factors used to determine the categories to which schools should be allocated include:

- remoteness, based on whether the school is in or near a town centre;
- Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) scores (the 2013 score provided by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and published on MySchool in 2014);
- average enrolment numbers (measured as the average number of students enrolled over the 2013 school year);
- attendance rate (measured as the average attendance rate for the school over the 2013 collections);
- National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) achievement (measured as the average proportion of students at or above national minimum standard across all NAPLAN domains and year levels over the three years to 2013);
- Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) results (a yes/no flag where a ‘yes’ indicates more than 25% of early years students tested were developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDI measures in 2012; ‘no’ indicates fewer than 25% vulnerable on two domains; ‘N/a’ indicates fewer than five (but some) children tested and the result has not been included; and ‘-’ indicates that no AEDI tests were completed for the school in 2012); and
- language other than English spoken at home (measured by the percentage of students recorded as speaking a language other than English in the student and parent data recorded at enrolment).

These factors are a mixture of input, process and outcome measures, are broadly quantitative and have some relatively arbitrary cut-off points (e.g. what constitutes a town centre and the AEDI cut-off). The review does not claim that the classifications are entirely robust, but presents them as an example of the way in which the education system might begin to articulate categories of need. Each of the factors represents, either directly (e.g. languages spoken) or indirectly (remoteness) an indicator of student need.

The allocation of schools to each category is broadly unproblematic in a significant number of cases, but involves qualitative judgments at the cross-over points between categories. While the classification could be conducted on the basis of a formal algorithm, it is probably better to include a judgment element to ensure that the categories reflect what the school is like, rather than simply what the numbers say. There is no doubt that further work is needed, and the review recommends that this work is undertaken to ensure that the categories are sufficiently robust to underpin system initiatives and that important differences between schools are not missed in the establishment of the categories.



The review argues that a classification like this should be used to make several kinds of decisions:

- What kinds of resources should each school be allocated to manage its need factors effectively?
- What forms of support are appropriate to different categories of school?
- What degree of autonomy or prescription should apply to each school?

These issues are discussed further in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

The report identifies 79 Priority 1 schools, consisting of 73 of the 80 very remote schools along with six remote schools. It also identifies 22 Priority 2 schools (six very remote, 11 remote, and five provincial), and 45 Priority 3 schools. As discussed above, some schools might be seen as sitting on the cusp between these three classifications.

Remoteness

Data on achievement (see below) indicate that remoteness alone is not a key factor driving school performance. Nevertheless, remoteness does affect such factors as capacity to attract and retain staff, access to specialist services (e.g. speech pathology and counselling), infrastructure, the availability of related services (e.g. health) and a range of other matters. The NT collects data on broad remoteness categories, but to some extent these do not accurately reflect the factors listed above. Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy, for example, are classified as very remote but clearly have better service access than many other very remote locations.

For this reason, the review has used a simple question for categorisation: is the school in a town centre? The smallest communities to be classified as towns were Jabiru, Batchelor and Adelaide River. Communities like Yulara, Mataranka and Pine Creek were regarded as too small for this classification. While this cut-off point is somewhat arbitrary, it reflects a real measure of advantage/disadvantage that affects the capacity of schools to meet student need. It would be possible in a further iteration of the list to develop a more sophisticated approach to this factor, involving a closer analysis of availability of local services and levels of remoteness.

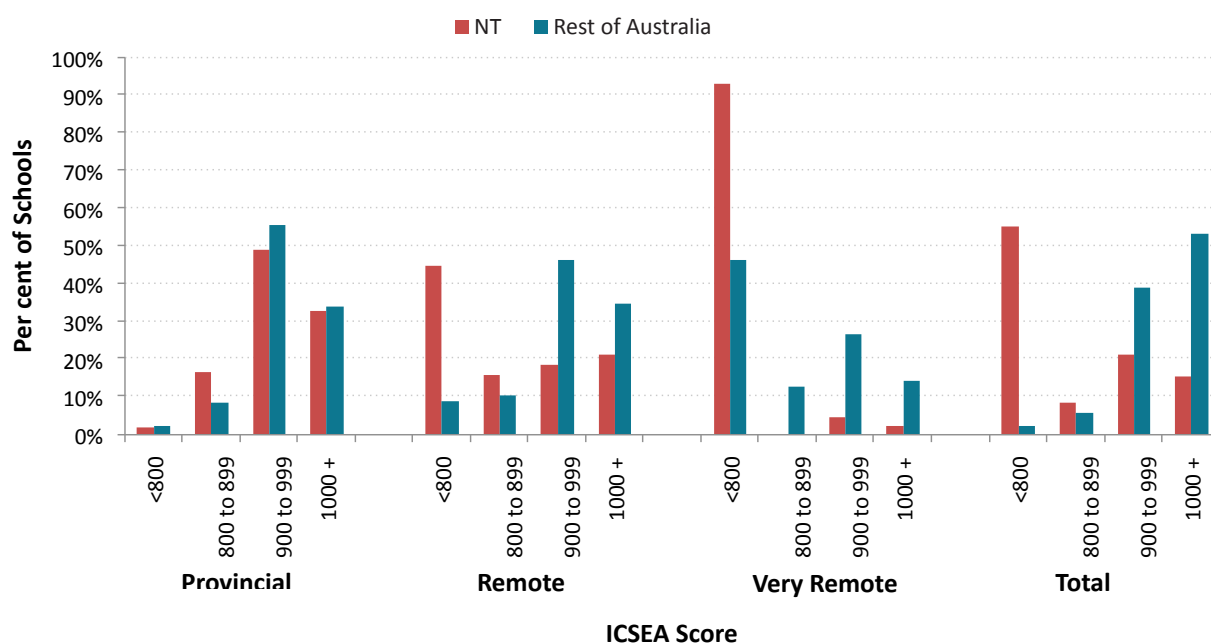
On this basis, there are 60 schools located in town centres and 87 schools outside town centres.

Index of community Socio Economic Advantage (ICSEA) scores

ICSEA scores are used nationally to enable meaningful comparisons of performance in literacy and numeracy of students in a given school with that of similar schools serving students with statistically similar backgrounds. The index is constructed by collecting student and family background data and using statistical models to identify the combination of variables that affect performance. The data collected include parent occupation, school education, non-school education and language background obtained from student enrolment records, as well as Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data. Each school has an ICSEA value, mostly between 500 (representing high levels of educational disadvantage) and 1300 (representing students with very advantaged backgrounds). The median score nationally is 1000 (ACARA, 2012A).

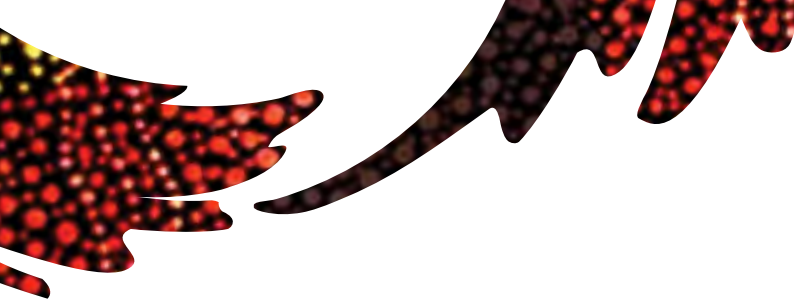
NT schools are disproportionately represented in the lower ranges of ICSEA scores. Figure 6 below indicates that more than 50% of NT schools are in the bottom category (below 800) by comparison with a national proportion of about 2%. This is principally the result of the fact that 93% of very remote schools in the NT fall into this category. In addition to the other factors already discussed, very remote schools in the NT are dealing with Australia’s most disadvantaged population.

Figure 6: Northern Territory versus Rest of Australia, % of schools in ICSEA bands



To some extent the ICSEA scores overlap with other variables in this discussion because they include variables that are also considered here. ICSEA on its own, however, does not reflect the specific circumstances of a school. The score does not distinguish between, for example, a school with a high proportion of parents in unskilled occupations and a school with a high proportion of students with non-English speaking background. For the purposes of the review, ICSEA is a useful element but is not specific enough to be used on its own. But because ICSEA includes a range of variables, it adds further data to the analysis that is not included in the other categories (e.g. family background).

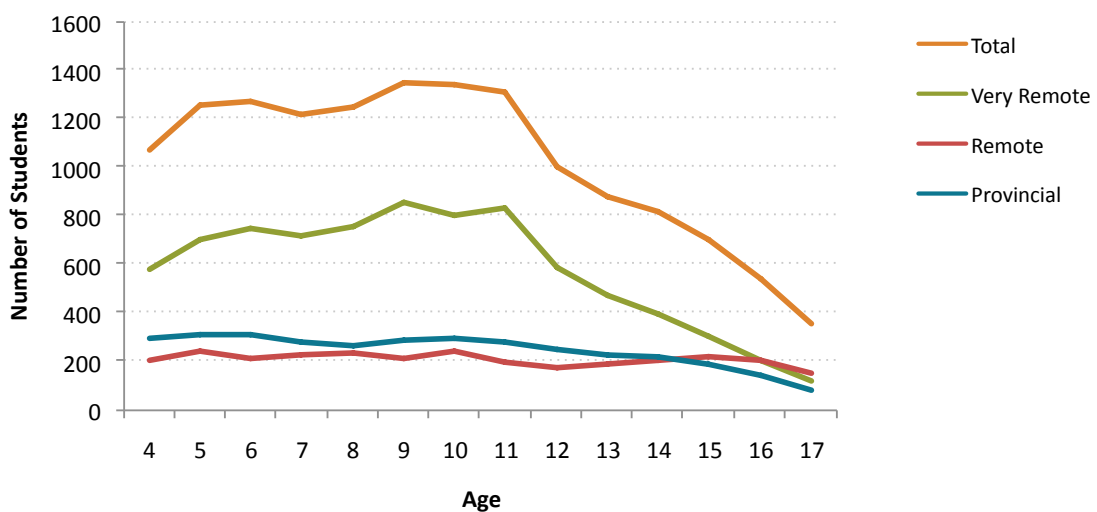
In the Appendix 6 table, each ICSEA score range is represented as a different colour (red for relatively lower scores, green for relatively higher scores). The darker the shade on the table, the lower (or higher) the score is. This provides a visual representation of ICSEA scores.



Enrolments

Indigenous enrolments in very remote schools have a distinctive pattern. They increase gradually during the primary years, then drop quickly once students reach about 12 years of age. By contrast, Indigenous enrolments in provincial and remote communities are relatively consistent across all ages, with a decline in the later years, a pattern broadly the same as for non-Indigenous young people.

Figure 7: Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2012 by Geolocation



Source: Schools Age Grade Census data

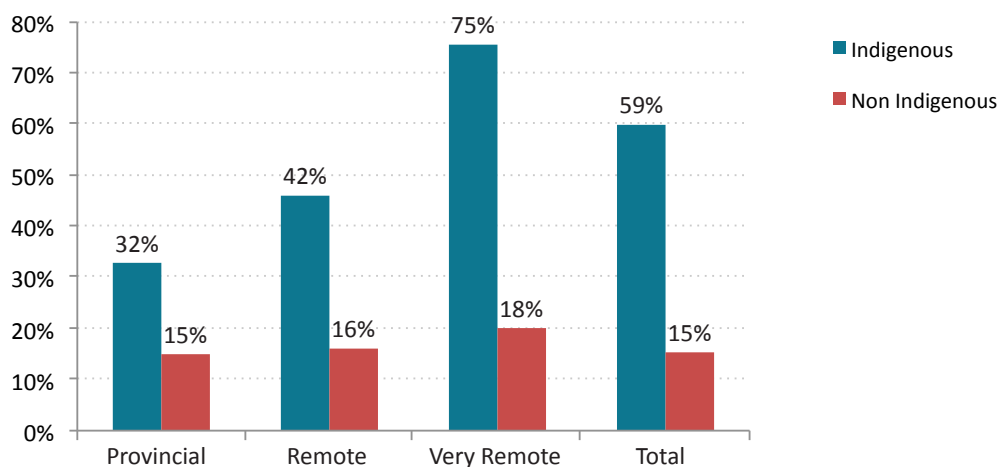
This suggests that schools in very remote locations experience significant enrolment decline in the secondary years, which is itself a problem for schools. Beyond this, however, schools with smaller enrolments operate at a disadvantage because of the limited resources they receive. Small schools offering secondary programs (or seeking to deliver the Australian Curriculum across all learning areas including new areas during the primary years) find it more difficult because they are unable to source specialist expertise. A primary school with 300 students can clearly source a wider range of staff expertise (and has greater flexibility in staffing) than a school with 30 students. To some extent this is reflected in staffing allocations (see Chapter 13).

In this report, schools have been categorised according to the number of enrolled students (based on average enrolments during 2013). In the Appendix 6 table, each level of enrolment is represented as a different colour (red for relatively lower enrolments, green for relatively higher enrolments). The darker the shade on the table, the lower (or higher) the enrolments are. This provides a visual representation of level of enrolment.

Attendance

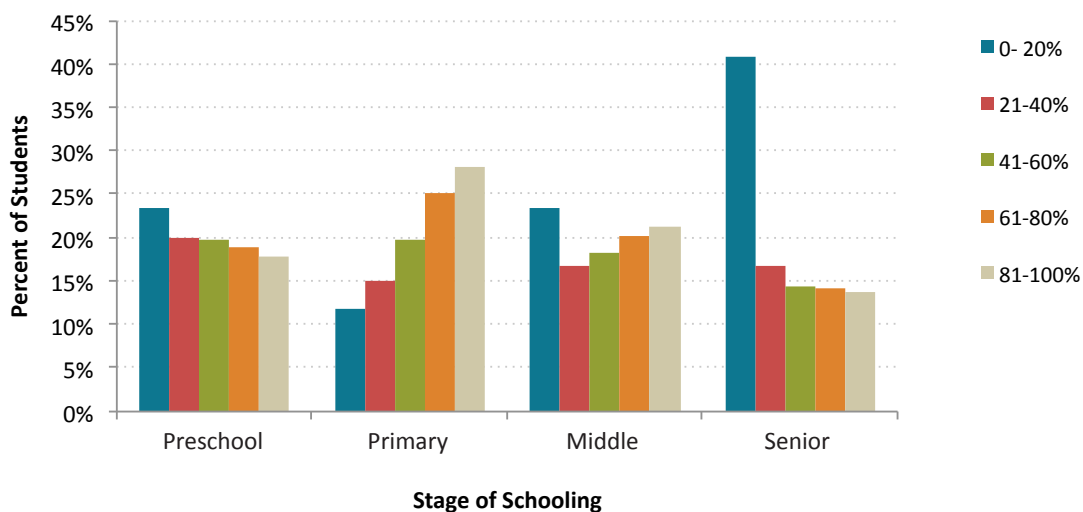
There is an equivalent overall difference in patterns of attendance. The average Indigenous attendance rate in very remote schools is about 58%, compared with almost 83% in provincial areas and 78% in remote schools. The review has taken the view (see Chapter 10) that an attendance rate of at least 80% is required for a student to achieve effective learning. In very remote settings, 75% of Indigenous students do not meet this benchmark.

Figure 8: Students attending 80% or less by Indigenous Status and Geolocation



Among very remote schools, primary school attendance is the strongest with 29% of students attending more than 80% of the time. The lowest attendance band (0% to 20% or 1 day or less per week) is the most common band for students at preschool, middle and senior schools, dramatically so in the case of senior students.

Figure 9: Very Remote Indigenous Students by Stage of Schooling and Attendance Band⁹



Source: DoE data from Student Activity v3.0 database

9 Data are for the 2013 school year with partial results for term 4.



Attendance rate is a major factor affecting student achievement. As noted above and elaborated in Chapter 10, student attendance is directly related to student achievement. For schools, low and irregular attendance makes planning and curriculum delivery increasingly difficult. There is a particular difficulty for schools offering senior programs if student attendance is weak.

In the Appendix 6 table, each level of attendance is represented as a different colour (red for relatively lower attendance, green for relatively higher attendance). The darker the shade on the table, the lower (or higher) the attendance is. The dividing line between negative and positive attendance is 80%, the level at which the review's analysis suggests learning can be effective for the majority of students. This provides a visual representation of level of attendance.

Achievement

It is in student achievement that the differences are most dramatic. The review commissioned a new set of NAPLAN data from ACARA, based on the NAPLAN mean scale scores (MSS), equivalent to individual student raw scores. ACARA was asked to provide national data with the NT scores removed to enable comparison of results for the NT with the rest of Australia and specific cohorts with like cohorts in the rest of Australia. This gives a measure of the relative performance of students in very remote schools where NT Indigenous students make up 44% of the national Indigenous very remote population.

Figure 10 represents the results. The red cells are those where the NT does worse than the rest of Australia; the green cells represent better performance in the NT. The darker the shade, the greater the difference in achievement it shows. Each cell shows the result for a specific cohort (e.g. very remote Indigenous Year 3 students) on a specific NAPLAN domain compared with equivalent students in the rest of Australia.

The top half of Figure 10 refers to comparisons of Indigenous student performance. It shows that the NT Indigenous cohort performs worse than equivalent cohorts in the rest of Australia across all geolocations, year levels and domains. No group of Indigenous students in the NT does as well as its equivalent in the rest of Australia.

By geolocation, however, some stark differences emerge. In provincial and remote settings, the underperformance of NT students is relatively minor. While the difference amounts to up to a year of schooling in a small number of cells, it is mostly within a few months of schooling. This difference cannot be dismissed, and recommendations in this report are designed to address the underperformance of Indigenous students in provincial and remote schools.

The largest gaps, however, are for the very remote Indigenous student cohort. Here the variations are dramatically negative. To give a rough sense of the significance of these numbers, and taking the writing results as the sample case, a difference of 103 points at Year 5 is a difference equivalent to more than two years of schooling. A difference of 125 points at Year 9 is equivalent to almost five years of schooling. So very remote Indigenous Year 9 students are almost five years behind very remote Indigenous students in the rest of Australia in development of their writing.

Figure 10: NAPLAN data by Geolocation, Indigeneity, Year Level and NAPLAN Domain, comparing Northern Territory with the rest of Australia minus Northern Territory, 2013

Geolocation	Indigenous Status	Year Level	Domain				
			Reading	Writing	Spelling	G&P	Numeracy
Provincial	Indigenous	3	-22	-32	-26	-21	-16
		5	-16	-23	-17	-18	-12
		7	-20	-22	-24	-26	-19
		9	-19	-28	-30	-34	-18
Remote	Indigenous	3	-28	-45	-30	-24	-20
		5	-9	-18	-15	-12	-7
		7	-36	-66	-30	-42	-23
		9	-23	-53	-38	-42	-20
Very remote	Indigenous	3	-63	-92	-80	-77	-47
		5	-62	-103	-107	-74	-43
		7	-77	-124	-120	-112	-46
		9	-67	-125	-109	-96	-47
Provincial	Non-Indigenous	3	-16	-17	-11	-17	-10
		5	-6	-7	-2	-4	-6
		7	-6	-5	-5	-7	-10
		9	2	4	-1	-1	-1
Remote	Non-Indigenous	3	10	-14	7	9	11
		5	10	7	9	12	9
		7	12	-4	9	10	6
		9	13	2	4	18	12
Very remote	Non-Indigenous	3	-3	-6	-5	-1	1
		5	12	-5	2	11	12
		7	26	-6	13	22	16
		9	19	1	-5	34	30

The bottom half of the graphic shows results for non-Indigenous students. On balance, NT non-Indigenous students in provincial settings (i.e. Darwin and Palmerston) are slightly behind their national counterparts, while remote and very remote non-Indigenous NT students are mostly somewhat ahead of their national counterparts.

In the Appendix 6 table, NAPLAN data are represented as the average over three years of the proportion of students achieving at or above national minimum standard for each school. These percentages are represented as different colours (red for relatively lower achievement, green for relatively higher achievement). The darker the shade on the table, the lower (or higher) the achievement. This provides a visual representation of level of achievement. When the data discussed here are compared with Programme for International Student Assessment data, it is clear that the achievement of very remote Indigenous students in the NT is at levels that would normally be seen only in third world countries (ACER, 2011).



Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

The AEDI is a population measure of how children are developing in communities across Australia, collecting data on most five-year-old children in Australia. The data make clear that Indigenous children in the NT are disproportionately at risk on parameters directly related to their learning. The Index measures how children have developed across five domains: Physical health and wellbeing, Social competence, Emotional maturity, Language and cognitive skills, and Communication skills and general knowledge.

A more detailed discussion of the AEDI is provided in Chapter 7 on Early Childhood. The key reason for the inclusion of the AEDI data here is that vulnerability on one or more of the AEDI domains is directly related to school readiness, and so constitutes a factor that schools need to deal with in the early years. As the later discussion also notes, levels of AEDI vulnerability are also good predictors of achievement in literacy and numeracy as late as secondary school.

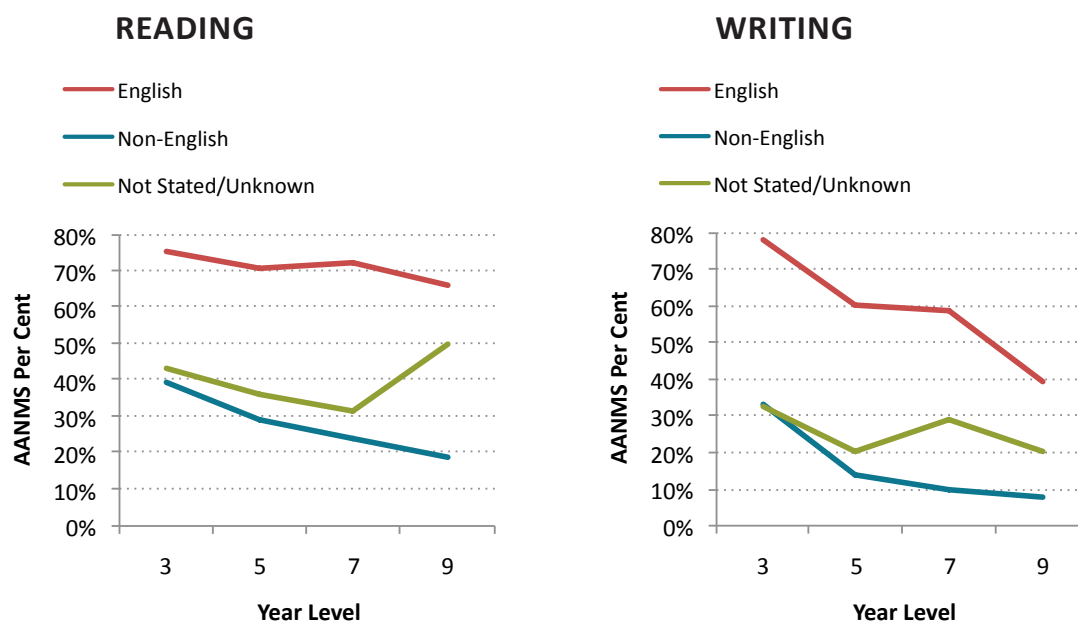
In the Appendix 6 table, the AEDI data have been treated as a yes/no factor. Where the table lists a 'yes' next to a school's name, the school has an intake including at least 25% of children who are vulnerable on two or more of the AEDI domains. Where the listing is 'no', fewer than 25% of children are vulnerable in this way. In some cases, the table lists 'N/a', indicating that while some children were tested, there were fewer than five and so no conclusions are drawn. In other cases, the table lists '-', indicating that no AEDI data are available for the school.

Language background

One factor missing from the analysis in the draft report of this review was student language background. A number of respondents drew attention to the need to consider language background as a key factor in determining what approaches to adopt in the education of Indigenous children. This advice has been used in the preparation of this final report (see, for example, Chapter 8 on Primary Education for a discussion of the role of children's first language in schooling).

It is clear from achievement data that there is a close correlation between language spoken at home and NAPLAN achievement. The graphs below show Indigenous student achievement of results at or above national minimum standard on NAPLAN reading and writing scales at each year level over 2012 and 2013, taking account of language spoken at home. Two things directly relevant to the discussion in this chapter are clear: those students who speak English at home have dramatic advantages over those who do not speak English, and the advantages persist through schooling. A third factor specifically relevant to Indigenous students is that for both categories, there is a substantial drop-off in achievement, especially in writing, through the years of schooling. Similar results are obtained in the other NAPLAN categories.

Figure 11: NTG Indigenous School Students At or Above National Minimum Standard in Reading and Writing by Language spoken at Home (NAPLAN results from 2012 and 2013)



It is clear that language is a key variable affecting school performance. As Chapter 3 on Demographics makes clear, a minority (35%) of the NT Indigenous population speak English at home, with the majority (65%) speaking an Australian Indigenous language. Of the provincial Indigenous population, 89% predominantly speak English in the home compared to 54% of remote and only 12% of the very remote Indigenous population.

The information on home language in the table in Appendix 6 is derived from the data on students and parents recorded at enrolment. It lists the percentage of Indigenous students reporting a language other than English spoken at home. These numbers somewhat understate the proportion of homes in which English is spoken, since the data are collected on the basis that if any one of the students or either parent speaks an Indigenous language at home, the language is reported as Indigenous. Homes in which both English and an Indigenous language are spoken are likely to be reported as Indigenous language speakers. The data are, however, collected consistently across the system, so they provide a basis for comparison between schools.

The data report the percentage of Indigenous students for whom the home language is recorded as non-English. They show that there are 66 schools in which 90% or more Indigenous students are recorded as speaking a language other than English at home. A further 28 schools show more than 50% of students in this category.



Discussion

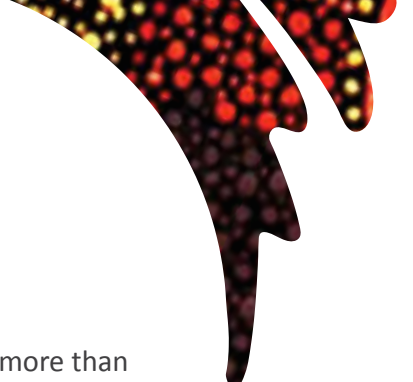
Taken together, the data reported in the table in Appendix 6 show that schools can be grouped according to the factors of disadvantage affecting their Indigenous student population. There is a clear clustering of schools from the top of the table, listed in the table as Priority 1 schools. There is little doubt about the classification of the Priority 1 schools. Within the priority categories, the table is listed according to ICSEA score, since this is the broadest data set. While far from completely consistent, these schools show relatively common patterns:

- virtually all are located away from town centres;
- ICSEA scores are consistently below the national median of 1000, and almost all below 700;
- average enrolment numbers tend to be low, despite the presence of some larger schools;
- attendance rates are mostly relatively low, with few showing over 80% attendance;
- NAPLAN achievement at or above national minimum standard is in low single digits in some schools and infrequently above 50%;
- AEDI results in those schools where enough students were tested to generate a result show that most schools have a significant proportion of children vulnerable on two or more AEDI scales; and
- language other than English spoken at home is commonly recorded above 90%.

Priority 2 school classifications are more matters of judgment, and they range from larger town schools with higher enrolments but a significant proportion of Indigenous language speakers and relatively weak NAPLAN results, to schools that have good attendance rates and perform well on NAPLAN but experience several other factors of disadvantage. These classifications are, to some extent, arguable. In each case, there are specific reasons for the allocation of Priority 2 classification. The two Nhulunbuy schools, for example, are included because of the likelihood that their populations could change substantially in the future and planning for that shift should be resourced. The argument of the review is that the Priority 2 schools will require specific forms of assistance to achieve the kinds of student outcomes expected from high quality schools.

The later chapters of this report detail the kinds of resources, support and degrees of autonomy recommended for each category of school. It is clear from data such as NAPLAN results that none of the three categories is achieving acceptable student outcomes for Indigenous students when measured against the outcomes expected and mostly achieved for non-Indigenous students, or even against outcomes for Indigenous students in other states and territories.

The argument for considering resource allocation against these priority categories seems clear. Where schools are dealing with a variety of factors of disadvantage, they will require different levels and kinds of resources. Schools dealing with cohorts with high percentages from non-English speaking backgrounds, or with high proportions of children showing developmental vulnerability on the AEDI, will require resources targeted to addressing those issues.



The review takes the view, however, that the questions to be addressed require more than resources. They require consistent, evidence-based approaches that are known to work with students experiencing specific forms of disadvantage.

This approach is suggested in part by a significant report released by McKinsey & Company in 2010. This was an attempt to identify how to improve education systems. It examined 20 education systems from around the world, seeking how to ‘raise the bar and close the gap’ for all students (Mourshed et al, 2010: 6).

For the purposes of this review, the key finding in the report concerned the distinction between reform approaches found to be effective in low- and high-performing systems. In summary, poorer performing systems (which would include the Priority 1 schools listed in Appendix 6) do best when they tighten control and provide technical training. As the report argues:

The main challenge of systems engaged in the poor to fair and fair to good stages is to minimise performance variation between classes and across schools. This requires ensuring that lower-skill teachers are given the support of high-quality teaching materials and lesson plans that can closely guide what they do on a daily basis (ibid.: 44).

By contrast, high performing systems (including the Priority 3 schools in the NT) are best improved by a loosening of central control, a reliance on evidence-informed school-based practice, teacher collaboration and standard-setting, and a gradual movement from the sole use of common standardised assessments to the inclusion of school and teacher self-evaluation. Where ‘lower-performing systems focus on raising the floor...higher performing ones focus on opening up the ceiling’ (Ibid.).

This is a useful way of thinking about how to take action for improvement in the NT, but it is important not to exaggerate the application of this model. The submission received from the Central Land Council (CLC) in response to the draft report makes the point that the NT is different in important respects from many of the low performing systems considered by McKinsey. Teachers in the NT are trained and registered, and Indigenous students in the NT are different from students in other low performing systems in being:

... an Indigenous minority ... educated in a developed country, a context in which people’s engagement with schools is strongly affected by the school’s capacity to embrace and respond to culture and identity (CLC, 2014: 6).

While the NT has a dramatically different economic (and teacher employment) background from the kinds of countries that generate levels of school achievement seen among Indigenous children in very remote schools in the Territory, this economic advantage has not flowed through into educational achievement. The various phases of reform in recent years in the NT have not achieved the kinds of outcomes that sponsors were hoping for, or the kinds of improvements catalogued in the McKinsey report, especially among Indigenous children in those schools listed as Priority 1 in Appendix 6.



Some features of the NT mean that the circumstances for remote schools are more similar to those of low performing systems of the kind discussed by McKinsey. The somewhat higher rates of teacher turnover, low rates of student attendance, student mobility and levels of community dysfunction mean that schools are operating in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The review argues that, despite some important differences between Priority 1 schools in the NT and low performing systems internationally, similar remedies are probably necessary to some extent.

It is the argument of this review that different forms of performance improvement are likely to be effective in the different school settings within the NT. It is not suggested that prescriptions for improvement in the Priority 1 schools in the NT should be identical with those for third world countries. But approaches should also differ from those for higher performing systems. This report seeks to propose initiatives that will take account of this critical difference.

Recommendation

2. Recognise the differing capacities and circumstances of groups of schools by:
 - a. constructing a list of schools based on factors of disadvantage and need, starting with the approach outlined in this report;
 - b. varying implementation requirements to reflect these differences, including mandating evidence-based approaches for some schools; and
 - c. determining resource and support allocations for different categories of school based in part on the different priorities in the final list.
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Chapter Five

The education system

The key to overall improvement in the outcomes achieved by Indigenous children lies to a significant extent in the capacity of the Department of Education's (DoE) to provide effective, long-term management of a large and complex system of education. The elements of good management include a clear strategic direction, effective alignment of resources and people around that direction, quality of implementation, rigorous monitoring and reporting of progress and consistent delivery over long periods of time. The findings of the review suggest that in each of these areas there is the opportunity to set new directions and improve performance.

The review has found that the major factors affecting areas in which improvement is needed are:

- matters that are outside the direct control of the department, including an exceptionally difficult demographic and logistical context, a complex funding and strategic relationship with the Australian Government and elections and changes of government and minister at Northern Territory (NT) and national levels;
- uneven approaches to strategic planning;
- weak implementation practices;
- historical weaknesses in data management, now significantly improved;
- funding arrangements and other practices that encourage short horizons for action;
- unresolved structural relationships between central office, regions and schools; and
- limited workforce planning and a lack of coordination in staff development.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- general support for much of the discussion in the chapter, including long-term careful implementation, planning and evaluation of initiatives;
- significant numbers of responses that were critical of the department's poor planning, changes of direction and lack of consistent focus on Indigenous education;
- some concern about the adoption of system-wide approaches from those who believe that each school needs to be treated somewhat differently depending on context and culture; and
- concern that there needs to be a strong, independent voice for Indigenous people in NT education.



Learning Lessons

The *Learning Lessons* review found in 1999 that there were substantial management failings in DoE. The review highlighted ‘insufficient long-term departmental planning’, a focus on short-term projects and ‘a lack of a strategic approach’. Discussing the management tools that underpin effective delivery of outcomes, the report says, ‘... the review has found that there are major system and school deficiencies in regard to these management tools’. The review notes that the only schools ever formally evaluated were bilingual schools. There was ‘no interest at departmental or government level in a dispassionate analysis of the educational outcomes of Indigenous students’ (Collins, 1999: 47-8).

A clear strategic direction

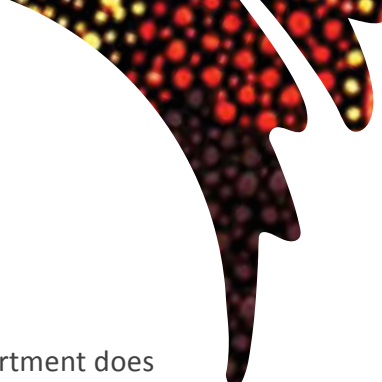
Previous reviewers have drawn attention to difficulties in the department’s approach to strategy. The Collins review referred to ‘The lack of an overarching departmental strategy in relation to Aboriginal education’ (ibid.: 22). Discussing the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 2011, Masters noted:

The document would be better if it next identified a few big strategies that the system is going to pursue to improve literacy and numeracy performances across the NT... My first recommendation would be to focus strategic planning for improved literacy and numeracy on what the system is going to do ... identifying a few major ways in which the system can make a difference (system ‘strategies’) and elaborating in more detail how the system will pursue these strategic priorities (Masters, 2011: 16).

Similarly, the Menzies evaluation of *Strong Start, Bright Futures*, in reviewing the overall strategy for the initiative, argues for prioritising actions rather than tackling everything at once (Menzies, 2013: 77).

The department has improved its approach to strategy in some areas. There is now a strong data framework and a greatly enhanced capacity to monitor and report on progress. Across the system at all levels there is a focus on the use of data to drive planning. The framework is now in place for school and principal evaluation and accountability. Regions have in some cases established common expectations and goals with their schools.

The present review has, however, identified the continuing absence of a clear strategic direction in the area of Indigenous education. Department strategy in the area of Indigenous education, as reflected, for example, in the 2006-2009 Indigenous Education Strategic Plan (DEET, 2006) is comprehensive but lacks focus. The goals in the plan cover effectively all possible action that the department might take. Because of this, the plan does not set explicit priorities, make clear what will not be done, or define where resources will be differentially allocated.



Although there is no current strategic plan for Indigenous education, the department does have a new Strategic Plan 2013-2015 (DoE, 2013A). This is similar in approach to the earlier Indigenous education plan. While targets and measures are in the process of being set, and will assist in focusing the plan, the goals in the plan seem to give free rein to almost any approach that someone thinks might work.

In part this is both deliberate and normal. Strategic plans in large public sector organisations are often less strategic than political: they aim to satisfy interest groups, stakeholders, government, clients and employees that their interests are being protected. The easiest way to do this is to keep plans very general and to be vague about tough decisions. This approach does not, however, easily lead to continuing improvement.

A key requirement for effective system leadership is a set of clear goals that make explicit what matters. These should drive activity at every level of the system: central office, regional, school and classroom levels. When a new strategic direction is set, some activities should stop or change direction. Others should be strengthened. Resources should be reallocated, and in some cases resourcing should cease for some areas. Even with these factors in place, nothing will change unless strategy is followed through into resourcing, articulation of staff responsibilities, implementation, monitoring and accountability.

In each critical area, strategy should be explicit. There seems to be no limitation in current NT policy regarding, for example, what kinds of early years literacy programs and approaches should be adopted. Schools are free to choose their own approach to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. These examples might seem to reflect a devolution of authority to the level at which the decision can most appropriately be made. The review interprets them as the abandonment of the responsibility of the department to make clear what is required of schools.

Strategy should also define, even if by implication, what will not be done. The present review, for example, is clear that literacy should be the priority in primary schools. It argues that numeracy can wait. In secondary schools, the review would resolve the tension between quality of delivery and provision in every community, by opting for quality. These are difficult and challenging proposals. That is the purpose of strategy.

An approach like this is the basis for the recommendations in this review. Taken together, they are intended to set a strategic direction for the department in the delivery of Indigenous education.

Long-term planning

One of the clearest outcomes of the review is the understanding that achieving ambitious goals will take an extended period. The only way to achieve transformational change is to plan for the very long term: in political terms, over the lives of a succession of Parliaments; in human terms, over a generation or more. Unless the department maintains a consistent approach for an extended period, it will not achieve its goals.



Interviews and visits to schools have made clear that this is the most substantial weakness in current practice. At present there is a proliferation of projects and programs aimed at addressing elements of Indigenous education. Australian and Territory governments, the DoE, regions and schools – all initiate activity. Goals vary, targets shift and directions change constantly. As a result, there is little consistency across the education system in key areas and a sense of constant, unexpected change.

This problem has caused a loss of confidence in the system and senior management. The Menzies evaluation of the college model refers to ‘policy churn’ as a factor in local failure to engage with department reform processes (Menzies, 2013: 65). Schools are used to making their own decisions, and to assuming the right to reject department priorities, sometimes very explicitly. Unless the department is very clear about boundaries, they will continue to do so, relationships between schools and the centre will remain tense, and long-term planning will be a mirage.

These problems can be substantially overcome. The elements that will contribute to improvement include:


- simplified funding arrangements between the Australian and Territory governments that are based on long-term agreed strategic goals, targets and timelines;
- establishment of firm expectations of each level of the department to deliver on the goals;
- the setting of mandatory elements of practice for schools;
- strong support for effective implementation in priority areas, so success strengthens resolve;
- allocation of resources and support to those approaches that enact policy and strategy; and
- no tolerance for significant deviation from the policy position.

Departmental structure

While the current review cannot address all elements of the departmental structure, the establishment and operation of the regional model deserves comment. As Masters notes in his 2011 report:

The alignment of effort from central office to regions to schools and classrooms will be essential to the success of the regional model. Over-delegation to regional offices is a potential risk. So is unnecessary duplication of effort across regions. The regional model is likely to be most effective if it includes a strong role for the centre in setting Territory-wide learning expectations, providing high-quality classroom resources, providing access to high-quality professional development, and closely monitoring trends and performances across all schools (Masters, 2011: 33-34).

There remain unresolved issues in the relationship between regions and central office. Some regions have, for example, supported particular approaches to literacy. The Barkly has moved towards the adoption of *Scaffolded Literacy* (which is a re-badged Accelerated Literacy); Alice Springs has reached agreement with schools about the use of *Performance Monitoring (PM) Benchmarks*;



Katherine has focused on phonemic awareness. Within the current framework, the review supports decisions like this as a legitimate effort to achieve consistency and economies of scale in the delivery of support, at least at regional level. A clear department strategy would, however, provide a common framework and make such approaches redundant.

The whole education system should adopt a consistent approach to key areas for action in Indigenous education. The department should provide regions with both an explicit policy framework and a defined role in working with schools on how agreed approaches will be implemented.

This should take account of differences between schools; as proposed above in the development of the list of Priority schools, small and remote schools experiencing multiple factors of disadvantage need a different program from more advantaged schools. But these variations are mostly system-wide, not regional; a remote primary school in Alice Springs region is likely to share more with a remote school in Katherine region than it does with a large primary school in Alice Springs township. So the department could specify mandatory elements for Priority 1 schools, and different elements, some mandatory, for Priority 2 or 3 schools, to reflect the differences between kinds of schools in policy implementation. But it should ignore the regularly expressed view that each school is its own micro-climate, requiring every decision to be made locally.

The recommendations in later chapters of the report illustrate how this approach should be implemented.

Management of Indigenous education

The management of Indigenous education has ebbed and flowed in the department. It has been treated sometimes as a separate area of management and sometimes as a mainstreamed policy focus. Through the early 1990s, Indigenous education policy was managed through the Aboriginal Education Policy Unit, a small unit working on specific initiatives under the national Aboriginal Education Policy framework. Towards the end of the 1990s, the Aboriginal Education Branch was established and took on responsibility for a range of programs, including the management of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP), which was the source of Commonwealth funding.

The Aboriginal Education Branch eventually became the Indigenous Education Division. With a rush of policy reform from 2007 onwards, the division was downsized and briefly became Remote Schools Policy and Services. This was replaced by structures to manage the Territory Growth Towns work and the Transforming Indigenous Education initiative. The policy area for Indigenous education had returned to the size of a small policy unit. This unit concentrated on the major reform work and all other policy- and program-related work was led by relevant functional areas. At present there is a small Indigenous education unit and a related unit responsible for Community Driven Schools, incorporating the Community Engagement Team.



The management of Indigenous education in the department is a key issue for the future. Following this review there is a need for a strong unit to lead the area, further define and progress the reform agenda outlined in this review and monitor progress with implementation. The unit should lead the development and implementation of a strategic plan in the area, develop policy and guidelines for schools, support the conduct of a number of reviews and trials recommended in this report, lead community engagement initiatives, monitor and report on progress and identify areas for further improvement across the department.

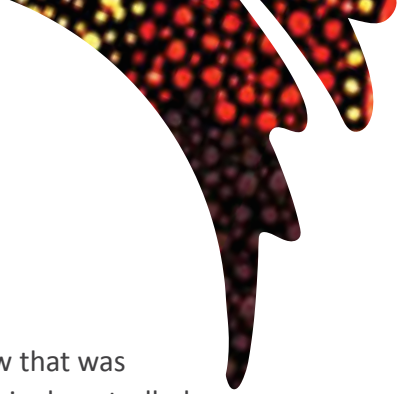
Because this is a key area for strategy in the department and for government, a dedicated senior official should lead the unit. This leadership role will take responsibility for developing the Indigenous education strategic plan and ensuring that its intentions are effectively delivered. It will be essential that the official has status and authority within the department equivalent to leaders of other major units, because the responsibilities fall across policy and operational units, regions and schools. For these reasons the position should be in the Executive Contract Officer scale and have a role on the DoE Senior Management Team. It should be filled as quickly as possible to ensure consistent, dedicated leadership of reform in the area of Indigenous education.

The structure of the unit should be determined by an analysis of the demands of the roles outlined in this review and the workload implied by the implementation of the review. It is clear, however, that the number of staff presently employed will not be sufficient to manage the range of tasks required. It will be important to ensure that the unit includes a significant proportion of Indigenous people.

A stronger Indigenous voice

One of the striking features of discussions about Indigenous education in DoE is the absence of a strong, effective and independent voice for Indigenous people. There is no independent Indigenous body with a mandate and responsibility to speak on behalf of Indigenous people on educational matters. While a strengthened Indigenous Education Unit will provide a voice within the department, there is no spokesperson for Indigenous people independent from the department.

The nearest to such a body is the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council (NTIEC). This is an Indigenous representative advisory body appointed by the Minister for Education and Training to provide advice and make recommendations to the NT Government and Australian Government Ministers on education for Indigenous students in the NT. The NTIEC is not, however, fully independent, and there is little evidence that it has been able to establish a strong voice in educational debates in the NT. This seems to be a function of membership, lack of independence, lack of a clear strategic approach to the role and the fact that the body is not regarded as a key Indigenous representative organisation. Its recommendations have mostly addressed local matters or lower level issues affecting education.



The submission of the Central Land Council (CLC) to the review articulated a view that was shared by other respondents. The submission argued for ‘an independent Aboriginal-controlled peak body for Aboriginal education’ with the support of the Australian and NT governments (CLC, 2014: 3, 5). Under the current arrangements, there is no body with the authority and independence that would enable it to draw attention to weaknesses in the implementation of reforms to Indigenous education.

It is recommended that DoE engage with key Indigenous representative bodies to determine the level of interest in the establishment of an independent organisation to advise the Minister and Chief Executive on Indigenous education. If the proposal is broadly supported, the department should negotiate its structure and levels of support and initiate its establishment. Such a body should have the following characteristics (with further detail to be established as part of the negotiation process):

- a direct communication line for advice to the Minister for Education and the Chief Executive of the department, including regular meetings with both;
- funding independence so that its role is not constrained by funding pressures;
- a small, representative membership not drawn from department employees;
- members with relevant expertise and a strong advocacy role to ensure policy advice is of a high level;
- a small but effective secretariat located outside the department;
- no operational role in education;
- meetings approximately quarterly, with the capacity to meet with department personnel as needed;
- an initial role in advising on the development and implementation of the strategic plan recommended in this report; and
- an obligation to produce a short six-monthly report that summarises its activities for the period and comments on progress with reform.

Implementation

The review has noted the relative weakness within the department in the implementation of major initiatives. One of the reasons for relatively rapid shifts in policy direction is a perception that initiatives launched with ambitious goals are soon seen to have failed.

This is true at the level of the whole department. The mandatory adoption of Accelerated Literacy, then its termination as a department priority, offers a clear example. More recently, the implementation of the College model is instructive. The department announced in 2010 its intention to establish a College model to support educational reform and improvement. An evaluation report published in 2013 drew attention to limited successes and a long list of problems and issues. The College experiment now seems to have been abandoned.



The key lesson from this experience is the need to take the time for careful, detailed planning and consultation on major reforms so that their potential can be captured and problems can be identified and managed ahead of implementation. This cuts across the desire for early announcements and quick results.

It is also true at the school level. Many schools are engaged in a quest for the magic bullet. Storerooms are full of discarded literacy and numeracy programs and curriculum resources. Every program ever developed is still being tried somewhere in the NT. Some schools visited have initiatives that started this year, as though there is always the hope that some day they will crack the riddle. Some have programs that have been in place for years, for which no-one can remember the evidence.

There is a developing research literature on what makes implementation effective. This literature is widely pertinent to human services systems such as education, but is little used. Fixsen et al, in a review of the literature, argue that:

In a transformed human service system, services are program-centered or practice-centered rather than practitioner-centered. That is, well-specified practices and programs ... are chosen to solve particular problems and are implemented with fidelity in organisations and systems designed to facilitate the implementation of those practices and programs (Fixsen et al, 2005: 72).

Among the approaches associated with good implementation, then, the close specification of common practice ranks highly. This is the inverse of the common model of 'eclectic' approaches to practice, characteristic of organisations that depend on qualified, or 'credentialed' professionals. Overcoming this requires not only close specification of practice, but appraisal programs based on adherence to specified practice.

The authors note that among other implementation factors, information dissemination and training are ineffective on their own. What is required is a:

longer-term multilevel approach ... The strongest evidence concerns skill-based training and practitioner performance or fidelity measures. Good evidence also supports the need for coaching and practitioner selection (Ibid.: 70).

The research indicates that funding is required for:

startup costs ... intensive implementation services ... the service itself on an on-going basis with an eye to creating a good fit between the service provision requirements and funding regulations, and ... the ongoing operation of the infrastructure required for continued fidelity and sustainability (e.g. continual training, supervision and coaching, fidelity measures, outcome data collection) (Ibid.: 73-4).



Implementation can be improved through:

- careful selection of evidence-based approaches;
- a clear strategy that limits the range and number of initiatives;
- explicit statements of responsibilities at each level of the system;
- clarity about which programs and approaches are mandatory;
- detailed and careful implementation planning involving those levels of the system that are involved in implementation;
- phasing of implementation (through trials and introduction of initiatives over time) to ensure that implementation load is managed;
- establishing data systems that support decisions related to implementation;
- providing substantial support for priority programs including training, coaching and continuing funding (and not supporting other programs);
- providing clear program specification in priority areas and identified areas of weakness;
- aligning appraisal to delivery of required programs; and
- treating different categories of school differently, depending on their level of need and their capacity.

Support for schools

The forms of support for schools, and especially Priority 1 schools, are in flux at present. The recent decisions to cease both the College model and the Group School management approach raise issues about how support will be provided to schools. Both models were able to provide structural support for leadership teams in small schools through the senior managers of the Colleges and Group Schools.

This review has identified a significant proportion of Priority 1 schools that depended for their effective leadership on external support from one or the other model. These are often the schools experiencing the greatest difficulty in managing community engagement, negotiating department rules and procedures, dealing with staff and student management issues and addressing a range of curriculum, assessment and reporting responsibilities. In the best cases, principals or teaching principals with little experience in senior roles were effectively counselled and supported by experienced principals available to them through the model.

The roles of Regional Directors (RDs, formally Directors of School Performance) also offer support of this kind, but their support is usually spread too thin to make the kind of difference needed for many inexperienced school leaders. Although most school leaders were relatively positive about the roles of RDs, there was a general view that they had limited contact with the more remote schools. This is likely to be true of Homelands learning centres as well. The RDs also have a degree of potential conflict between their roles in supporting and reviewing principals and schools. There were signs in more than one school that this potential had become real.



The review proposes specific forms of support for schools in areas where changes are recommended (e.g. literacy coaches for Priority 1 and 2 schools). Evidence also suggests support for a systematic and substantial program to ensure that school leaders in remote schools have access to experienced and capable principals to assist them in skill development and to provide advice on issues they face in their role.

Coaching is likely to be a key support for the most critical school-level initiatives (e.g. early literacy). The review intends that coaching should be understood to mean:

- the provision of expert support to teachers and school leaders focused on strategic priorities;
- a focus on specific content and intentions;
- a continuing process aimed at monitoring and supporting improvement over time;
- direct engagement with practice (e.g. through observation of teacher lessons or shadowing of leaders);
- specific and direct questions and feedback aimed at giving perspective to the teacher or school leader;
- exposure of gaps between intentions and action;
- offering practitioners support to identify areas in which they do not understand their own actions or their effects; and
- suggestions for specific actions to achieve improvement (Hargrove, 1995; Hault, 2005; Boyd, 2008).

Support should be targeted to Priority 1 schools in a different form from Priority 2 and 3 schools. The implementation of the Australian Curriculum illustrates the point. Priority 3 schools have a level of staffing and infrastructure that mostly will allow them to make a considered judgment about how to implement the Australian Curriculum, as long as some broad policy parameters are set and moderate levels of external support are provided. Many Priority 1 and some Priority 2 schools are not in this position. The department should target levels and kinds of support (e.g. supporting materials, professional learning and coaches) that reflect the difficulties faced by principals and staff in these settings.

The current review proposes that where high-quality evidence-based resources are available, they should be mandatory for Priority 1 schools. The implementation of more consistent approaches to literacy is an example of this. The review supports the mandatory specification of materials for Priority 1 schools to ensure that they are not in the position of having to design their own approach to implementation, without the time or resources to do the job properly.

The department should support those programs in which it has confidence, and not others. An education system of this size, with the constrained resources available to it, must be disciplined in using those resources to support a limited set of priorities and action programs. It should not be tempted to broaden its focus or to support a multitude of competing approaches.



Data and evidence

Measuring achievement against strategic goals depends on good data and evidence. The NT department has struggled for years with the challenges of distributed schools systems, poor data quality and incomplete data. It now has in place a sophisticated, flexible, robust and user-centred data system and high quality validated data in many areas including enrolment, attendance and significant areas of student achievement. It also has a systemic commitment to develop additional datasets and use data for monitoring and planning.

There remain areas, however, in which the department has yet to accept a collective responsibility for data management. One pressing area concerns data about what is happening in schools. The review found it difficult, for example, to collect reliable data about the range, depth and quality of programs to teach first language in schools. Equally, data about school programs for gifted and talented students, while nominally collected, seemed to be of doubtful quality. This report noted above that there were many key areas in which there were no common expectations or requirements of schools. Similarly, in some core areas, the system still has no common expectations about the categories of data that schools should collect and report on. The department does not have systematic, comprehensive data about core issues in schools including, for example, curriculum and assessment. The engine is now in place to manage these categories of data; what is required is a management decision to collect and use data categories that are critical to the enterprise.

The review has also identified a consistent view that despite continuing efforts to undertake evaluation, many program areas are lacking clear and unambiguous evidence to measure success. This was certainly the impression of the reviewer. In many key areas, data about effectiveness were uneven, unreliable or absent. This reflects the difficulty in collecting data and conducting robust evaluation in the NT; the same constraints and barriers that inhibit the delivery of education to Indigenous children also impede data collection and the management of effective evaluation.

As the Australian Medical Association (AMA) notes, the common problem with the evaluation of intervention programs designed for Indigenous people is ‘high rates of attrition, casting doubt on [their] effectiveness and wider applicability’ (AMA, 2013: 7). Similarly, the Maximising Improvements in Literacy and Numeracy (MILaN) review referred to ‘the shortage of large scale assessments’ giving school leaders reliable evidence about what works (Tremblay, 2012: 25).

Despite this, whenever initiatives are to be trialled or implemented, a commitment should be made to evaluation, preferably longitudinal where feasible and appropriate.

Where the department receives external requests to conduct research in schools, decisions should be based on clearly stated criteria including that the research should contribute to the department’s strategic goals and cause minimal disruption to school practice, and that all results of the research will be freely available to the department for evaluation and planning purposes. Rigorous efforts should be made to manage and minimise the overall research load on schools. If the conduct of research has the effect, as it sometimes has, of making the underlying tasks of schools more difficult, the research should not be permitted.



Homelands


The delivery of education to Homelands and outstations was not explicitly addressed in the draft report. While this discussion could be located in a number of different chapters in the report, it is provided here because it is a structural issue affecting the department's delivery of education. For practical purposes, Homelands education falls into the Priority 1 category in Chapter 4 of this review. The content and delivery of education to the Homelands should be guided by the discussion in other relevant chapters, except as that discussion is modified by recommendations in this chapter.

Homelands consist of families that have chosen to live on land with which they have historical and cultural connections:

The Traditional Owners and their families choose to live in their homeland for both cultural and social reasons, as a means of retaining language and traditional practices as well as removing themselves from the social problems often associated with larger communities (DECS 2013F).

Data provided to the review indicate that there are about 530 Homelands in the NT, of which more than 400 are occupied on a permanent basis. The Homelands vary widely from large stable communities to small transient groups. The current approach involves the provision to larger Homelands of a school or Homelands Learning Centre (HLC), while provision for smaller communities is via transport for students to nearby schools, distance learning or access to boarding school options. Some Homelands have an adequate student population for the establishment of a school; an example is the Baniyala Garingali school established from 2009 on the Yilpara Homeland in North-East Arnhem Land. Some Homelands are located close enough to existing schools for students to attend daily; students in Nauiyu, for example, attend Wooliana School. In some communities where no school is established because of low student numbers or other factors (e.g. land tenure, infrastructure and accessibility) the department has established HLCs.

The department has provision for 41 HLCs, of which 34 were operating in 2013 with a total enrolment of 490 students and an average attendance rate of 60%. The review identified evidence that some communities had closed educational facilities for extended periods, often lasting for years. Most HLCs are serviced by a nearby hub school and services are delivered by a combination of face-to-face and distance learning. A visiting teacher located at the hub school supports a local community member employed as an assistant teacher, to deliver an education program to a group of students sometimes including all levels from pre-school to the senior years. Distance learning is sometimes an important element of service provision, with primary and middle years serviced by Katherine School of the Air (KSA) and Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA), while senior years programs are provided by the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC). The use of technology-based distance learning on some Homelands is limited by unreliable power supplies or internet access. The usefulness of distance education is also critically determined by whether there is a literate, and preferably trained, adult to support students.



The physical facilities in some Homelands are limited, and in some cases classes are offered outside, on verandahs or in poorly constructed, rundown facilities. In many cases, qualified teachers spend two or more days a week working in a Homeland, with the educational program being maintained in their absence by local Indigenous staff. Evidence from previous analyses of the level of service suggests that it is sometimes modified or adapted, depending on staffing conditions in the hub school, or short-term student attendance issues (DET 2008; DET 2009B). Teachers providing Homeland services are often provided with limited accommodation and face issues with water quality, hygiene and a range of occupational health and safety concerns. Teachers and local assistant teachers are provided with varying levels of logistical and administrative support, depending on the resources allocated by the hub school. There is often unreliable, minimal or non-existent Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capacity. Service to some Homelands centres is seasonal; some Homelands students attend school in Maningrida during the wet season and return to Homelands in the dry. This is a pragmatic solution to the difficulties of the wet season, but exacerbates fluctuations in the hub school's enrolments. In some cases, there is evidence that the program delivered on days when no qualified teachers are present is intermittent. The department has done substantial work on transport arrangements for linking Homelands children with hub schools, but in many Homelands this is not a realistic option.

Respondents to the review noted the evident contrast between these often very run-down Homelands learning centres and the materially better level of provision at some small, very remote schools for non-Indigenous students. These stark contrasts raise issues about equity and quality in the delivery of education for all NT students.

There are cases where the historical hub school relationship now seems inefficient. The support from Shepherdson College for some Homelands located closer to other schools is an example of an arrangement that seems inefficient. Further analysis of arrangements of this kind could lead to greater efficiency in serving the needs of Homelands students.

There is no longer a specific system-wide Homelands bureaucratic infrastructure. The review was unable to identify a clear common application of the policy position for the provision of education to the Homelands, and the inconsistency inherent in the absence of provision to some sites is clear. There are no common programs used across all Homelands education facilities. There are usually no, or very limited, early childhood programs. There are high levels of teacher transience, and it is difficult to provide effective training and support to Homelands assistant teachers. Available data suggest that children in the Homelands are performing at the lower end of the NT Indigenous population as measured on NAPLAN (DET, 2009B and NAPLAN data available on MySchool), although in some cases data for Homelands students are not disaggregated from hub school data.

While the level of education provided to many of the Homelands receiving services is unsatisfactory, it is notable that there are hundreds of Indigenous students living in Homelands where no education service is provided. One estimate suggests that there are about 10 000 people living on Homelands (DET, 2009B). Table 2 is drawn from a department discussion paper in 2009 that used data from the (then) Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to estimate the population spread across 453 Homelands funded by FaHCSIA.



Table 2: Estimate of Numbers of Homelands in Four Population Categories

	Permanent population <20	Permanent population 21-50	Permanent population 51-100	Permanent population >100
Number of homelands	263 (58%)	121 (27%)	42 (9%)	27 (6%)

Source: DET 2009B

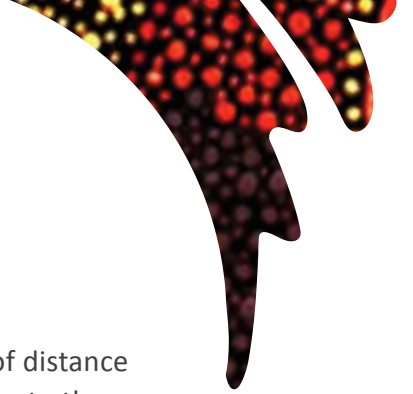
On the basis of these numbers, the 490 students serviced through HLCs, and the additional number serviced through schools located in Homelands, are likely to be only a minority of the young people of school age living on Homelands. One estimate suggests that as many as 2000 very remote Indigenous students are not enrolled at all (DET, 2009B: 2), although there are no accurate census data to support this estimate. It is also likely, however, that a significant majority of Homelands do not have a stable school-age population of sufficient size to support a school or HLC.

This is not to suggest that there are no positives. The Secondary Homelands Education Program (SHEP) was referred to in several submissions from Yirrkala (e.g. White, 2014). This program involves collaboration between Yirrkala Homelands School and NTOEC to deliver senior schooling, including a residential component, and to support the transition of students from school into employment, further education or training. It includes vocational programs based in Darwin. It is also notable that families in Homelands associated with Gapuwiyak have agreed to move to Gapuwiyak to give their children the opportunity to attend and complete their schooling (CDU, 2014: 13). Initiatives of this kind should be further examined to determine whether they provide models for the progressive development of Homelands education.

It is challenging to set out a comprehensive approach to addressing the current arrangements for Homelands service delivery. Proposals for improvement in earlier reviews of Homelands education (DET 2008; DET 2009B) have not been taken up. For some communities living on Homelands, the benefits of their location clearly outweigh the potential benefits of a Western education. As the 2009 departmental discussion paper notes:

Homelands/Outstations pose a dilemma to government. The benefits of self determination and human rights, positive impacts on health and well being, the value of maintaining the integrity of traditional aboriginal culture and language weighed against the financial burden of supporting Homeland/Outstation residents with essential services, infrastructure, health and education services (DET 2009B: 2).

One option canvassed in the 2009 discussion paper was the inclusion of Homelands education under a broad distance education model. This was seen as providing a common approach and focused leadership. It could build on initiatives undertaken by KSA and ASSOA to take on broader responsibility for the delivery of primary years education services in some communities, with a strong focus on supported distance delivery. In some cases this has led to dual enrolments. This model could be extended to provide a distance service more closely linked with the



provision of teachers by hub schools. This will require attention to the model of distance education used and the resources developed to ensure that they are responsive to the Indigenous population, and especially to their status in many cases as non-English speakers. The review is aware of trials of a range of technologies including audio, video, digital and online. It might be possible, over time, to extend and develop options to provide a much more sophisticated and flexible system able to meet the needs of more students in the primary years. This is also likely to require attention to ICT infrastructure in most Homelands.

The position for senior schooling, and to some extent middle years schooling, is more problematic. This review has taken the view that secondary education, and especially senior secondary, should be delivered largely in urban schools because it is effectively impossible to provide an education of quality even in some larger very remote communities. The position in small Homelands is even more serious. While it might be possible to deliver some middle and senior years programs by distance education where there is a literate adult, it is highly unlikely that these programs would lead to a qualification or could deliver an education that would attract the enthusiasm of most Homelands students, and attendance rates suggest that in most cases it would be ineffective. It might be, however, that some communities would prefer this option. At present it appears that the overwhelming majority of Homelands students are not achieving NAPLAN national minimum standard in the secondary years and virtually none are gaining an exit qualification.

It is proposed that resource discussions with the Australian Government should address this issue, including the issue of children on Homelands without educational services, and this matter should be pursued as part of the broader funding discussions proposed in Chapter 13 of this report. While the current arrangements are clearly less than satisfactory, it is not clear what a cost-benefit analysis would show about the relative merits of improving Homelands provision *in situ* or negotiating for residential arrangements in urban schools. Homelands communities are likely to be strongly resistant to the latter option, especially for children of primary age, and it is not proposed that any change to the current arrangements should be made without extended consultation with communities. In the longer term, however, it is likely that urban boarding arrangements will be recognised as the only viable way to provide for the education of students living in small, remote Homelands.

Until it is clear whether there is a substantial resource commitment directed to improving Homelands education, it is proposed that the current arrangements should be sustained. DoE should undertake further work to confirm student numbers in Homelands including those with no current service provision. The department should also develop a system policy to define the approach to Homelands education, including clarity about hub school arrangements, staffing, resourcing, service levels and support. Further work should also be undertaken to assess the capacity for more effective use of distance education in the delivery of education to Homelands students.



Recommendations

3. Develop a 10-year strategic plan for Indigenous education with long-term goals and interim targets and ensure that it drives action at regional and school level.
 4. Establish a strong Indigenous Education unit led by a dedicated senior official to develop the strategic plan, design trials, lead community engagement, support and monitor implementation, and report on progress.
 5. Negotiate with Indigenous bodies to determine the level of interest in the establishment of an independent Indigenous representative body to advise the Minister and Chief Executive on Indigenous education.
 6. Plan implementation carefully, aiming for slow and measured approaches to ensure the resolution of technical, financial, legal, structural, governance and staffing issues including organisational and reporting relationships.
 7. Maintain the current form of education service delivery for Homelands for an interim period while:
 - a. including possible revised arrangements for funding of Homelands education, including a cost-benefit analysis of the different options, in discussions with the Australian Government;
 - b. undertaking research on the number of young people on Homelands with no educational provision;
 - c. identifying successful Homelands initiatives and determining whether they could be adapted for use more widely in Homelands;
 - d. assessing the capacity for more effective use of distance education as part of Homelands provision; and
 - e. developing a system policy to define the approach to Homelands education including clarity about hub school arrangements, staffing, resourcing, service levels and support.
 8. Conduct formal evaluation of all major initiatives to collect evidence on the progress of each initiative, and:
 - a. report against goals in the strategic plan;
 - b. specify data required from schools; and
 - c. ensure that all research including that conducted by external agencies is aligned with Department priorities.
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Chapter Six

Community engagement


There is a widespread view in the Northern Territory (NT) that the engagement of communities in the education of Indigenous children is critical to their success. Community engagement is seen as both a right and a condition for the effective governance of schools and their capacity to respond to local culture and meet local expectations. This view has led to a long series of initiatives designed to establish stronger community engagement. Despite determined efforts, however, engagement remains uneven and there is no clarity about what outcomes either the department or the community expects from the process.

Work undertaken by the review indicates that factors contributing to the difficulty in establishing strong and effective community engagement include:

- matters that schools and the education system cannot control, such as social dislocation in communities, language barriers and in some cases lack of community experience in formal governance processes;
- lack of clarity in the department's expectations about the responsibilities of principals and teachers for community engagement;
- lack of confidence in and support for community engagement at system and regional level, including the key role played by Indigenous staff;
- pursuit of whole-system engagement models that attempt too much in too short a time;
- lack of confidence by some school personnel about community engagement and in some cases, a degree of resistance;
- failure to focus agreements on specific short- and medium-term action and outcomes to establish a history of success;
- weaknesses in cultural training and ongoing support for existing and new staff; and
- failure by both the department and communities to sustain engagement efforts beyond the initial development of an agreement.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- support for the focus on community engagement and for the recommendations;
- the need for shared responsibility, collaborative approaches and the recognition of community goals in community engagement efforts;
- reinforcement of the role of effective community engagement in improving student attendance, retention and achievement;
- emphasis on the role played by language and culture programs in fostering community engagement;
- the importance of the engagement of Indigenous people in policy making and implementation at all levels of the education system;

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- references to the value of local approaches to community engagement;
 - references to the value of conducting curriculum activities in the community as one means of community engagement; and
 - a suggestion that this area is so important that it should appear as an earlier chapter in the report of the review.

Learning Lessons

Learning Lessons recommendations on partnerships and the self-managing schools program focused on the authority of the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory (IECNT).

Learning Lessons explored options to break down the barriers between schools and communities and proposed the piloting of local and regional partnerships, under the auspice of the IECNT (Collins, 1999: 164). Negotiated agreements were to include components such as attendance, retention, flexible schooling, goals for improved education outcomes, improved facilities and professional development/staffing programs.

Collins identified two approaches to parent and community engagement in education decision-making: School Councils and a program called Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) committees. The effectiveness of either of these mechanisms was not known at the time of *Learning Lessons*, and the ASSPA program, which was funded through the Australian Government, ceased some time ago.

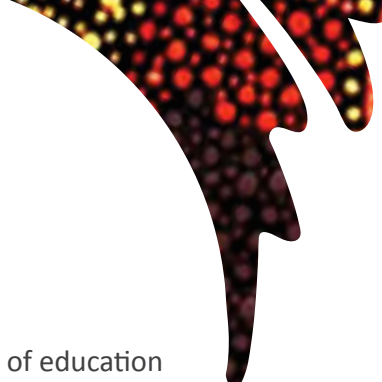
In 2005, the (then) Department of Employment, Education and Training published a *Community Engagement Charter* (DEET, 2005). This document set out a broad set of principles for and approaches to community engagement. Use of the document appears to have ceased, and it is no longer available on the department's website.

The situation now

The evidence available to this review suggests that the *Learning Lessons* goal to improve partnership and greater local ownership in education has gained little traction, particularly at the system level. The review has heard stories of success with local level partnerships, but feedback from the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council (NTIEC) and others suggests that there is limited impact on education policy and planning. Neither the council nor the department seems impressed with the outcomes to date on engagement and partnership actions.

The Menzies evaluation of the College model drew attention to the long-established view that Indigenous people need a strong voice in the governance of schools. The evaluation argues that:

Whatever the approach, Indigenous people need to have a greater voice in the overall decision-making process ... It is not appropriate for *non-Indigenous* people to continue to be seen to make all the decisions about what is best for the education of Aboriginal children and young people in the NT, particularly in its Aboriginal Communities (Menzies, 2013: vi).



The long-term goal should be a stronger voice for Indigenous people at all levels of education in the NT. One critical requirement for the transition is a cohort of highly educated Indigenous leaders in schools and the system. The schools are where these future leaders will be developed and grown, and the education system has a responsibility to identify and support them. That, however, is a long-term strategy.

There is also a need to address the current situation. The review has identified three approaches to community engagement with a history in the NT: School Councils, formal agreements between the department (or the school) and the community, and efforts to engage communities through integrated services arrangements. This report's discussion in Chapter 5 of a potential Indigenous representative body is also a recognition of the need for improved community engagement beyond specific communities.

School Councils

The Education Act and the Education (College and School Councils) Regulations provide for School Councils in the NT to have a wide range of functions and powers, including:

- advise the principal on the implementation of NT educational policies;
- advise the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in relation to the educational needs of their school;
- advise the principal/CEO on initiatives in community education;
- advise the CEO in relation to the job description for the position of principal;
- advise the principal in relation to the job descriptions for teaching and ancillary staff;
- advise the CEO in relation to the building and facilities needs of the school;
- determine the purposes for which Government moneys allocated to the school are spent and to spend those moneys; and
- exercise general control of the buildings, and determine the after school hours use of school building for community purposes (NTG, 2013).

In the 2011-2014 Strategic Plan, the department outlined a strategy for developing school governance models:

In partnership with the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO), DET develop appropriate, contemporary and sustainable options for governance in Northern Territory Government schools and build capacity of regions and communities to further engage in school governance (DET, 2011).

The department has acknowledged that there has been a lack of training in governance for School Council members and in 2012 introduced annual School Council governance training, aimed at building the capacity of School Council members to fulfil their roles and responsibilities under the *Education Act*. In conjunction with this the department has funded NTCOGSO to develop and deliver school governance training to all government schools in the NT.



The aim of the training is to work with School Council members and their communities to increase their awareness and understanding of governance processes. Thus all government School Councils have the opportunity to attend the annual DoE training and then receive follow-up NTCOGSO training, which can be tailored to meet the needs of their communities.

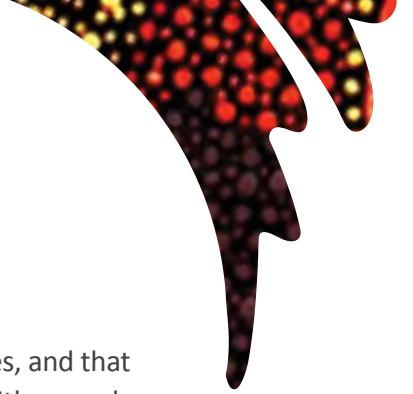
Feedback to the review indicates that there is some variance in the extent to which governance training is being achieved. Programs offered by NTCOGSO do not seem to have reached most Indigenous communities; evidence suggests that they have not been delivered in very remote communities in the past two years, apart from an activity involving the four schools of Grootte Eylandt. While NTCOGSO has made some adaptations to programs to meet the needs of Indigenous participants, there would be value in developing a training program specifically tailored to work with remote Indigenous communities.

Information from within the department (internal departmental brief) indicates that remote schools have generally not taken up the degree of autonomy that is available to School Councils. Evidence suggests that remote schools have variable approaches to involving their councils in part because of the lack of expert support to help them develop and work with their School Councils. While many principals spoke of the importance of working with councils, many also echoed views expressed by one principal:

I am struggling to get a School Council meeting happening at the moment. We are having issues with getting people to attend ... People say they will come but things often happen during the day which means that people don't turn up ... We have tried varying the time when the meetings are held but this has had little impact on people attending so we haven't had a meeting in some time (Principal respondent to the review).

There is some distance to go before the goal of the 2011-2014 strategic plan is achieved. The review proposes that there are two areas in which new approaches are needed. The first is additional support for principals and teachers in working with communities to set up and operate School Councils, including transition arrangements on the pathway towards School Councils in those communities where councils do not exist or are not effective. For many communities it is clear that going straight to a School Council, with its alien governance arrangements and meeting rules, might be too large a step. In these cases, principals should be supported to establish a precursor body with limited responsibilities, as a step towards full governance arrangements. It is likely that there are existing decision-making processes in such a community, even informal ones, on which a school model could be built initially. Principals will need assistance in how to identify and work with these existing arrangements and to achieve a transition to a full School Council, probably over several years. It is likely that legislation will need to be amended to establish a legal basis for this approach.

Secondly, there is a clear need for governance training and support designed for remote communities. The current arrangements for School Council training are based on the needs of non-Indigenous English-speaking communities. The department should establish a project to



design a governance training model that reflects the needs of remote communities, and that takes account of the proposal above that remote School Councils might begin with a much more informal arrangement built on existing community processes and structures. This work should be managed by the Indigenous Education Unit, but developed in partnership with an organisation or agency with expertise in the design and delivery of school council governance training to Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Education Unit should establish a reference group, including representatives of Indigenous communities, to advise on the school council governance needs of these communities.

Partnership agreements between schools and communities

Since the time of *Learning Lessons*, there have been a number of approaches to community and school partnerships and better representation of Indigenous people in the delivery of education in the NT. The basis for many community engagement programs has been the view that better community engagement will increase community involvement with and approval of the school, improve attendance and ultimately result in better learning outcomes (Zubrick et al, 2006: 501).

Over the years the department has pursued options including Self-Managed Schools, Community Controlled Schools, Education Boards, Remote Learning Partnership Agreements (RLPAs) and more recently the School Community Partnership Agreements (SCPAs) and the Local Implementation Plans in 15 schools under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery. The government now has, in addition, a policy for Community Driven Schools. Community engagement is also supported indirectly through expectations and requirements as part of the School Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework, School Review Process, School Improvement Plans, Annual Operational Plan and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (NATSI EAP).

The most substantial recent efforts were the RLPAs and the SCPAs. The NTG's Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006-2009 provided the foundation for RLPAs, committing the government to the negotiation of RLPAs in the 15 larger remote townships. These contracts aimed to support a closer working relationship between the school, Indigenous families and students, and community stakeholders. In April 2008, the Minister for Education and Training announced the Transforming Indigenous Education (TIE) strategy. RLPAs were to form the basis for discussions with communities about the future implementation of the strategy.

The initiative used external consultants who were separate from both the community and the government. This resulted in commitments from the community about their role in the education and training of their children and what they could expect from the government in return. Communities were told that these were not 'one-offs' and that they would be sustainable and sustained agreements to be revisited on a regular basis.



The changes did not survive for long. As one contributor to the review indicated:

although... the establishment of RLPAs resulted in more relevant delivery of education services in these communities, the changes were not long lasting and were swallowed up in the next phase of reforms ..., leaving those communities feeling disenfranchised, and ... result[ing] in disengagement (Review contributor).

The 2011-2014 Strategic Plan outlined a new approach to community engagement:


We will engage with parents and communities to create real, sharp and focused School Community Partnership Agreements (what DET and the community bring in partnership for improved education and training outcomes) commencing with the focus schools in the ATSI Education Action Plan (DET, 2011).

Initially, seven Remote Managers of Indigenous Education (RMIEs) were funded (although two positions were not filled). Their role was to act as advisors on appropriate and culturally inclusive protocols and processes and to assist in communicating and engaging with the broader community. An Indigenous Community Engagement Team (CET) was established to provide training, advice and support to Directors of School Performance (DSPs), RMIEs and school principals. 55 focus schools were identified in NATSI EAP and the CET were tasked with working with School Operations, schools and local Indigenous stakeholders to support them to establish, implement and maintain SCPAs in accordance with the goals of the NATSIEAP.

Between 2010 and 2012, the CET developed resources to guide the development of SCPAs and established 45 agreements. The SCPAs varied in their level of engagement and scope, but they all broadly had an emphasis on schools and their Indigenous communities making a commitment to working together to support improving the educational outcomes of their children.

The CET identified several challenges to the implementation of the SCPAs, particularly where the communities had already worked to develop RLPAs. They had difficulty encouraging some regions to use established and consistent approaches to community engagement and to use the resources developed. There also appeared to be a disconnection between development and implementation of the SCPA, as there was little systemic support provided to schools and inconsistent take-up of the reporting tools for accountability and monitoring the implementation of the agreements. There were also competing priorities for schools and communities, so in many cases the process was very slow or non-existent. Since 2012, this work has been halted altogether and only one RMIE position remains.

These efforts at broad approaches to community engagement have not achieved the success they aimed for. The review argues that the failure of these very ambitious attempts at community engagement occurred in part because they were aimed at a very broad group of target schools, not focused on specific activity, and they did not address clear outcomes. Equally importantly, they suffered from 'policy churn' and the cessation of funding, so they were not given the chance to succeed.



A number of respondents to the review's draft report made the point that community engagement processes have to reflect both departmental priorities and community values and needs. The review acknowledges this point, and the discussion below has been adapted to make clear the bilateral nature of community engagement processes.

Community engagement in NT education should operate on consistent principles and practices. These should be spelt out in a new charter to be developed by the Indigenous Education Unit, including elements such as:

- defining a clear community engagement model to be adopted by department personnel, including explicit processes and measures of success, so that all participants understand what the process involves;
- valuing of, and support for, Indigenous protocols, language and cultural practice;
- recognition that families and communities are partners in the education of their children;
- government and community have a shared responsibility for the delivery of quality education and the participation of children, so community engagement must take account of both community values and goals, and departmental priorities and targets;
- acknowledgment that there is a history of community engagement processes in many communities and that this history can form the foundation of new initiatives;
- explicit attention to the roles that different participants can play in community engagement, including how a community contribution to cultural induction and training for teachers will be arranged and remunerated;
- clear statements of the roles and responsibilities of community engagement personnel, regional staff and school personnel including the inclusion of community engagement responsibilities in position descriptions, school review processes and principal accountability arrangements; and
- the commitments that both communities and the department will need to make if engagement is to be effective and sustained.

A new round of community engagement should build on existing agreements where these are valued by communities, ensuring that these models provide examples of success from planning through to implementation and outcomes. Where there are agreements in place that meet the current goals of both the department and a community, these should not be wasted.

A new round should also focus on specific initiatives in this report and in the resulting strategic plan. Community engagement initiatives will need to focus on areas such as developing transition programs from Families as First Teachers (FaFT) to pre-school, the content of early childhood programs and their relationship to Indigenous parenting and child-rearing practices. Attendance is another priority for community engagement, to ensure that system-level and school-level attendance initiatives are effective and gain community support. It will be essential to work closely with communities affected by secondary education provision trials of urban schooling and residential facilities. In these areas, community engagement processes should



aim to ensure common understanding of what is proposed (including service changes that will directly affect each community and the benefits their children will receive as a result), establish common expectations, identify requirements of both communities and the department, and set criteria and reporting arrangements to ensure continuing communication and engagement. In this model, community engagement is a key service to ensure the effective implementation of strategic goals, and will help ensure that communities are supported in shaping initiatives to their own expectations and needs. One important outcome of a community engagement process should be confidence within a community that educational initiatives affecting children will take account of community values and goals.

This approach will require the involvement of staff dedicated to the community engagement process, and the development of a clear statement of roles and responsibilities of this team and of regional and school personnel. These responsibilities should be carried through into duty statements and position descriptions and form part of school review processes and of accountability arrangements for principals and regional personnel.

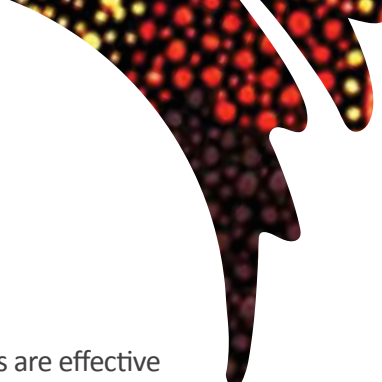
Integrated services

The third area related to community engagement is the development of integrated family services. This report briefly discusses Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) as one existing model. Chapter 7 discusses the development of Child and Family Centres (CFCs) as a specific integrated initiative.

LIPs were developed in 15 remote communities (Remote Service Delivery Priority Sites) setting out agreed priorities, actions, responsibilities and commitments for each location for government and the community. They cover areas including early childhood, schooling, health, housing, safe communities, governance and leadership, planning and infrastructure and youth sport and recreation. The LIPs have been established and are in the process of implementation. The intention is that they will be revised over time as progress is made and as a result of negotiation and discussion with each community.

The agreements reached with each community cover a range of elements. The Australian Government Coordinator General's October 2013 report (dealing with all 29 schools involved nationally) suggests that this breadth limits the effectiveness of the approach: 'In future, these plans should be simpler and identify a smaller number of key priorities that will focus effort and make a sustainable difference'. The response by the NT Coordinator General supports this reservation:

The burden of administration created by quarterly monitoring of all Local Implementation Plan actions, which in the Territory equates to over 1,000 individual actions, is unsustainable and unproductive. The approach to Local Implementation Plans requires review, and in particular with respect to creating a methodology that enables the prioritisation of key actions that will impact most significantly upon access to services in individual Remote Service Delivery sites (Kendrick, in Gleeson, 2013: 50).



The report argues that the plans show that services based on locally identified needs are effective and have encouraged agencies to ‘look beyond program boundaries’ to cooperate. But it also notes that ‘the energy and whole of government commitment has diminished over time’. While a great deal of data were collected, they were ‘difficult to interpret into meaningful statements of progress’ because of the absence of agreed independent systems of monitoring and reporting (Gleeson, 2013: 1-2).

This review supports the principle of integrated service delivery, but the evidence suggests that the LIPs have not provided a broadly effective response to this need. The development of CFCs might provide a more effective model (see Chapter 7). It is also critical that an integrated service model be developed across government departments, but also involving local communities, in planning and delivering the range of government services in each community. This is addressed in Chapter 3, where a recommended approach is proposed to working across departments and agencies to ensure better integration of services.

Local cultural training

The review notes and supports work on the concept of cultural competence, which is identified as the overall aim of cultural training. This idea takes in such elements as cultural knowledge (understanding the elements of culture and their impact on behaviour), cultural awareness (understanding how the actions of systems, organisations or individuals impact on those from different cultural backgrounds) and cultural sensitivity (taking account of cultural difference in planning and implementing initiatives) (Perso, 2012; DoE paper prepared for the Behaviour Management Taskforce).

All schools should be sensitive to their cultural contexts, and should seek to reflect local culture in their physical and educational environments. This is a minimal expectation of any school; that it should feel to students like a place that respects and takes seriously their culture, background and experience. Cultural inclusiveness also has a key purpose in enhancing the effectiveness of schools in teaching students and gaining the support and participation of parents and the community. The review does not, however, support the view, articulated by some respondents, that schools should be a source of cultural maintenance, or that schools in remote communities should have fundamentally different purposes from those in other parts of the NT or Australia. Cultural competence should assist, not deflect schools from, their core purposes.

For this reason, requirements of principals and teachers to source and undertake local cultural training should be clearly defined. Where local communities have the will and capacity to provide effective induction and cultural training, principals and teachers should take advantage of this opportunity. In some communities, however, there is at best a limited capacity to conduct and support such activities. In these cases, community engagement expectations of principals should include engaging with key community members, communicating effectively with parents and the community about school expectations, and becoming familiar with local cultural practices with relevance to education. Principals will also engage with communities through other responsibilities, notably concerning student attendance. It is recommended that all principals and communities seek to identify a local cultural mentor to support these processes.



The Gleeson report recommends that:

Boards of Management (or similar) better coordinate the approach to cultural training of government staff, including the use and training of interpreters, through a lead agency (Gleeson, 2013: 46).

It might be feasible to build better local induction and cultural training for teachers in larger communities by using a common approach with other agencies, especially in those communities with Local Implementation Plans and/or CFC's.

The issue of the DoE's responsibility for initial cultural training for all staff is addressed in Chapter 12.

Student Education Trusts

The review was provided with information about the Student Education Trusts (SETs) managed as a related initiative to the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA). SETs are a money management service assisting parents to support their child's education and development from birth to graduation. Through responsible income management, parents make regular contributions to their child's trust account, which they are then able to use to meet education-related expenses.

The program is entirely voluntary, although in some communities in Cape York all eligible families contribute. Parents agree to make a regular contribution to the trusts, to be used for educational items including uniforms, computers, books and other costs associated with education programs. The money contributed is invested on behalf of parents and students. Parents receive a regular statement of the balance and can make withdrawals for specified educational purposes. The CYAAA trusts service the CYAAA schools in Northern Queensland. Parents involved claim that the savings program has enable them to support their children through primary and secondary school and on into training and further education. The funds can only be used until the student is 25. At that point any remaining funds are not withdrawn but allocated to another student nominated by the parents.

The SETs service also works with education and child development service providers to help families identify appropriate expectations of a child's needs, as well as working with education suppliers to improve family access to high quality educational goods and services.

The review supports approaches of this kind as encouraging parent responsibility and community involvement in and commitment to education. The program also provides support for continued student engagement with education by overcoming potential resource constraints. SETs can support by equipping and outfitting students starting secondary school in urban settings and taking up residential accommodation.



Related elements of the review

Community engagement is related to, and affected by, other elements of this report. The acknowledgment in schools of Indigenous language and culture, the strengthening of first language programs and the conduct of culture programs jointly with community representatives will contribute. The confidence of the community should be strengthened by the development of a curriculum program to ensure that all students in the NT learn about Indigenous history, culture and experience. The establishment of a strong Indigenous representative body to advise on Indigenous education, and of an Indigenous Education Unit within the department to lead change, will establish a firmer basis for community engagement at other levels of the system. Developing a more consistent and extensive cultural training program for all teachers and including information about Indigenous languages in that program should equip teachers better to work with local communities and respond to their expectations and values.

The review takes the view that community engagement is central to the improvement of Indigenous education, but that it must be broadly conceived as affecting all elements of the education system and the delivery of education, not regarded as a discrete process conducted in parallel with, but separately from, all the other elements of a better education for Indigenous students.



Recommendations

9. Develop a new community engagement charter setting out:
 - a. the department's strategy for community engagement;
 - b. the principles to guide the process and practices to be adopted;
 - c. responsibilities of department work units including regional and school level personnel; and
 - d. the expected involvement of community representatives.
 10. Provide effective training for principals and teachers in supporting improved engagement and ensure that school review and staff performance management processes include community engagement as an expectation.
 11. Engage local communities to lead induction and local cultural training.
 12. Provide support for principals in building precursor school decision-making bodies based on community practice, develop and manage the delivery of school council governance training designed to meet the needs of remote communities, and review legislation to establish a basis for precursor bodies to School Councils.
 13. Focus community engagement on existing agreements where these are valued, community goals and the implementation of specific department strategic goals as set out in the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended in this report.
 14. Ensure that the Indigenous Education Unit has staff skilled and experienced in community engagement and able to support regions, schools and communities in developing school improvement plans and establishing effective governance arrangements.
 15. Further investigate Student Education Trusts and consider mechanisms by which they could be offered to parents in the Northern Territory.
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Chapter Seven

Early childhood

The education system has opportunities to directly shape educational outcomes almost as soon as children are born. The learning experiences of young children, including oral language, early literacy orientation and familiarity with the routines and practices of learning, help give them access to schooling.

The starting point for the review is the understanding that Indigenous children born in remote communities often come from a very different context from other children. The way families work and the cultural practices associated with child rearing can be very different from those of western cultures. This, coupled with the fact that English is often the second or third language spoken, can create a dissonance between home life and early childhood education. Much of what the Department is dealing with is a function of this dissonance, early disadvantage with a long-term provenance, and a range of other factors that significantly affect the delivery of early childhood programs in the Northern Territory (NT):

- health issues that affect short and long-term physical, social and neurological development in some children;
- social issues that impact on the ability of families to support children in early learning;
- difficulties in providing services to a widely dispersed population;
- non-English speaking backgrounds and lack of early literacy engagement;
- approaches to pre-school that need to be modified in some cases to provide the best start for Indigenous children;
- difficulties in providing an adequate supply of trained early childhood workers; and
- lack of consistency throughout early childhood programs in approaches to parent engagement with learning.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- generally high levels of support for Families as First Teachers (FaFT) and for formal evaluation to continue;
- concern that access to FaFT programs is not available to urban children or some very remote children;
- general acknowledgment that the training of early childhood workers is a priority;
- support for the use of both first language and English in early childhood programs;
- mixed responses but cautious support for and advice about the inclusion of phonemic awareness programs in pre-schools; and
- some concern about the cultural appropriateness of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data collection for Indigenous children and questions about the use of the Indigenous Adaptation for the AEDI.



Learning Lessons

Learning Lessons found that many schools were lacking the techniques and resources to assist them in working with very young children in the attainment of reading and writing skills. The engagement of families in early literacy acquisition was considered essential, and at the time of *Learning Lessons* a number of trial programs were running in very remote communities, involving parent participation in the schooling experience (Collins, 1999: 97).

The policy at the time of *Learning Lessons* made the provision of early childhood and pre-school experiences difficult for remote schools. Obstacles included inability to staff according to the formulae, lack of early childhood education skills or experience among the teachers and a lack of appropriate infrastructure in many of the schools.

Learning Lessons called for guaranteed access to play centres and preschools for all children in the three to five year age group, with multipurpose centres to include child health and child care services providing:

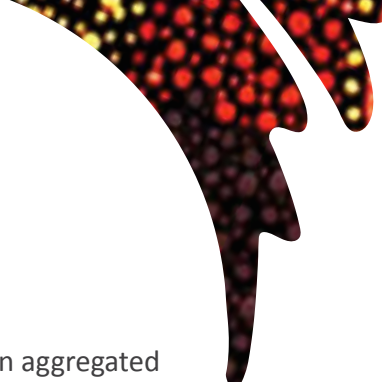
literacy and numeracy understandings ... that will assist the transition into the artificial and disciplined world of the classroom (Ibid.: 99).

By 2005 the Australian and NT governments were funding initiatives to increase access to early years programs throughout the NT. The *Learning Lessons* Implementation Status Report described the mobile preschools initiative and a rollout of childcare facilities and community initiatives to provide health promotion, care and early learning (LLISC, 2005).

Measures of early childhood disadvantage

There is compelling evidence that the level of disadvantage in the early childhood Indigenous population in the NT remains high. The AEDI is a population measure of how children are developing in communities across Australia, collecting data on most five-year-old children in Australia. The data make clear that Indigenous children in the NT are disproportionately at risk on parameters directly related to their learning. The Index measures how children have developed across five domains: Physical health and wellbeing, Social competence, Emotional maturity, Language and cognitive skills, and Communication skills and general knowledge.

Some concern has been expressed about the cultural appropriateness of the Index to Indigenous children, noting that it does not identify skills and knowledge in first languages other than English. Respondents noted a project was undertaken to develop an adaptation of the AEDI for use with Indigenous children aged from four to six and questioned whether it had been used in the administration of the AEDI in the NT (e.g. Green, 2014). The adaptation was designed to provide a culturally equivalent measure of the development of Indigenous children and in the process to provide advice to schools in developing successful learning environments for Indigenous children. The process is described by Silburn et al, who recommend that the adaptation could



be implemented in conjunction with the existing AEDI process and reported in an aggregated way at community, school and jurisdiction levels (Silburn et al, 2009). An adapted checklist was incorporated in the national AEDI data collection from 2009 along with some changes to the data collection process to support Indigenous children (Silburn et al, N.D.). There was also support for the involvement of Indigenous staff, including those speaking the first languages of the children, in the survey process.

The AEDI identifies those children who are developmentally vulnerable in each domain, meaning that their score is in the lowest 10% of scores nationally. It aggregates these results to identify the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on at least one domain, and in two or more domains. The Index enables a comparison of the development of NT children with those of the Australian population as a whole and a comparison of results over time within the NT. Recently it has provided 2012 data comparable with equivalent data collected in 2009, although some reservations were expressed about the quality of 2009 data suggesting that trend comparisons might not be reliable.

The data indicate that a notably higher proportion of children in the NT are at risk than the national population.¹⁰ In 2012, just over 59% of NT Indigenous children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains (22% across Australia, 43.2% nationally for Indigenous children). This means that these children are likely to experience some difficulty in making the transition into formal schooling.

Just over 38% of NT Indigenous children were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (11.8% across Australia, 9.6% of non-Indigenous children in the NT, 26% of Indigenous children nationally). This means that these children are highly likely to need some kind of special support to keep up with their classmates.

As Table 2 indicates, there is a strong apparent relationship between remoteness and vulnerability in two or more domains among Indigenous children. At first glance this might be taken to indicate that remoteness is a key factor for vulnerability. The figures for non-Indigenous children, however, contradict this view. If remoteness in itself were a significant factor, it ought to affect all children. The fact that it does not affect non-Indigenous children suggests that remoteness is a proxy for, or associated with, other forms of disadvantage that are the more direct causes of vulnerability. While remoteness undoubtedly impacts on the capacity of the education system to deliver services, it does not seem to be a primary cause of the forms of vulnerability measured by the AEDI.

10 Unless otherwise stated, data are drawn from Department of Education and Children's Services, 2013A and 2013B.



Table 3: Northern Territory Student Vulnerability by Geolocation

	Non-Indigenous Vulnerable %	Indigenous Vulnerable %
Provincial	10.2	20.6
Remote	11.6	40.8
Very remote	7.1	46.4

Indigenous children are particularly vulnerable in language and cognitive skills.

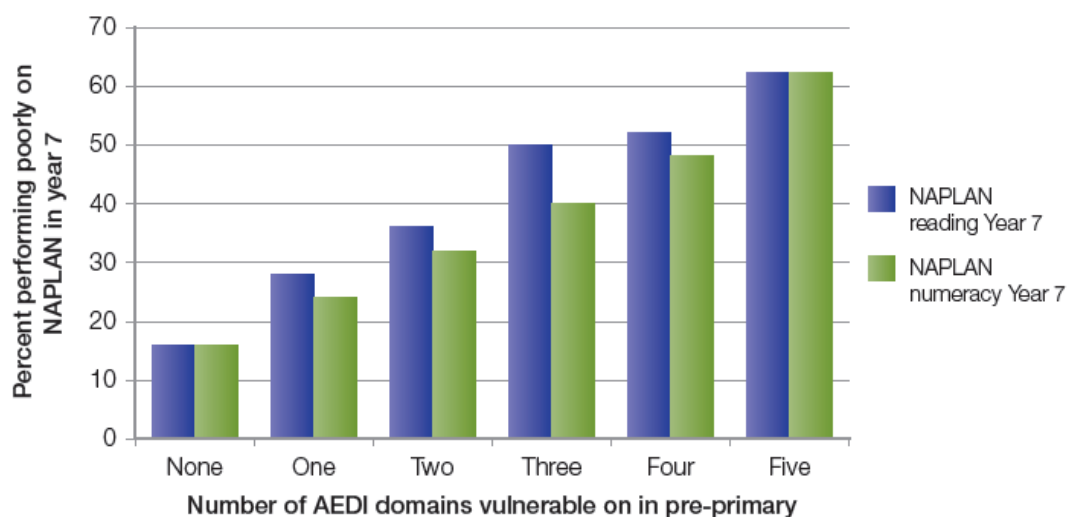
Table 4: Northern Territory Indigenous and non-Indigenous Developmental Vulnerability by Domain

	Non-Indigenous %	Indigenous %
Physical health and wellbeing	8.2	26.0
Social competence	9.0	24.5
Emotional maturity	7.5	23.4
Language and cognitive skills	7.4	42.4
Communication and general knowledge skills	7.2	26.3

Apart from the effect that these levels of disadvantage have on the capacity of children to engage with schooling at their entry point, there are significant other implications. Research has demonstrated a high correlation between levels of disadvantage as measured by the AEDI and the later literacy, numeracy and other cognitive and behavioural outcomes of children. The research showed that all five of the AEDI domains predicted later literacy and numeracy outcomes for children as measured by National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) at Years 3, 5, and 7. The best predictors were the Language and cognitive development and Communication skills and general knowledge domains, on which Indigenous children in the NT show the highest levels of vulnerability. But all domains are important; for each additional vulnerable domain in pre-primary there was an increased percentage of children with low reading and numeracy scores in Year 7 (Brinkman et al, 2011; AEDI n.d.).

The figure below shows the close correlation between the number of AEDI domains on which children are vulnerable and poor performance in NAPLAN reading and numeracy at Year 7 (Figure taken from AEDI, n.d).

Figure 12: Poor Year 7 NAPLAN performance by vulnerability in number of AEDI domains in pre-primary



Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). N.D

A further research study shows that AEDI data perform relatively well in predicting age 8 mathematical thinking, language and literacy and behavioural outcomes (Brinkman et al, 2012; AEDSI n.d.). These data suggest that reducing the vulnerability of Indigenous children on the AEDI domains at school entry could have material impacts on later school achievement.

Early childhood programs in the Northern Territory

The review recognises that considerable work has been undertaken by the Department of Education (DoE) to develop a comprehensive educational response the needs of children before they reach school age. The Northern Territory Government (NTG) is making a major policy commitment to improving outcomes for children in their early childhood years. The *Early Childhood Plan for the Northern Territory 2013–2016*, in draft at the time of writing, includes a focus on ‘children’s cognitive, language and social development’ (NTG 2013: 9). This involves a commitment to universal early learning programs including early childhood education and care services, childcare, pre-school programs and improvement in the academic levels of parents. For vulnerable children (who are mainly Indigenous children), the policy commits to ‘innovative [pre-school] models for children living in small remote communities’. The policy has a strong focus on integrated service to remote communities (ibid.: 11).

Information provided for this review indicates that effort in the early years has been an ongoing priority for governments. The Australian and NT governments have been working to integrate child and family services, particularly in remote communities ‘where the population is among Australia’s most culturally diverse and geographically isolated, with the greatest health, wellbeing, education and infrastructure needs of any Australians’ (NTG, n.d.: 8-9).



In reviewing the work done to date we have paid attention to the Masters review of literacy policy in the NT, which suggested that:

low average student performance levels in the Territory, particularly among Indigenous students, have their origins in the years before school ... The implication for schools, I believe, is that they must become increasingly involved in the learning and development of children in the years prior to school (that is, from birth) (Masters, 2011: iv-v).

This view is supported by research on the benefits of early years programs. Schweinhart et al, in a cost-benefit analysis of different preschool programs, note that:

Young people born in poverty have greater educational and economic success and reduced crime rates if they attend a high-quality preschool program than if they do not do so; such programs return seven to ten dollars to taxpayers for every dollar invested (Schweinhart et al, 2010: 5).

Silburn et al, in a major review of the literature on English language acquisition and instructional approaches, offer insights into the importance of early language learning in the kinds of contexts typical of the NT. The paper notes that:

Indigenous children with some proficiency in English on entry to school have generally better educational outcomes than those with little or no knowledge of English ... This ... highlights the importance of promoting early language and cognitive stimulation for all children from birth, through infancy and through their pre- and primary school years (Silburn et al 2011: 47).

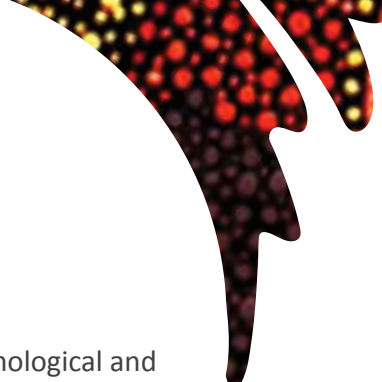
This suggests that programs including components designed to stimulate and support language learning should be in place well before the commencement of school.

The research also indicates that children with:

a wider vocabulary and proficiency in their first languages have generally better literacy development than students with less well developed early language skills ... [E]xposure to two languages from early in childhood has cognitive, social and educational benefits (ibid.).

The view that dual language programs are effective is also supported by a research report developed as part of the 3A Linkage Project related to the FaFT program, providing 'the rationale [for] ... supporting Indigenous languages while introducing English as an *additional* language to young Indigenous children'. The paper surveys the evidence that maintaining first language at the same time as introducing English provides developmental and cognitive advantages and that learning two languages in the early years has no material negative effects (Taylor and others, 2014).

Further support is provided by research into school readiness. Prior notes that raising the quality of child language at an early age has lasting positive effects in improving school readiness. This should include 'systematic instruction in language and literacy skills in pre-school to enhance success in the first years of school' (Prior et al, 2011: 14). The most influential factors in readiness



for school are language competencies and pre-literacy capacities, including phonological and phonemic awareness and letter knowledge. These capacities can be developed in both first language and English. The work of Zubrick et al on Indigenous child health reaches similar conclusions, arguing for 'language and cognitive enrichment programmes at kindergarten and pre-school' (Zubrick et al, 2006: 498). The AEDI research cited above also indicates that developmental vulnerability in language and communication is a reliable indicator of future difficulties in schooling.

Prior also notes the application of this research to Indigenous children:

The case of indigenous children in Australia is a salient example of the problems when children are typically inadequately prepared for school, with poor English language development and limited or no access to pre-school, and are struggling to cope with the early years in the English-speaking classroom, and consequently reluctant to sustain school attendance (Prior et al, 2011: 14).

It is clear from research that early childhood programs designed to address school readiness in disadvantaged populations should be sustained and consistent and should begin early in a child's life. High-quality child-care and early learning and enrichment programs for children from birth up to pre-school entry are associated with better cognitive development and language comprehension. Pre-school programs are also associated with improved school readiness in disadvantaged children. A critical finding, however, is that both early childhood programs and high-quality pre-school programs are essential to gain maximum benefit, since the benefit of each is reinforced by the other (Li et al, 2011).

There is good evidence about the importance of teacher qualifications in determining the quality of early childhood programs. A summary paper reporting on a 2013 research report indicates that children whose pre-school teacher had a relevant degree or diploma qualification received significantly higher Year 3 NAPLAN scores in all domains except grammar (Warren & Haisken DeNew, 2013). The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse also reports research demonstrating that:

The general educational levels of staff and their specific preparation in early childhood education predict the richness of language and cognitive experiences, and the extent to which interactions with children are positive, responsive and sensitive....Greater staff training and higher levels of staff qualifications have a beneficial effect on children's developmental outcomes (Harrison et al, 2012: 6).

One of the key criteria for effective early learning programs is parent engagement. The account of the Smarter Schools National Partnership makes clear that:

We know from research, and we know from practice, that when schools and families do work together in partnership, children perform better academically, they stay in school longer, and they enjoy their schooling (DEEWR, 2011).



In addition to early language learning and parent engagement, sustained effort and close integration between agencies and programs is also essential. The AMA report referred to earlier (AMA, 2013), which indicates the extent of inter-generational disadvantage, refers to the need for evidence-based programs to reduce adverse health and developmental outcomes ‘to break the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage’ (AMA, 2013: 3).

Integrating services continues to be a priority to ensure young children and families are engaged in early learning and care programs. Key initiatives include FaFT, mobile pre-schools and integrated service delivery through the Child and Family Centres (CFCs) initiative and more broadly. The NTG will need to work closely with the Australian Government to streamline and guarantee targeted and ongoing funding if the success of these early years programs is to be sustained.

Families as First Teachers

One major component of the NT’s strategy is the FaFT program. It has been in place since June 2009 when it was established in six very remote communities. It has now been established in the focus towns. In 2011 a mobile FaFT program was established to provide access to 24 very remote communities in the Central Australia, Barkly and Katherine regions. (DECS 2013: 9; Menzies 2013: 55).


In 2012 the program engaged 2455 children and 2294 adults in the 45 communities it serves. Given that there are fewer than 6000 Indigenous children aged 0-4 in the NT (ABS, 2011), and that the program is only available in very remote settings, this suggests that approximately 70% of eligible children in serviced communities are involved to some extent in FaFT.

FaFT is designed ‘to improve developmental outcomes for remote Indigenous children’ (DECS, 2013C: 9). It aims to improve the school readiness of children (and their parents) by providing educational activities in an environment that is culturally responsive.

The program has a central goal to improve parent engagement both as a goal in itself and to support child development. The Program Handbook makes the intention clear:

The FaFT program builds family knowledge of child development.... Key contributing factors to promote optimum development, such as parental knowledge of early childhood learning and development, parenting skills, health, hygiene, nutrition and family functioning, are addressed (DECS, 2013C: 10).

The focus on the engagement of parents is supported by data on the relationship between maternal educational attainment and student NAPLAN scores. Hancock et al show that higher levels of maternal education are directly correlated with higher NAPLAN scores, and the lower the level of attendance of the child, the greater the impact of maternal education. This suggests that keeping young mothers engaged in education, and/or in educational activity with their children might lead to improvement in student outcomes (Hancock et al, 2013).



Systematic, conscious parental engagement and capacity building would appear to be highly successful, with most of the FaFT services having a high level of attendance and community ownership.

FaFT has a well-developed theoretical framework and is strongly based in research. There is good evidence that the approaches that make up the program have been effective in other settings. It involves four broad elements:

- early childhood learning, which includes the Abecedarian approach (notably conversational reading and learning games, many of which have now been adapted for the NT environment), a focus on adult-child interactions, adult learning opportunities, support and routines focused on nutrition and health and range of other activities;
- parent capacity building, partly delivered through the early learning components, and partly through workshops, coaching and family support for parents;
- literacy and numeracy at home, providing resources, including picture books, games and coaching to parents for use in the home; and
- transition to school, including activities adapted to local circumstances and designed to support school readiness in children and facilitate a smooth transition for children into pre-school by working with families and schools (DECS 2013: 20-29).

The program has also recently completed, in collaboration with Northern Territory Libraries, a baby board book project which culminated in the development of bilingual baby books in six remote communities. This project served multiple purposes beyond the final product as it explored ways that people interact with babies in the contemporary world, and reflected on similarities and differences with traditional practices. The project is also an example of the commitment within FaFT to foster both first language and English.

On each site the program has a Family Educator and a Family Liaison Officer (FLO). Playgroup Leaders are also funded in five sites under another Australian Government initiative. Indigenous staff members are intended to be employed in each location, and staff are offered training. Some staff are being provided with accredited training in Certificate III in Children's Services while in other cases, training for staff is provided mainly through FaFT workshops or by on-the-job training led by the Family Educators and supported and monitored by system Program Advisors located in regions. Playgroup Leaders are mostly trained on site by the Family Educators. It is intended that FaFT workshop content will link to competencies in Certificate III Community Services Work, which is the recommended minimum qualification for FLOs.

An early process evaluation of FaFT found that 'the program is heading in a positive direction as a vehicle for the delivery of place-based services for Aboriginal children and families. The program is clearly meeting an important community need' (Menzies, 2011: vi). One key factor in its early success was identified as local community-based support and supervision (ibid.: vii).



More recently, an evaluation of the *Strong Start Bright Futures* program stated:

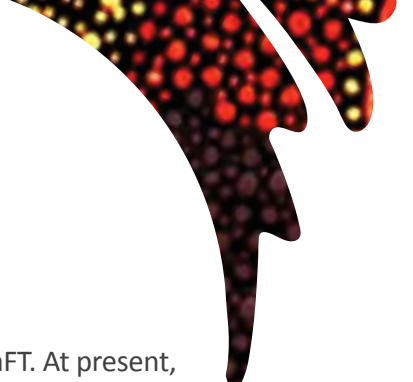
FaFT is thriving at most sites and has a significantly sized Indigenous workforce. Early indications are that, largely as a result of the FaFT program, children are more 'school ready' when they commence school (Menzies 2013: 56).

The evaluation report notes, however, that the veracity of this largely anecdotal evidence will be tested by improvements in the AEDI data and school attendance data. It proposes a strong evaluation program to ensure that the initiative is achieving measurable improvement in its key target areas and to provide feedback on areas for further development.

A further evaluation is being conducted by Melbourne University over three years. Confirming evidence about the value of FaFT will have to await findings from the evaluation. The review was impressed with the strong research base for the elements of the program, and with anecdotal responses from some sites where implementation was seen as highly effective. At some sites, the program had clearly attracted significant interest and continuing engagement from parents and it appeared that parents were enthusiastic, albeit sometimes in small numbers, about the program.

Despite the evidence for success, we note two significant issues that were raised by respondents in the review process. In a number of interviews conducted by the review there were comments about uneven implementation of FaFT. One respondent estimated that the program was being implemented fully effectively in about 50% of cases. It was beyond the scope of the review to collect sufficiently fine-grained data to determine the truth of these suggestions, but weak or uneven implementation of other programs was a strong theme in the review. The critical factors are likely to be the support of school leadership and staff capacity and training:

- There were anecdotal reports of uneven support for FaFT from school principals and leadership teams in some locations, along with concern about the extent of communication with FaFT staff in some schools. Some concern was expressed in the consultation process about lack of explicit support and engagement from school leaders. This should be a key responsibility of principals in relation to early childhood programs. It would be useful to establish clear guidelines for principals to ensure common approaches across sites in support for FaFT.
- Some respondents claimed that a significant proportion of Indigenous program staff did not have access to accredited training, although they were offered substantial professional development. The development by the Department of the Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011–2021 reflected the research indication that early childhood reforms will be ineffective 'unless workforce training issues are addressed' (Moss et al: 4). The research cited above on the importance of qualifications and training for early childhood staff is also noted (see Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, N.D.; Harrison et al, 2012). The early childhood team within the DoE should continue work to develop a resource to support assessment of local staff capability and the design of professional learning targeted to identified need.



The further significant issue concerns the communities that are benefiting from FaFT. At present, only remote communities have access to the program, for reasons to do with funding and licensing restrictions. This leaves unaddressed the issue of early childhood programs for the considerable population of Indigenous children who are living in towns, including town camps but also including those who are living with families or in other arrangements. In some cases these living arrangements are temporary, but the population, especially in the town camps, overlaps substantially with those in remote communities and these children have the same needs. The review proposes that the current restrictions on the delivery of FaFT should be removed so that the program can be delivered in all locations where there is a significant population of Indigenous children who would benefit.

The review supports the rollout of FaFT. It is possible that the current implementation program has reached almost as many sites as is feasible in very remote settings. An internal review should be undertaken to determine:

- whether there are any remaining remote communities with a target group large enough to support extension of FaFT; and
- whether there are sites that have not yet achieved effective implementation or staff training and what remedial action is required.

The period between the 2009 and 2012 AEDI data collections saw the rollout of FaFT and the wider implementation of the pre-school program. While reservations were expressed about the reliability of inter-collection changes between the 2009 and 2012 AEDI collections, it would be worth examining the data by community to determine whether there is any association between engagement in FaFT and pre-school and local changes in AEDI results between collections. If this were the case, it would be valuable support for the program.

Pre-schools

The NT is committed to ensuring that every Indigenous four year old in a remote community has access to a high quality early childhood education program for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks a year. The NT has committed to benchmarks of 95% of children having access and 90% attending. Indigenous children are eligible to attend pre-school if they turn three on or before 30 June of the enrolment year. The review saw evidence that this early start was occurring in some schools.

The department now indicates that through Universal Access to early years learning, 90% of the pre-school cohort has access to services in the year prior to full-time schooling. The Indigenous enrolment for this cohort is 79.3%. The AEDI data show that the number of Indigenous children attending a pre-school program rose from 865 in 2009 to 1078 in 2012.

Pre-schools are provided in association with schools and mostly on school sites. In addition to on-site pre-schools, the department provides mobile pre-schools which service small communities in very remote locations. Mobile pre-schools visit communities for two days on average. They are staffed by a qualified teacher (not necessarily an early childhood teacher). The department is also responsible for registration of pre-schools.



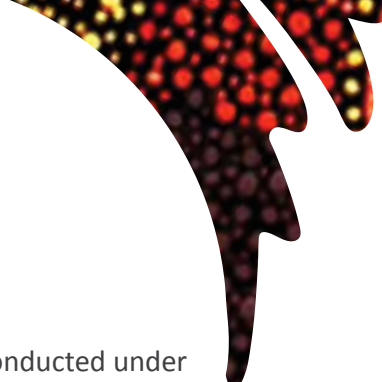
The review strongly supports the pre-school program. There are, however, two areas of concern that were raised often during the review. The first concerns parent engagement in pre-schools. It appears that the strong levels of parent engagement evident in FaFT do not continue when children make the transition to some pre-schools. While some schools had made efforts to overcome this problem, there seemed to be a barrier in operation. Over the course of the review, many of the FaFT sites showed evidence of a strong transition program in place to support families with the move to pre-school, which is part of the FaFT program. However the disconnect between FaFT and the pre-school in supporting this program was very apparent in many cases. This lack of recognition by the pre-schools and school leadership of the importance of managing the transition to preschool is seen as a fundamental issue in supporting children and families to engage with school.

Factors suggested as causes of the drop in parent participation when children reach pre-school included poor parent experience of schools, unwelcoming pre-school programs, lack of intervention by school leaders to ensure continuing parent involvement, the unintended effect of an institutional transition (where FaFT is not school-located) and a general reduction in parent participation in education as children grow older, not confined to the Indigenous population.

Some of these factors are outside the control of schools, but where schools themselves have erected barriers to parent engagement (or have not dismantled them), efforts should be made to continue the valuable involvement that is generated by FaFT. Silburn et al note the problematic effect of transitions in the lives of Indigenous children and the need for programs, services and staff to support the movement of children and parents across transition points (Silburn et al, 2011). Similarly, the *What Works* program argues that the effectiveness of student transitions between the stages and phases of learning (including early childhood learning) depends on social, emotional and cognitive readiness in the child as well as school readiness to support the transition (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). There is ample evidence of the importance of continued parent engagement with the institutions of schooling in fostering improved engagement and achievement for children.

The second issue concerns the content of pre-school programs. A number of respondents noted that the play-based approach supported by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) could be ineffective without some adaptation in developing early literacy skills in young Indigenous children who do not speak English and have not had the kinds of pre-literacy experiences characteristic of more advantaged children. This reflects one finding in a review of mobile pre-schools, which used a classroom observation approach to measure teacher skills in mobile pre-school literacy teaching. The review found that literacy knowledge was the lowest represented skill set, with a score of only 26% (compared with 83% for 'respect'). The report notes:

Skills not evident in assistant teachers' knowledge domain in the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule included being explicit about reading and writing purposes and having the metalanguage to explain structure of written English (Nutton et al, 2013: 34).



Review respondents suggested that both the EYLF and the evaluation process conducted under the National Quality Framework (NQF) are based on the expectation that children will engage with literacy through play or informally. Some schools reported that they found the evaluators negative about formal literacy programs in pre-schools and had decided not to admit the nature of these programs in the evaluation process. This is denied by those responsible for the evaluation process. The language of the EYLF suggests a very broad conception of literacy as including:

a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, story telling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing (DEEWR, 2012A: 38).

It is notable that the document makes no mention of more formal or technical aspects of literacy, which are likely to be a key part (though only part) of what young Indigenous children need. For these children, more formal exposure to phonological and phonemic awareness¹¹ and early literacy experiences would be beneficial in addition to informal and play-based and child-driven approaches and a rich language environment.

As Konza argues, ‘The foundations of children’s language and later literacy are shaped by the modelling and responses of their parents and other significant people’. Among the matters that affect later literacy are the number and variety of words that children hear, the reading aloud of books and the availability of educational toys. Oral language and the early understanding of the ‘alphabetic principle’ (the matching of written symbols with specific sounds) are a key to phonological awareness and both early and later literacy (Konza, 2010: 2). Where children do not have access to these experiences at home, pre-schools can provide them.

Neilson argues similarly that phonological awareness should be explicitly addressed in pre-schools:

partly because it relates to a fairly new area of research, and partly because teachers and policy makers are typically not well trained in the area of phonological or phonemic awareness ... It is absolutely critical ... for preschool children to be able to attend to the phonology of the speech stream in an analytic way, attending to larger units of sound than phonemes, before they are introduced to phonics lessons (Neilson, 2014: 5).

Neilson also makes clear that phonological awareness should be a focus of first language teaching as well as English teaching in the years prior to formal schooling:

[T]here is a very good opportunity to use First Languages (in addition to English) to support the development of both implicit and explicit phonological awareness at the syllable level, as a pre-literacy strategy. There is abundant evidence from other language groups that basic phonological awareness strategies can transfer from one language to another (ibid.: 7).

11 In some discussions, ‘phonological’ and ‘phonemic’ are used somewhat interchangeably. In the draft report of the review, the term ‘phonemic’ was mostly used to refer to learning about sound systems in language. Based on consultation feedback and submissions, the term ‘phonological’ is largely used in this version, since it is a broader term that includes ‘phonemic’ and more explicitly includes sound segments larger than phonemes (e.g. onsets, rimes and syllables).



This review proposes that work be undertaken by the department, using the services of experts in pre-schooling and early literacy, to develop advice to pre-school teachers about the content and sequencing of a more explicit phonological awareness program in pre-schools, along with approaches to delivering the program that sit within the EYLF. The program should be designed specifically with Indigenous children in mind. It should address phonological awareness in both first language and English, recognising that many Indigenous children have levels of oral English that make it difficult for them to develop phonological awareness in English at this stage. There is, however, evidence indicating that it is developmentally helpful for children to begin learning a second language in early childhood (Taylor and others, 2014).

The program should be designed for delivery to and by assistant teachers as well as teachers. The work should be reviewed by the early years team, curriculum literacy personnel and School Operations prior to use. It should be implemented with professional learning support in early literacy for pre-school teachers and assistant teachers.

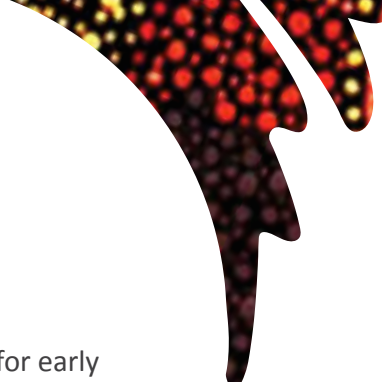
Child and Family Centres

The 2011–2014 Department of Education and Training (DET) Strategic Plan outlined the introduction of the Integrated Child and Family Services (IFS) initiative:

DET will partner with Government and Non-Government agencies to develop early childhood integrated family services as a focal point for families and children from 0-8 years particularly in Territory Growth Towns. A leader will be employed to coordinate and implement high quality and aligned services in each town (DET, 2011).

IFS had an ambitious goal to lead the whole of government to integrate child and family services. The department's internal IFS Handbook indicated that it proposed to seek the integration of early childhood development, care and learning; parent and family support services and programs; maternal and child health; and early intervention programs. The program's ambition seems to have been its undoing. The IFS agenda was costly and complex, relying on a small unit in the DET Early Childhood Policy and Regulation division creating NT-wide service integration. With the 2012 DoE reform agenda, the IFS unit disbanded and its work, to a large extent, vanished.

One key piece of IFS work, however, remains. The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NPA IECD) supported the establishment of five Indigenous CFCs. The purpose of the CFCs was to enable integration of service delivery including antenatal services, child and maternal health services, parenting and family support services, and early learning and child care. They were intended to provide educational and health services separate from, but closely connected to, the school. The NPA IECD indicates that the centres were to be responsive to community needs and depend on establishing effective community engagement (COAG, 2009, NPA IECD: 4). The CFCs were to be built in Yuendumu, Maningrida, Gunbalanya, Ngukurr and Palmerston. At the time of writing this review, all five were under construction and due to be completed by June 2014.



The CFCs provide the department with an opportunity to pilot a flagship model for early childhood services. At many of the communities the review visited, young mothers drop out of school due to pregnancy and do not return. Given that level of maternal literacy is a key predictor of a child's future literacy attainment, CFCs could provide an opportunity for these young women to re-engage with educational options in a supportive environment. Educational courses, childcare and parenting support could all be delivered through the CFCs. This would assist other existing programs. The FaFT Program Handbook, for example, makes a clear commitment to integrated service delivery. The program:

works in collaboration with other agencies. Strong partnerships with health, shires, schools, and other agencies are critical for the program success (DECS, 2013C: 10).

The notion of education and health working collaboratively has many perceived benefits to both families and children. Many remote school staff made comments to the review about the lack of communication between the two agencies resulting in service provision problems. If services operating through CFCs could have a common assessment and referral process, this would improve capacity to cater for a child's needs and provide early diagnosis and interventions. Services could work with families on all the key domains of the AEDI in a manner that is clear and consistent and driven by the needs of the child. Achieving this outcome will involve managing privacy and other legal considerations in access to health and educational information about children.

This approach reflects a widespread view about the urgency of establishing integrated service delivery for remote communities. Work by the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) with a group of schools with high Indigenous populations, for example, noted that there was a consistent theme in schools being expected to provide non-educational services to students. The study recommended the establishment of 'a small number of whole of government service delivery trials' (O'Keefe et al, 2012: 72). This review argues that the CFCs provide an opportunity to put this proposal into action.

We understand that there is at present no certainty about the availability of operational funding beyond mid-2014 to ensure the effective implementation of the CFCs. The department and the Australian Government should work together to ensure that this funding is secured. The review proposes that the five CFCs be the site of trials and a longitudinal evaluation to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of an integrated model of service delivery involving at least health and education, with the potential to further integrate children's services. This is also a practical means of beginning to implement the intention of the first recommendation in this report.



Recommendations

16. Maintain Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in its current form pending data from the evaluation and:
 - a. remove barriers to delivery of FaFT in towns, beginning with town camps;
 - b. consider whether there are additional remote communities with sufficient numbers to justify FaFT programs;
 - c. improve implementation where weaknesses are identified;
 - d. establish guidelines for principals to ensure clear expectations about their role in supporting FaFT and managing FaFT staff;
 - e. ensure that principals establish good communication with and support for FaFT staff and programs; and
 - f. improve the training profile of Indigenous staff by identifying individual training needs and developing targeted training programs.
 17. Strengthen parent engagement by requiring all schools to establish a transition program from Families as First Teachers to pre-school, and from pre-school to school, that:
 - a. provides ongoing support for both children and parents;
 - b. supports parents to understand the developmental stages of their children; and
 - c. provides opportunities for parents to engage with their child's education.
 18. Define appropriate phonological awareness skills and teaching strategies and implement them in pre-schools in both first language and English, alongside broad balanced early language programs.
 19. Seek adequate funding for the implementation and operation of the Child and Family Centres, establish them as trial sites for the delivery of integrated early childhood services and evaluate their effectiveness as a mode for integrated service delivery.
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Chapter Eight

Primary education

The critical issue for primary schooling in the Northern Territory (NT) is English literacy. Indigenous children, especially those in Priority 1 schools, are behind both their non-Indigenous counterparts and equivalent cohorts in the rest of Australia. Literacy is the foundation for all subsequent success in schooling. Children who do not achieve effective English literacy are less likely to complete their schooling, and more likely to be unemployed, earn less over their lifetimes and experience poorer health outcomes.

Work undertaken by the review indicates that factors contributing to the difficulty in providing primary education in schools (especially, though not only, in remote locations) include:

- matters that schools cannot control, such as poor attendance, lack of an English language or literate home environment, health issues and social dislocation in the communities from which children come;
- the failure of the Department of Education (DoE) to make clear and implement the non-negotiables in primary education;
- wide variations in school practice in the area of literacy (and other areas) and the use of some programs that are not supported by strong evidence of success;
- no common approach to systematically measuring and teaching phonological and phonemic awareness and associated decoding concepts;
- differing views and practices regarding the relative importance of first language maintenance and cultural learning in the development of English literacy.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised significant issues related to this chapter, including:

- evidence in favour of bilingual approaches to literacy teaching, and concern that it had not been effectively addressed in the draft;
- evidence about the appropriate place of first language learning and concern that the draft misunderstands its role;
- concern about the use of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) as a census assessment and its effect on English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learners;
- recognition of the key importance of English literacy as a foundation for success in schooling; and
- general support, though some mixed views, about the emphasis on phonemic awareness in the draft.



Learning Lessons

The *Learning Lessons* report had a substantial focus on language and literacy acquisition. It acknowledged the critical importance of the early acquisition of literacy: ‘... children who fall behind are unlikely to catch up and in fact are more likely to find the gap widening in secondary school’ (Collins, 1999: 96). The review concluded that:

... the Standard Australian English oracy and literacy of the majority of Indigenous students in remote and to a lesser extent urban schools are simply not at a level that enables full participation in further education, training or employment (Ibid.: 118).

The review cited English as a Second Language (ESL), EAL/D status, ear disease and the need for a ‘structured induction process’ for literacy as potential reasons. It also noted ‘the absence of well-defined and longitudinally tested pathways for the development of oracy, literacy and numeracy competence for Indigenous students’ and ‘Staffroom after staffroom ... saturated with literacy media and curriculum support materials’ (ibid., 131). This wide variety in literacy approaches was also noted in an Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report in 2003 (Frigo et al, 2003).

Learning Lessons provided a detailed discussion of different approaches to bilingual education, noting the continuing controversy about these approaches. The establishment of bilingual programs in 1973 was based on arguments about improved attendance and better outcomes in English literacy and numeracy, but also on concerns about the formal recognition of Indigenous language, culture and law. The NT Government decided in 1998 to phase out additional funding for bilingual education. The report notes that the approach originally used was the ‘staircase’ (or ‘step’) approach, involving curriculum (including literacy) instruction predominantly in first language and a gradual transition to English literacy and English instruction by some point in the primary years. It also noted that at the time of the review, there had been an *ad hoc* shift towards a 50:50 model. The program had found it difficult to provide consistent access to high-quality teaching but had provided a high proportion of Indigenous teaching staff across the NT. The review argued that the term ‘bilingual education’ had lost clear meaning (Collins, 1999: 120-24).

The Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee report (LLISC, 2005) indicated that ESL was a priority and the Accelerated Literacy program (which Collins had noted positively) was being rolled out to urban and remote schools. The department claimed that the development of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) ‘ensures consistency across the subject areas as well as providing consistent assessment frameworks’. Schools were expected to develop ‘a School Literacy and Numeracy Plan that commits the whole school to consistent approaches in English oracy, literacy and numeracy’ (ibid.: 40-41).



The situation now

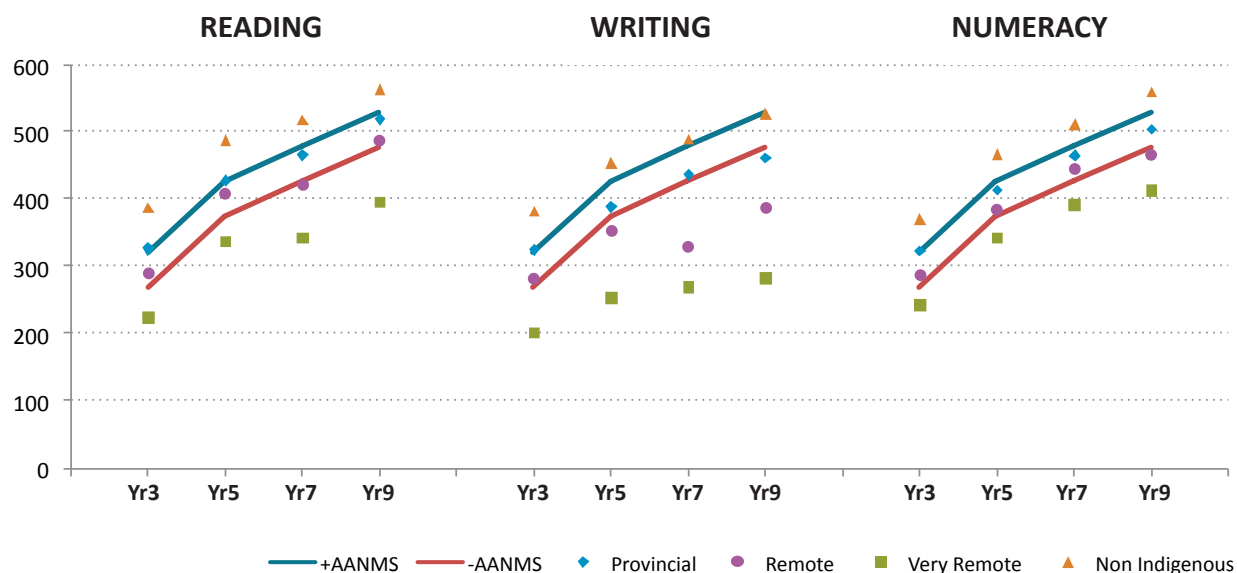
This section of the report relies on NAPLAN as an important indicator of success. A number of respondents to the draft report raised issues about the cultural appropriateness of NAPLAN for Indigenous children, especially in the early years of schooling. The review recognises these issues, and proposes the use of other means of assessing and reporting progress to sit alongside NAPLAN as a way of providing a more effective measure of individual improvement during the first few years of schooling. In the end, however, if Indigenous children are achieving English literacy, that should be reflected in NAPLAN scores. If NAPLAN shows that Indigenous children as a group are still not gaining the levels of English literacy that are essential for success in schooling, and equivalent to those achieved by other Australian children, that is a problem that education systems must address.

NAPLAN results for recent years mirror those reported by Collins, suggesting that initiatives in the intervening years have not had the anticipated effect. Figure 13 shows the average 2013 NAPLAN Mean Scale Scores for Indigenous students by geolocation (and non-Indigenous students across the NT for comparison purposes) in reading and writing in English. The key points to be made are:

- the non-Indigenous student cohort tends to sit above the national minimum standard (with the exception of Year 9 writing);
- the provincial Indigenous student cohort tends to sit within the at-national-minimum-standard band (with the exception of Year 9 writing which was lower);
- the remote Indigenous student cohort tends to sit close to the bottom of the at-national-minimum-standard band (except for Years 7 and 9 writing which are significantly lower and Year 5 writing which is marginally lower); and
- the very remote Indigenous student cohort is below national minimum standard for each year level and domain, and the gap widens over time, dramatically in the case of writing).



Figure 13: Northern Territory Government Schools, 2013 NAPLAN Results – Reading, Writing and Numeracy¹²

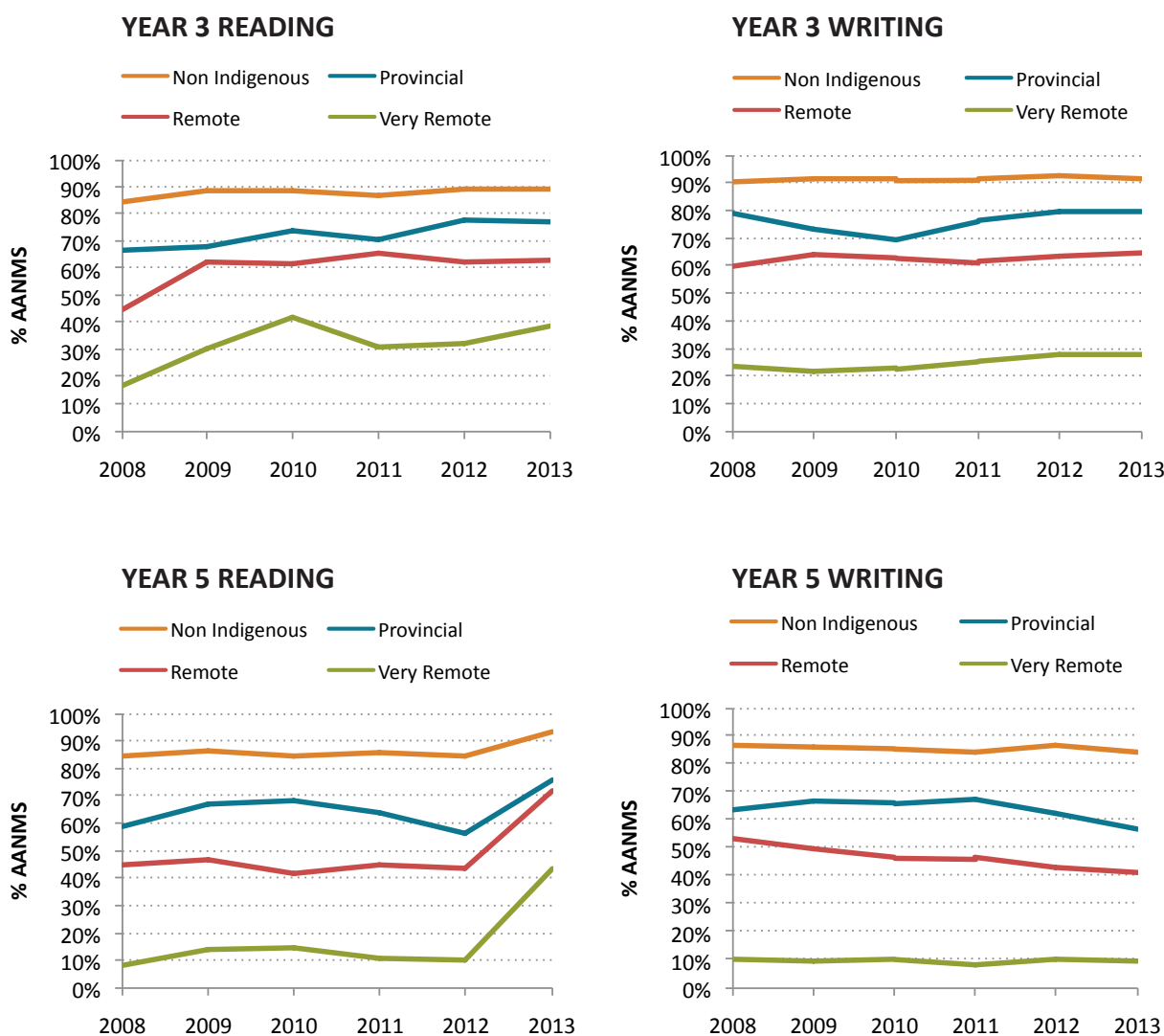


Source: DoE NAPLAN School Detail Results data

Figure 14 shows the percentage of Year 3 and 5 students achieving at or above national minimum standard (AANMS) from 2008-2013. Almost 90% of non-Indigenous students achieve AANMS in each domain. Provincial Indigenous students are mostly between 70% and 80% in both domains in Year 3 and mostly between 60% and 70% in Year 5. Remote Indigenous students average just over 60% at Year 3 and between 40% and 50% in Year 5 (despite what appears an anomalous result in Year 5 reading in 2013 across all cohorts). Year 3 very remote students average around 35% in reading and 20-30% in writing, dropping to about 10% in both domains at Year 5 (again noting the apparent anomaly at Year 5 reading in 2013).

12 +AANMS represents the line above which students are achieving results above national minimum standards.
 -AANMS represents the line below which students are failing to achieve national minimum standards.
 Results between -AANMS and +AANMS indicate achievement at national minimum standards.

Figure 14: Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Indigenous students by Geolocation¹³



Source: DoE NAPLAN School Detail Results data

These results confirm the general underperformance of Indigenous students in primary school English literacy, the association of increasing underperformance with greater remoteness, and the drastic failure of very remote children. Given the significance of early English literacy attainment as an indicator of success in schooling in Australia, many Indigenous students, and very remote students in particular, are already unlikely to succeed in schooling by Year 3. By Year 5, almost all very remote students and well over half of all Indigenous students are likely to continue to experience failure throughout their schooling.

¹³ Notes: MSS is the Mean Scale Score. The non-Indigenous series are for students Northern Territory wide. There is a break in series for the writing domain from 2010 to 2011 due to a change in the testing genre from narrative to persuasive.



English literacy in the Northern Territory

Masters argues that the pattern of NAPLAN results ‘points to a major challenge: to increase levels of school readiness and to close achievement gaps at the earliest possible ages’.

He recommends that the system:

... search for new ‘breakthrough’ strategies to increase the English language skills and school readiness levels of young Indigenous children (Masters, 2011: 40).


The current review has found that, while school plans document approaches to literacy and numeracy, the range of programs in use is vast, and the evidence basis for the use of specific programs is extremely varied. The plethora of approaches described in earlier reports still stands. There is no clear general commitment across the NT to any common approach to English literacy education. There is no policy in place that would require particular evidence-based approaches to literacy. There is a remarkable absence of coherence and consistency across the system, even in an area such as English literacy, which has been such a clear weakness.

An examination of School Annual Operating Plans reveals a different approach to literacy in virtually every school. There is no common approach or shared understanding about how to achieve effective literacy with Indigenous students, especially those with no literacy background and little or no English. The review observed what appeared to be some outstanding practice in literacy education including examples in very remote locations. Despite this, the outcomes overall for Indigenous children remain poor, especially in remote and very remote locations.

The department has identified *First Steps Literacy*, *Accelerated Literacy*, *QuickSmart Literacy*, *Gateways to Literacy* and *Walking Talking Texts* as programs that have been evaluated against the critical features of its Evidence Based Practices Framework (DET, 2011C). None of these programs appears to provide a complete solution and there is no guidance to schools about which programs should be used in specific situations. Further, there is no evidence that this advice has led to preferential use of these programs, and the review has identified a wide range of other programs that schools have taken up.

What we already know

We know how children learn to read, and the elements of effective teaching to achieve literacy for native speakers of English (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). The research consensus is that effective early reading programs focus on five essential elements: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). There is widespread recognition that both text-level teaching and sub-word-level teaching are essential.



These views were echoed in Australia's National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, which recommended that:

[T]eachers provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundational reading proficiency. Equally, that teachers provide an integrated approach to reading that supports the development of oral language, vocabulary, grammar, reading fluency, comprehension and the literacies of new technologies. (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2005; 38).

Konza supports the addition of oral language as part of the Big Six program (Konza, 2010). This is likely to be critical for Indigenous children, especially those without oral English. Second language learners often begin to learn to read English with little knowledge of basic grammatical structures and vocabulary. For these learners, 'learning to read becomes less about comprehension or getting information from text than a tool for developing basic language skills' (Nassalji, 2011: 175).

In Australia, the Australian Council for Educational Research has recently conducted a literature review for the New South Wales Ministerial Advisory Group on Literacy and Numeracy (Meiers et al, 2013). This review identified eleven whole-class literacy interventions and five small-group or individual programs. It concluded that there was no robust research evidence on the impact of *Accelerated Literacy*; *Best Start*; *First Steps*; *Language, Learning and Literacy*; *Literacy on Track*; *Literacy Lessons*; *Focus on Reading*; *Off to a Good Start: Learning to Read K–2*; *Principals as Literacy Leaders*; *Reading Matters*; or *Reading to Learn*. There was some evidence of the impact of *Successful Language Learners*, a whole-school ESL approach, and two small group intervention programs: *MINILIT* and *QuickSmart Literacy*. Only *Reading Recovery* and *MULTILIT*, both of which are small group or individual intervention programs, were supported by a robust base of research evidence.

The review has been struck by the extent to which phonological and phonemic awareness has been cited as a weakness in specific English literacy programs. Evidence from *Reading Recovery* (Tunmer et al, 2013) and *Accelerated Literacy* (Robinson et al, 2009A) suggest that these programs, although designed for poor readers, seem to fail with those readers who have the greatest problems; Indigenous children with little or no English or literacy behaviour. In both cases, reviews have found the programs were weak in phonological and phonemic awareness (Tunmer et al, 2013; Monash, 2008).

Beyond the experience of Indigenous children, the value of phonological awareness (and the teaching of phonics) is based on compelling evidence. There has been significant research and policy attention to the importance of these elements both as key entry behaviours for reading and as indicators of later reading success. The United States National Reading Panel argued that phonemic awareness and letter knowledge (phonics) were the best two school-entry predictors of how well children will learn to read in their first two years of literacy learning at school (National Reading Panel, 2000; see also Neilson, 2014). Research has indicated that both high intensity short-term study and longer-duration study are effective (Carson et al, 2013; Shapiro and Solity, 2008).



Failures with some children of programs like Accelerated Literacy (AL) are probably related to the fact that only 12% of the very remote Indigenous population speaks English in the home, compared with 89% of the provincial Indigenous population (ABS, 2013). These children come from cultures that have been predominantly non-literate, and are unlikely to make progress without attention to the foundational building blocks of literacy (in both first language and English where possible).

Yonovitz and Yonovitz (2000) argues that there is strong evidence that phonemic and phonological awareness are critical to emergent literacy, and that children do not spontaneously associate spoken or signed utterances with written language symbols unless they are provided with adequate models or otherwise taught to do so:

Many indigenous cultures have not traditionally had written languages and have to make an enormously difficult transition to be included in literate society (Ibid.).

Support for this view comes from Konza, who reiterates the critical importance of phonological awareness (Konza, 2011: 2) and phonics:

Learning the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent is ‘non-negotiable’ if children are to become independent readers (Ibid.: 3).


Konza also argues that while embedded approaches to phonics (drawing attention to letter-sounds incidentally) can work for children with already rich literacy backgrounds and experiences, those children who do not come from literate backgrounds are likely to need more explicit and systematic teaching of analytic and synthetic phonics. Neilson similarly argues that:

... the children who are most helped by extra explicit attention to phonemic awareness are those who were most at risk in terms of initial low phonemic awareness when they entered the program ... If phonics is being taught by inexplicit ‘phonics’ programs, the problem of educators taking phonemic awareness for granted is of course more severe (Neilson, 2014: 10).

Early evidence from the NT supports the argument for explicit attention to phonemic awareness and phonics. A number of schools in the Darwin and Katherine regions took part in an Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (ILNNP) project designed to:

- improve students’ knowledge and skills in phonemic awareness and phonics; and
- improve teacher capacity to assess, plan for and teach early reading skills particularly phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

This was a trial of a meaningful size, involving about 250 children, including roughly equal numbers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. The team tested the students’ phonemic awareness before the project and after. In addition to trialling different approaches to improving student skills, the project also experimented with different kinds and levels of support for teachers (coaching and consultants versus grants and resources). Assessment data from the project indicate that phonemic awareness was consistently extremely low among Indigenous students in the early years of schooling, and substantially worse than levels among the non-Indigenous students.



Over the six-month period between assessments, average gains of the order of 20% were achieved across all eight components of phonemic awareness, with Indigenous children showing greater percentage gains, though from a lower base. The results also demonstrated the value of coaching, which was associated with gains of about 23% compared to 14% without coaching (DoE, 2013A and DoE, 2013B). Related data demonstrate that the improvement in achievement in these areas is accompanied by corresponding improvement in reading scores using *PM Benchmarks* (DoE, 2013I).

The area broadly encompassed by phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics has been contested territory in Australia, with widespread and passionate debate both for and against (Fox, 2005; Snyder, 2008; Buckingham, 2013; Lewis, 2013). There is some evidence that teachers are uncertain about the area as a result of these debates. Many teachers undertook their pre-service study at a time when ‘phonics’ was the enemy and for some tertiary teachers it still is. Many teachers also feel uncertain about their own knowledge in the area. As one research report puts it, discussing knowledge of language structure and the relationship between speech and print:

[T]eachers’ metalinguistic knowledge was not strong overall ... [S]pecialist teachers had superior knowledge, although as a group they only achieved a 73% success rate ... Pre-service and general teachers were even less knowledgeable, with ratings of 54% and 62% respectively (Fielding Barnsley & Purdie, 2005).

Redressing this situation is likely to require explicit support for the incorporation in early literacy programs of formal phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics.

The place of first language teaching

Responses to the draft report of this review included a substantial number drawing attention to research concerning the role played by first language learning in the education of Indigenous children (e.g. ACTA et al, 2010; Grimes, 2009). First language, it was argued, is important in itself as a focus of culture and identity, provides the most effective access to essential literacy skills, can be valuable instrumentally as a means of access to the curriculum and offers a stepping-stone to English literacy. A number of respondents argued that the draft report failed to adequately distinguish between literacy, which can be gained in any language and is gained once, and learning English, which can build on skills and understanding gained in first language.

The valuing of first language reflects well-established positions in Australian education. A paper developed for the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 2006 makes the point that:

The home language, whether an Indigenous language or a contact language like Aboriginal English, not only carries the culture of Indigenous students but also encapsulates their identity (MCEETYA, 2006: 17).



The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, developed for the successor to MCEETYA, argues that because of the significance of first language:

A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school (MCEECDYA, 2010: 12).

As the *Learning Lessons* review noted:

One of the basic concepts of bilingual education is that the language and culture of the student are to be valued within the school just as the introduced language and culture are to be valued (Collins, 1999: 127).

This also reflects the views articulated in *Our Land Our Languages*, a report of an inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The report refers to:

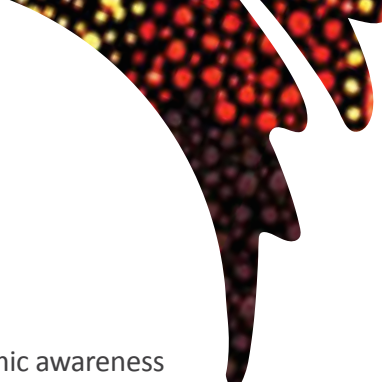
The important role that Indigenous languages play in terms of a connection to culture, kinship, land and family ... Indigenous languages are the foundation upon which the capacity to learn, interact and to shape identity is built (House of Representatives, 2012: vii).

The Action Plan cited above also recognises that the first languages spoken by Indigenous students are various:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the communities in which they live. While some speak Standard Australian English at home, many speak Aboriginal English (a non-standard dialect of English), a creole, one or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages, or any combinations of these as their first language (MCEECDYA, 2010: 6).

Submissions to the review drew particular attention to the situation of those children who come from communities in which English is in effect a foreign language: where few adults speak English, and many students arrive at school with little or no functional knowledge of English. An analysis of languages spoken at home by Indigenous students showed that there are 66 schools in which 90% or more of Indigenous students report speaking a language other than English at home (although it should be noted that this includes an unknown proportion of homes in which English is also spoken). Virtually all of these schools have a population approaching 100% Indigenous. In some of these schools, there will be few opportunities for children to gain incidental exposure to English. In a further 27 schools, between 50% and 90% of Indigenous children report speaking an Indigenous language at home.

First language plays an important role in the formation of identity, and the educational value of learning more than one language is well established. It is a reasonable assumption, and one supported by many respondents to the draft review report, that a school paying respect to the language and culture from which students come will be more likely to achieve more consistent student attendance and higher levels of engagement in learning. There is also widespread support



for the view that, for children who do not speak English, phonological and phonemic awareness is most effectively gained in first language as a bridge to English.

Within the NT, the teaching of first language has been unevenly implemented in schools. Despite the continuing vigorous debate about bilingual education, very few schools have bilingual programs and relatively few have any kind of sustained program to maintain and develop students' first languages. A departmental review in 2004-05 reported that:

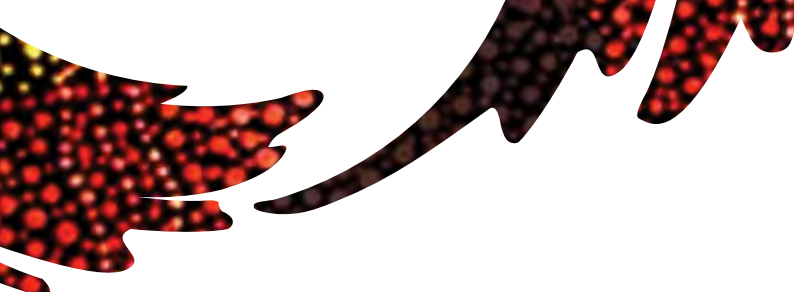
Ninety-seven percent of all schools in the NT provide some form of Indigenous language and culture programming, and forty-seven percent of schools provide regular, weekly curriculum programs (DEET, 2005A: x).

The report indicated that there were 47 Indigenous languages being taught in the NT in 2004. But more detailed data indicated that only 39% of schools offered structured language and culture programs, all but two of these being in non-urban locations, and fewer than 20% offered 'language maintenance, revitalisation or awareness programs' (ibid.:3).

More recently, the department was unable to provide a fully comprehensive and accurate picture of the current situation regarding the teaching of Indigenous languages. Various data sources were provided, but they did not clearly indicate the range or quality of programs. In 2013, 97 schools (about two-thirds of NT schools) responded to a languages survey. Of these, 25 schools were offering one or more Indigenous languages, of which 21 were primary years programs and 17 were in Central Australia. While the data are difficult to interpret, it appears that only eight schools were offering programs for more than two hours per week. Only 27.7% of teachers delivering Indigenous languages were qualified language teaching specialists, and the most common support cited as essential to the program was qualified staff. Schools cited a wide range of available resource materials (DoE, 2013H). Other data provided suggest a larger number of school first language programs, but give little indication of duration, quality, year levels or staffing.

An ACER report in 2008 argued that the barriers to sustainability and quality in NT language programs included dependency on key people, staff mobility, community issues affecting community support and the involvement of Indigenous staff, poor student attendance, the need for ongoing cultural training, and resourcing difficulties. The report also noted that the absence of a policy requirement meant that programs depended on continuing support from school councils and leaders (Purdie, 2008: 71-2).

Despite these barriers, the review is persuaded by the considerable body of research evidence, some provided in response to the draft report, that for students for whom English is not their first language, schools should provide a coherent, continuing, high quality first language program, delivered by a fluent trained teacher. This is especially important for most Priority 1 schools as identified in Appendix 6 of this report. Such programs should aim to achieve literacy in first language, and should include a focus on phonemic awareness and the other elements required for effective literacy. There are strong arguments for the benefits of first language learning, especially in early childhood programs and primary schools,



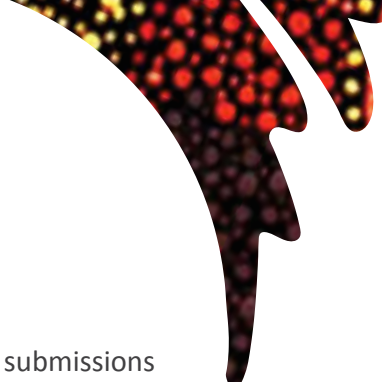
in providing educational benefits (including support for the attainment of English literacy) and support for student identity formation and school attendance. This is especially important in those communities where English is infrequently spoken.

First language programs of this kind offer opportunities to effectively use the skills of local Indigenous staff, for whom a career path leading to trained language teacher status should be available. There should be a clear policy expectation that first languages will be taught where feasible, a consistent approach to staffing and resourcing Indigenous language programs, and a requirement that schools will report on their programs.

This set of conditions is rarely met in first language programs in schools. While the absence of clear policy expectations is one factor, in part this is also because there are practical caveats on the implementation of this proposal. In some communities there is no agreement on the language to be taught. Many children speak a Kriol. First language capacity in some communities is in serious decline. Some languages have a limited stock of reading material for use in literacy programs. Children living in town camps often come from a linguistically mixed range of environments, providing no firm basis for a language program in a school. For these reasons, the report argues for implementation of first language programs where a case can be made that the program has a realistic chance of success given the circumstances prevailing in the community.

Most critically, there will be many schools where a strong case could be made for teaching a first language but no trained, fluent adults are available. The report argues for two approaches to this issue:

- Chapter 12 of this report on workforce planning proposes a strengthened program for training Indigenous teachers. One element of that program should be the selection and training of candidates fluent in Indigenous languages as language teachers; and
- secondly, the report recommends the establishment of a new employment category for Indigenous language teachers and a new training model to develop these teachers. Access to opportunities to teach first language would provide a career pathway based on the strengths of potential Indigenous teachers (including some people now working as assistant teachers or possibly in Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker (AIEW) and other similar roles). Gaining a teaching qualification drawing on their language and other strengths may be attractive to more potential applicants as a first step into teaching than entry into a full teacher education program. It is recommended that the model be adapted from the Limited Authority to Teach category in use in Western Australia. This provides three years of training and a qualification for Indigenous staff in teaching first language (including literacy). It does not initially qualify a teacher for general teaching beyond the teaching of language, although it could be a substantial step towards full qualification. Training is provided by the Western Australian (WA) department and graduates are employed on the teacher scale (Department of Education WA, 2011). The NT department, with the support of a training partner, should review the WA program, make whatever adaptations are needed for the NT situation and initiate training as soon as feasible.



Indigenous languages can also play a broader role in NT education. A number of submissions to the review made the point that it is important to recognise the language and cultural learning that Indigenous children bring to school with them. Incorporating these elements into the primary school curriculum is important to ensure that the school and the curriculum are familiar and relevant to children.

The review notes the work done by the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) to develop a program in the Guugu Yimidhirr language commonly spoken in Hope Vale in Queensland. The program is delivered in the Hope Vale CYAAA school by an Indigenous teacher using Direct Instruction (DI) techniques. This is an initiative that could be built on in NT for the teaching of local Indigenous languages, particularly if NT decides to use DI approaches in literacy in some schools (see below for further information about DI). The initiative could use existing Literature Production Centres.

In addition to providing a bridge for non-English-speaking Indigenous students, Indigenous languages can provide a curriculum option for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The review was unable to determine the extent to which non-Indigenous students study Indigenous languages as second languages, but in a system including a 40% population of Indigenous children, it is realistic to think that a broad languages program might attract a range of participants. Where possible then, schools should offer a first language program that meets the needs of the body of their Indigenous students and should consider making an Indigenous language program available to all students. But this will not be a system solution for all children, at least in the short term. Given the number of caveats above, there will be a significant number of schools for which no realistic first language program directly applicable to the specific Indigenous cohort is available or feasible, and some in which the provision of an Indigenous language program is difficult. This situation should be addressed over time.

Bilingual education

As was noted above, one literacy approach that has been tried in the NT over a long period is bilingual education (or, more correctly, biliteracy education): the use of first language instruction to access curriculum content and to learn the structures of literacy, as a means of subsequent access to English literacy. This has been the most prominent response to the recognition (see immediately above) of the role of first language in education.

In the NT, the form of bilingual education most often proposed is the ‘step’ or ‘staircase’ model, consisting of approaches that:

... aim to extend and develop learners’ first language skills in listening and speaking, reading and writing. Students learn initial literacy through their first language and use literacy as a tool for their first language study throughout their schooling. The knowledge and skills that students learn in their first language assists in their learning of, in and through English (NT DEET quoted in Devlin, 2011: 261).




The issue of bilingual education has been controversial. The controversy over bilingual approaches continues, and was evident in meetings and submissions in response to the draft report of this review. Respondents to the draft report argued strongly for the role of bilingual programs in schooling and cited a wide range of evidence, much of it in support of the general effectiveness of bilingual approaches.

The chequered history of bilingual education began in 1973 with pilot programs supported by the Federal Government. This followed a recommendation in the 1964 Watts-Gallacher report on curriculum and teaching in Indigenous schools in the NT, along with other discussions of the idea (Devlin, 2009). Throughout the subsequent 40 years programs have waxed and waned, been in or out of favour and have been the subject of changing government funding and policy approaches. Most controversially, in 2008, the first four hours of English policy, subsequently withdrawn, led to significant shifts in the capacity of schools to maintain bilingual programs. The view most commonly expressed in review consultations was that bilingual programs had been effectively stripped back by various phases of government intervention. Running through the debate has been a consistent battle about research, with regular claims and counter-claims about what the data show about the effectiveness of bilingual education.

It is difficult to be certain about the number of schools still operating full biliteracy programs in the NT. A department survey of schools (involving self-reporting of program types) identified eight schools claiming biliteracy programs but a substantial number of schools offering various forms of Indigenous language and culture programs, and a further group of schools offering ‘explicit teaching through Indigenous languages to bridge to new learning of English curriculum concepts, skills and understandings’, also described as team teaching. This latter category is taken to refer to English-language curriculum with first language classroom assistance or team teaching (DoE 2013J). Devlin (2011) also refers to eight schools still offering biliteracy programs. These indications should be balanced against arguments throughout the consultation responses that bilingual education had been effectively terminated in 2008.

The controversy about bilingual education is not confined to the NT. There is a continuing international argument about its merits, complicated by the wide variety of approaches gathered under the category. The term ‘bilingual’ is applied to programs ranging from the predominant use of first language instruction for the whole of schooling (developmental bilingualism) to ‘transitional’ approaches running several years at the start of formal schooling, with English (or another mainstream language) only gradually introduced, to the teaching of first language alongside the predominant use of English instruction (sometimes called ‘paired’ bilingual). While there is a vast array of evidence on both sides of the argument, the complexity of practice, the wide variety of settings in which such approaches are used and the variable achievement of the pre-conditions for success make it difficult to reach firm conclusions. In addition, as Hakuta et al noted, the debate has been fierce and ideology has often trumped evidence on both sides of the debate (cited in Slavin et al, 2010: 3).



The review has taken account of the vast body of international evidence available on bilingual education and related approaches to the education of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Grimes, 2009; Silburn et al, 2011; Krashen & McField, 2005; Cheung & Slavin, 2005). It is arguable from this research that, on balance across the range of international studies cited, there is some evidence of a small relative advantage for bilingual approaches, although this advantage is not consistent across all studies (see, for example, Rossell & Baker, 1996; Slavin et al, 2010).

One difficulty with the research is the wide variety of approaches that are grouped under the bilingual category for research purposes (Krashen & McField, 2005). It is clear that some studies include the parallel teaching of first language and English, others refer to stronger forms of bilingual education (terms used include transitional, step, staircase or late-exit) and some include a range of approaches in meta-analyses. Silburn et al (2011) noted that they found eight distinct definitions of the term 'bilingual education', and that of 120 studies reviewed, only 30 were sufficiently explicit to enable replication of the approach adopted. It is difficult in the research to distinguish for example, between the benefits associated with step or late-exit bilingual programs of the kind strongly advocated in the NT, and the parallel or paired teaching of first language within an English language school with in-classroom first language support, although Cheung and Slavin (2005) argued that paired programs with a focus on phonetics have a strong evidence base.

The imprecision of terminology is evident in the major parliamentary inquiry into Indigenous languages, *Our Land, Our Languages*. The report recommends 'adequately resourced bilingual school education programs...where the child's first language is an Indigenous language'. The commentary does not, however, make clear what the term 'bilingual' means in this context. The commentary refers to the benefits that arise when 'first language is incorporated into early education' and 'expresses its support for the teaching of first language in schools'. The report discusses language teaching in early childhood and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) but notes 'only ad hoc support for Indigenous language learning in primary and secondary schools' (House of Representatives, 2012: 118-120). The commentary could apply to step forms of bilingual education as well as paired or parallel language programs.

A second difficulty is also articulated by Silburn et al, who argued that there has been little analysis of cultural and socio-economic factors affecting the efficacy of specific literacy approaches. Where these factors are taken into account, evidence is available to suggest that bilingual, ESL (EAL/D) and structured English immersion approaches all offer measurable benefits (ibid.: 48).

The third difficulty with the research concerns its applicability to the NT. Silburn et al noted that only a handful of studies of literacy instruction have involved:

Indigenous populations with similar levels of socio-economic disadvantage and/or geographic remoteness to those of remote Indigenous NT communities (ibid.: 48).



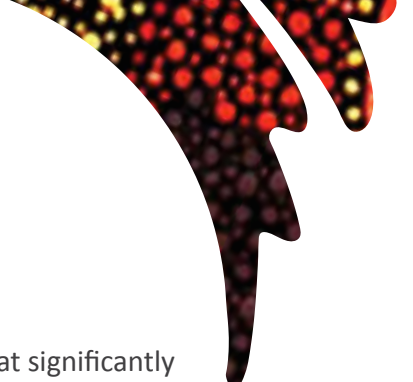
The research with these populations suggests that to be effective, programs need good resourcing, community support and delivery ‘by fully bilingual educators under optimal teaching and learning conditions’. This mirrors the concern expressed in *Learning Lessons* about the availability of high quality teachers in bilingual programs. Because of these factors, the Menzies report concludes that there is little research evidence to demonstrate the relative effectiveness and sustainability of specific instructional approaches:

when they are delivered on a longer-term basis, on a wider scale and under real-world conditions, particularly in very geographically remote and disadvantaged settings (ibid.).

The review notes the paucity of reliable evidence about the effectiveness of specific kinds of bilingual programs versus other approaches in the NT. The *Learning Lessons* report refers to comparative assessments of bilingual and non-bilingual schools conducted until 1988 and notes that the data indicate that bilingual schools performed better than non-bilingual schools (Collins, 1999: 122). The report also indicates however, that ‘bilingual’ schools included those offering a wide variety of different kinds of programs. A DEET report on Indigenous language and culture in 2005 reported (on a ‘preliminary and provisional’ basis) that bilingual schools were achieving ‘marginally better’ results than demographically like schools, though the difference did not achieve statistical significance. The bilingual schools also, however, had 20% greater teaching and support staff allocations (DEET, 2005A: x). It was disappointing that in responding to the draft report of this review, respondents generally failed to identify either contemporary or historical evidence of a compelling kind concerning the effectiveness of specific forms of bilingual education in the NT. This reflects to some extent the absence of research, and to some extent the difficulties experienced in operating biliteracy programs (in particular) in a consistent fashion over an extended period because of policy and resourcing changes.

Several responses referred to data comparing NAPLAN achievement at some schools with bilingual programs between 2008 (taken to be the last year of effective bilingual education) and subsequent years. One submission presented a table of data showing the comparison for four bilingual schools for 2008 by comparison with 2009 and 2010 (AuSIL, 2014). The author argued that the data demonstrated a fall-off in achievement in the years immediately following 2008 resulting from the cessation of bilingual approaches or reductions in funding for these programs.

The review has extended this analysis using NAPLAN data to compare 2008 and 2013 to determine whether there has been a measurable change in student achievement over that period. This was virtually the only NT achievement evidence provided in the consultation responses to support bilingual education, and the extension of the data to the most recent year is as close as the review can approach to definitive data. The review has compared 2008 and 2013 student achievement in five schools listed as bilingual schools in 2008 (adding Yirrkala to the list in the Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL) submission): Yuendumu, Milingimbi, Lajamanu, Maningrida and Yirrkala.



The full data set is provided in Appendix 7. There are, however, some caveats that significantly limit the usefulness of this analysis:

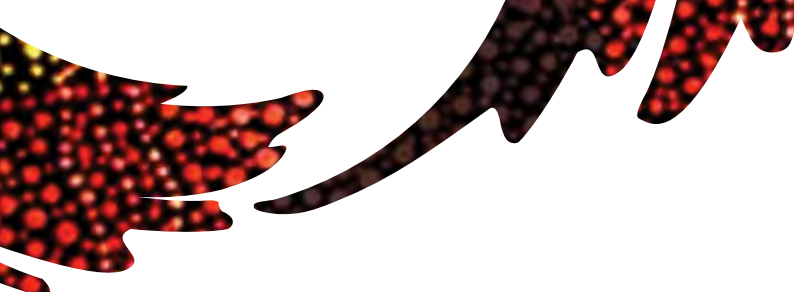
- there are many other factors (e.g. differing cohorts, community factors, attendance patterns) that affect NAPLAN;
- the writing scores are not comparable, because there was a change in 2011 from persuasive writing to narrative writing (ACARA, 2013). The scores have been included in the tables, but not the comparison percentages; and
- three of the comparison schools had limited data in 2008 because the numbers of students completing NAPLAN assessments were too small to generate a school result on some domains.

These caveats significantly limit the value of the data. Nevertheless, the data presented in Appendix 7 show the following features:

- of the 41 year level domains for which a comparison score was able to be generated, 22 showed a lower result in 2014 and 19 showed a higher result;
- the average percentage loss in the lower results was just under 24%;
- the average percentage gain in the improved results was just over 51% (this outcome was strongly influenced by dramatic increases in four scores);
- 12 of the negative results were at one school;
- only one school had an overall negative outcome based on the number of positive domains minus the number of negative domains (Yirrkala had two of each); and
- only one school had an overall negative outcome based on averaging the percentage changes across all domains in the school for which a comparison percentage was generated.

The data do not provide evidence of a consistent pattern of deterioration in student outcomes at these five schools after the 2008 changes. Nor is there a consistent pattern of improvement. While the caveats noted above limit the value of the data for evaluation of bilingual approaches, to the extent to which the analysis does generate findings it provides no basis for a preference for the stronger forms of bilingual education adopted in these schools up to 2008. It should be noted that the analysis was conducted because data about these schools had been cited by proponents of stronger forms of bilingual education as evidence for their effectiveness.

The review has considered the body of evidence concerning language teaching in the early years of school. Much of the evidence was generously provided or referred to by respondents to the draft report, and this evidence has been carefully examined and evaluated. As discussed earlier, the review recommends that, where feasible, primary schools should offer a coherent program aiming to achieve literacy in first language for those Indigenous children for whom English is not a first language. The review also proposes that Indigenous languages should be offered more generally. On balance, taking account of both the research and the specific circumstances for implementation in the NT, this report argues that the teaching of English as the primary language for learning is also essential from the start of schooling. In this, the review follows other analyses of Indigenous health and education. We note, for example, the important work of Zubrick et al on Indigenous child health.



The report of that work argues for the ‘explicit teaching of standard Australian English language features throughout all years at school’ (Zubrick et al, 2006: 498).

For the reasons articulated above, the review argues for an approach involving the following elements:

- sustained teaching of first language, including literacy, to Indigenous children for whom English is not their first language, where feasible and where a trained teacher is available;
- training of Indigenous first language speakers to teach the language, including training on a Limited Authority to Teach basis;
- provision of English language learning from the start of school;
- delivery of the curriculum in English; and
- the active presence of trained first language-speaking adults in the classroom where the curriculum is delivered in English to Indigenous students whose first language is not English.

Within the literature on bilingual education, this could be described as a paired or parallel bilingual program, but it is important to note that it is not proposed that the curriculum in general should be delivered in first language. It will, nevertheless, be feasible for trained teachers of first language to incorporate some general curriculum content within a first language literacy program.

English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D)

The review has been struck by the extent to which the formal use of EAL/D or ESL approaches has declined in the NT. There is clearly a history behind this. Despite the fact that a very significant proportion of Indigenous children arrive at school without English and without the foundations of literacy, there is little consistency in EAL/D practice, many teachers with responsibilities in the area are unqualified or under-qualified and we found few examples of effective EAL/D professional support for classroom teachers. We note the EAL Early Years Oracy Program (DECS, 2013E), which provides support for intensive oral English language programs for Indigenous students who speak English as an additional language and who are in their first formal year of schooling.

There is a current EAL/D policy, the Framework for Learning English as an Additional Language (DET, 2011B). At the time of writing new EAL/D Policy and Guidelines were in draft (DoE, 2013F). It was clear that policy implementation would require very substantial resourcing to raise the capacity of teachers in the EAL/D area. The draft included specific reference to biliteracy and bilingual education, which this review does not support in the stronger forms proposed by its proponents. We are concerned that the EAL/D area in the NT has strayed some distance from its origins, and is now associated with cultural and first language maintenance as much as with the explicit teaching of English to children who arrive at school not speaking English. It is clear that good EAL/D teaching could make a material contribution to better literacy outcomes, but it is difficult to be confident that the NT is now able to deliver such teaching.



Literacy assessment

The absence of a common approach to literacy teaching is matched in the area of literacy assessment. Apart from NAPLAN, the only early years mandatory program is the Assessment of Student Competencies (ASC), conducted in Term 1 of Transition year since 2011, but also recommended for pre-schools. In 2013, 87% of Transition students were assessed. This program, which is a screening tool rather than an assessment program, covers a wide range of entry behaviours and foundational competencies. For 2014, the screening tool will focus on motor skills, healthy living, literacy and numeracy, but will not provide a thorough diagnostic instrument. The ASC is accompanied by a guide to programming based on the results of the screening tool. While specific early literacy foundations are discussed in the guide along with suggestions for classroom activities, there is no advice about the use of programs or approaches appropriate to specific student data.

The NT has developed a *Diagnostic Net for Transition to Year 9* (The Net). This is a set of learning continua that ‘provide a roadmap of literacy and numeracy milestones’ (DET, 2011A: 5). The document makes clear that the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics should be part of a balanced curriculum along with fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It is explicit about the year level expectations of students across all areas (including both literacy and numeracy expectations). The Net provides a valuable map, though it is neither a curriculum nor an assessment instrument. As Masters notes, its reliance on teacher judgment means that it is unlikely to provide the kind of rigour and consistency needed. He notes that more reliable instruments would be preferable (Masters, 2011: 23). The Net is, however, a useful guide to teachers.

Indigenous culture

In addition to a significant consultation response drawing attention to the role of Indigenous first languages in education, a number of respondents referred to the role of culture (e.g. AuSIL, 2014; White, 2014; APONT, 2014). There were extended discussions of the relationship between language, culture and identity. A number of submissions drew on the 1995 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (Yunupingu, 1995), which argued:

There is plenty of support for the idea that education should be re-conceptualised and reconstructed to take into account the aspirations of Indigenous Australians. This occurs, for example, in discussion of more culturally-aware and culturally-sensitive forms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment ... Moreover, there is strong support from many people for the proposition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies should be made part of the education of all Australians (ibid: 21).

This national report proposed that the transmission of culture is the domain of Indigenous people, and that the incorporation of culture programs in schools and the involvement of local elders and other people with expert knowledge empowers local communities (Ibid.: 85-6).



This was a theme in some consultation responses, although there were review responses from some community members who argued that cultural transmission should be managed by the community separately from schooling.

The second element of the national report's proposals noted above concerned the role of Indigenous studies as a part of the core curriculum in Australian schools. Within the development of the Australian Curriculum this issue is addressed through the cross curriculum priority concerned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The priority has been taken up across the curriculum, most extensively in the history curriculum.

How to proceed

Effective whole-school literacy approaches for the NT would need to include all of the essential curriculum elements: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and oral language. This will be true of literacy programs in both first language and English. Recommended changes in approach will require significant professional development, coaching and feedback. Programs selected should, as far as possible, be relatively straightforward to implement: the experience of AL and other programs is that complex programs requiring high fidelity in implementation are at greater risk of failure.

It is the view of the reviewer that the department should set common approaches to literacy. Consistent with the Priority Schools approach recommended by the review, Priority 1 schools should be required to use programs and approaches that are demonstrated to be effective. Priority 2 and 3 schools should start with the common approaches but have support to identify additional evidence-based approaches and to innovate within the limits of what is known about the essential elements of literacy teaching.

It is also recommended that implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Priority 1 schools should be guided by the Multiple Year Level materials developed by the NT to support implementation in English, mathematics, history and science. In the first four years of schooling, the priority should be literacy development, and additional learning areas should be introduced in ways that broaden the literacy program. Beyond Year 3, the Multiple Year Level materials, which were developed specifically for remote schools, should be used as the means of implementation of the first four learning areas in the Australian Curriculum in Priority 1 schools. Schools using these materials were positive about them but in remote and very remote locations usually felt that there was too much material to cover. This is a function of the Australian Curriculum, rather than a problem specifically of the materials. It will in part be addressed by improvements in student literacy. The review argues that using these materials will make the task more realistic, but will not solve the underlying problem of excessive volume in the primary years of the Australian Curriculum.



Which literacy programs should be mandatory?

The discussion above of the evidence on the role of phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics suggests that if all teachers are to engage effectively and knowledgeably with these areas, two things will have to occur: the department will need to endorse an approach based on these areas and provide evidence for its effectiveness, and teachers will require professional development opportunities in the foundational knowledge and skills involved.

It should be noted that phonemic awareness and phonics are key factors in becoming literate in any language. While this discussion focuses on approaches to English literacy, it will also be critical to ensure that where first language programs are offered they also focus on these foundational literacy skills. The argument for first language literacy forming a basis for English literacy depends on a first language program that addresses those elements of literacy.

Phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics constitute only two of the key elements of literacy teaching. The review's starting point is that without consistent, systematic, relentless teaching of phonological and phonemic skills and mapping of letters on to sounds (for at least 20 minutes every day), and the development of a sight vocabulary, many children will never gain the foundations of literacy. Beyond this however, a full literacy program must be provided. This will also involve:

- developing syntactic awareness (knowing what is likely to come next grammatically in the English language);
- learning the processes of selecting information to comprehend text;
- developing fluency;
- developing a good English vocabulary;
- hearing good literature that is beyond their reading capacity;
- understanding how to talk about texts;
- developing a rich oral language in English;
- learning how to construct texts; and
- reading books of all kinds: Big Books, picture books with captions, rhyming books and levelled readers.

In the area of phonics and phonological and phonemic awareness there are two broad approaches that could be pursued. One approach is to adopt a whole literacy program that includes explicit attention to phonics and phonemic awareness within the context of a broader program. In this area, one of the variations of direct Instruction probably has the best research base.

The term 'direct instruction' refers to a number of related approaches ranging from almost any academic instruction that is led by a teacher, to the formal program labelled 'Direct Instruction' (DI) developed by Engelmann and associates in the 1960s. This latter form is characterised by teachers following scripted step-by-step procedures, student choral responses, student groupings based on level of progress rather than age or grade level and achievement of mastery before students progress to the next level (Rosenshine, 2008).

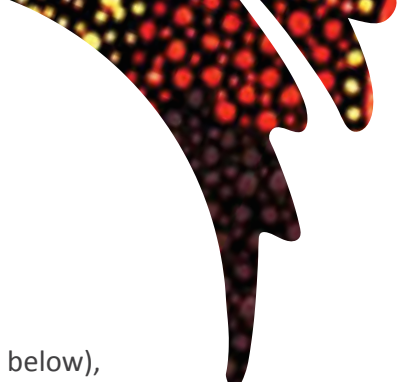


The review observed the use of this latter form of DI in the CYAAA schools at Aurukun and Hope Vale, schools with considerable demographic similarity to NT remote schools. DI is an English immersion program, and is being used in schools serving communities with low levels of exposure to English: in Aurukun, for example, most students arrive at school with little oral English. The review saw highly organized classes with engaged children and a strong focus on foundational skills in core areas. Staff involved were enthusiastic and showed high levels of operational effectiveness in delivery. These schools provided a contrast with some schools in NT using a range of approaches to literacy that the review observed having considerable difficulty in establishing consistent programs, establishing a working atmosphere and engaging students.

The DI program is tightly prescribed and involves a substantial training load for teachers. Those using the program commonly reported initial teacher reluctance, which was overcome when those implementing the program with fidelity saw rapid student progress. In the Cape York schools some teachers departed in the early phase of the implementation because of their resistance to the program. The adoption of a scripted program has potential benefits in strengthening teacher capacity in remote schools and achieving greater commonality across schools. The review also observed teacher aides delivering the program with confidence to small groups. This could provide support for a stronger and more independent classroom role for assistant teachers.

While the program seems effective, and reports significant learning growth in its internal measures (CYAAA, N.d.; Grossen, 2013), the review was unable to determine the extent to which gains are reflected in NAPLAN data, in part because it is too early for confident longitudinal analysis (ACER, 2013), although initial analysis suggests there is a small but measurable gain. Hattie's analysis suggests that the program has an effect size of 0.59, which is a very positive result (Hattie, 2009). If it were proposed to consider large-scale implementation of DI, further work would be needed to determine how well it would translate to delivery at scale across a significant proportion of schools in NT. This work should include attention to the evidence for the effectiveness of the program in improving student learning as measured by NAPLAN and other measures, development of local expertise and the costs and optimal timing of implementation. It is proposed that further research of this kind be undertaken with a view to implementing the program in one or two clusters of Priority 1 schools in 2015. These clusters should each include a larger hub school that would consolidate local expertise in the program and provide support and training to smaller schools in the cluster. The schools should preferably be volunteers.

If the program is demonstrated to be effective in these schools, consideration should be given to a measured but progressive rollout across Priority 1 schools and potentially Priority 2 schools. The review does not recommend moving immediately or quickly to scale because of the considerable training load involved, the need to build local expertise and capacity and a degree of uncertainty about the extent to which public measures of student progress demonstrate success. Attention should also be paid to the somewhat troubled history in NT of rapid large-scale rollout of programs without adequate planning or preparation.



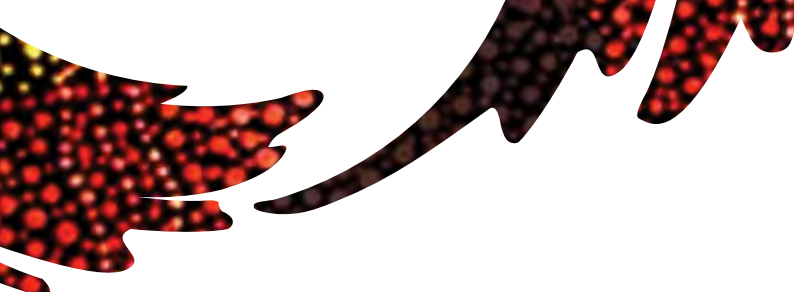
The review notes that the DI program also includes a numeracy component (see below), the capacity to deliver Indigenous language programs (see above) and a Culture program (see below). There is an associated Childhood program (a broad equivalent of which is delivered in NT through pre-schools and Families as First Teachers). The other component is Club, consisting of sports, arts and music programs and performances with a focus on moral development, higher order skills and creative expression. In the Cape York Schools this is associated with an extended school day to make time for the program. While this time is not mandatory for student attendance, in practice most students attend. Students and their communities appeared to value the Club and Culture programs, and if a decision were made to implement the DI approach, it would be valuable to consider a broader implementation of these other elements, possibly including an extended school day.

The second approach to primary school literacy is to adopt one or more of those programs that explicitly address phonemic awareness and phonics in a self-contained way, but do not claim to provide solutions for a whole literacy program. The two programs of this kind that the review identified as in use in some schools and with the potential to be effective were *Jolly Phonics* and *Crack the Code*. While these programs do not fall explicitly under the heading of Direct Instruction, they do involve explicit skills-based teaching. There is good evidence about the effectiveness of *Jolly Phonics* with children from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Cheung and Slavin, 2005, Dixon et al, 2011). *Crack the Code* is an Australian program that has been used with success in parts of the NT. Respondents to the review also suggested that a spelling program such as *Spell Links* could usefully be added to the list of essential programs. Further work should be undertaken to identify the most appropriate programs in these and other areas.

The implementation of a selected program will require substantial professional learning and coaching. The reluctance and lack of specific expertise of some teachers was noted above. Some participants in the consultation process assumed that areas such as phonics would best be addressed incidentally in the classroom, and showed a degree of resistance to the idea of specific programs in these areas. This approach is not supported by the review because of the need of Indigenous children for explicit teaching in these areas.

In addition, a standard sight words list should be used across all schools as a starting point to building automatic recognition of known words. The Oxford Word List and Dolch Sight Words are referred to in the NT's 'Prioritising Literacy and Numeracy' program.

The anecdotal, and sometimes formal, evidence collected in interviews and school visits suggests that practice in the remaining areas is stronger. Fluency, other aspects of vocabulary and comprehension seem better represented in practice. Oral language is also well represented, although the role of first language oracy and literacy remain contested. There are, however, many different programs in use, suggesting some policy inefficiency and potential for confusion among mobile students in remote schools. During the implementation phase of the literacy program, including phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words and spelling, a more detailed internal analysis should be conducted of the different approaches to teaching of fluency, vocabulary and comprehension to determine whether common approaches should be mandated in Priority 1 schools.



In addition, the department should address the current position with regard to EAL/D teaching and expertise in schools and determine how EAL/D practice in schools can be improved and better supported.

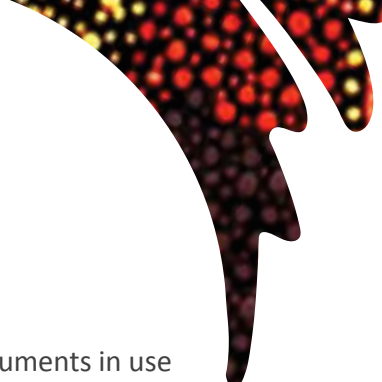
Assessment

The absence of a common approach to literacy assessment apart from NAPLAN was noted above. This gap should be filled, initially with a mandatory dedicated early literacy test used to identify initial weakness in phonological and phonemic awareness. Instruments such as ACER's *Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test* (SPAT-R) or the *Phonological Awareness Skills Test* (PAST) are in use in some schools in the NT. Both can also be used to measure progress over time. The review notes the work of Dr Roslyn Neilson, who was a developer of SPAT-R and has more recently developed the *School Entry Alphabetic and Phonological Awareness Readiness Test* (SEAPART), designed specifically for very early administration, and a variation specifically designed for Indigenous populations, the GEEPAT. She has also developed the AIST2 test, which is designed to assess the application of spelling skills to unknown words somewhat later in primary schooling. These instruments have been used successfully on Palm Island and Groote Eylandt, though formal research evidence is yet to be published (Neilson, 2014: 3, 12). One or more such instruments should be used in all Priority 1 schools and, by preference, in all NT schools. It is likely that work will be needed to further develop and trial instruments specifically designed for use with Indigenous children. These instruments should take account of the needs of first language speakers and teachers.

There should also be a mandatory general reading assessment. The measure most widely used in the sample of schools visited was the *PM Benchmarks* reading assessment. The significant advantage of this instrument (and of other similar items) is that it enables the mapping and reporting of progress more widely and in a more fine-grained way than NAPLAN. In many schools, *PM Benchmarks* levels for individual children were on display, progress was celebrated and children had target levels for achievement. This provided incentive and reward for children and teachers, and enabled the reporting to parents of evidence of progress even where children had not reached NAPLAN benchmarks.

Such an approach should be linked with NT-wide age-expected benchmarks for key areas including reading level, phonemic awareness and sight words. These could build on the T-9 Diagnostic Net continua.

The review notes that the DI program referred to above has its own well-developed internal assessment and data management processes. The program uses a continuous testing program and comprehensive data analysis to place students initially and to determine when they have achieved mastery at a level and are ready to move to the next level. If the NT decides to implement DI, the assessment methods used within the program would meet the criteria set out in this report and should be adopted in those schools using DI.



There is a range of other general and specific literacy assessment tools and instruments in use in different schools. Despite some areas of success, this open-ended approach is not supported. Instead, there should be a consistent approach in all schools involving:

- the use of mandatory phonemic awareness tests to diagnose student starting points and to monitor progress through the early years of schooling (T-3); and
- the use of a mandatory general reading test to map student progress over time, set goals and report progress to parents.

In addition, in those schools teaching a sustained first language program, investigation should be undertaken to identify one or more assessment instruments that could reflect student progress towards first language literacy.

Indigenous culture

The review supports the view that, where the local community is supportive of a school role in delivering culture programs, and where local community members are able to assist with delivery of such programs (and their role is endorsed within the community), schools should make arrangements to enable and support such programs. The review team met a number of Indigenous people involved in delivering culture programs who reported high levels of student engagement. The programs reviewed showed evidence of careful planning and considerable breadth. In some cases, programs were delivered to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The review also saw evidence of high quality programs delivered as part a Culture component of the CYAAA initiative in Northern Queensland. It includes teaching about the culture and history of families, the community, country and people. According to staff, it focuses on higher order skills and project activities. In those schools in which Direct Instruction is implemented in the NT, the Culture component of the program could also be used.

In the NT, with a 40% Indigenous population, there is an argument for more extensive attention to Indigenous history, culture and experience. The review recommends that all students in NT schools should be exposed to a balanced curriculum program dealing with these areas. This could be approached broadly in three ways:

- the intentions of the Australian Curriculum could be enacted by providing more detailed advice to NT schools in specific subject areas;
- a NT Indigenous studies program (or equivalent) could be developed for delivery across the school system; and/or
- encouragement and support could be provided to local schools to develop their own more extensive programs based on local experience.

These approaches are not exclusive. One, two or all three could be adopted. The review recommends that further work be undertaken by the DoE on these options and that a proposal be developed for the Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS).

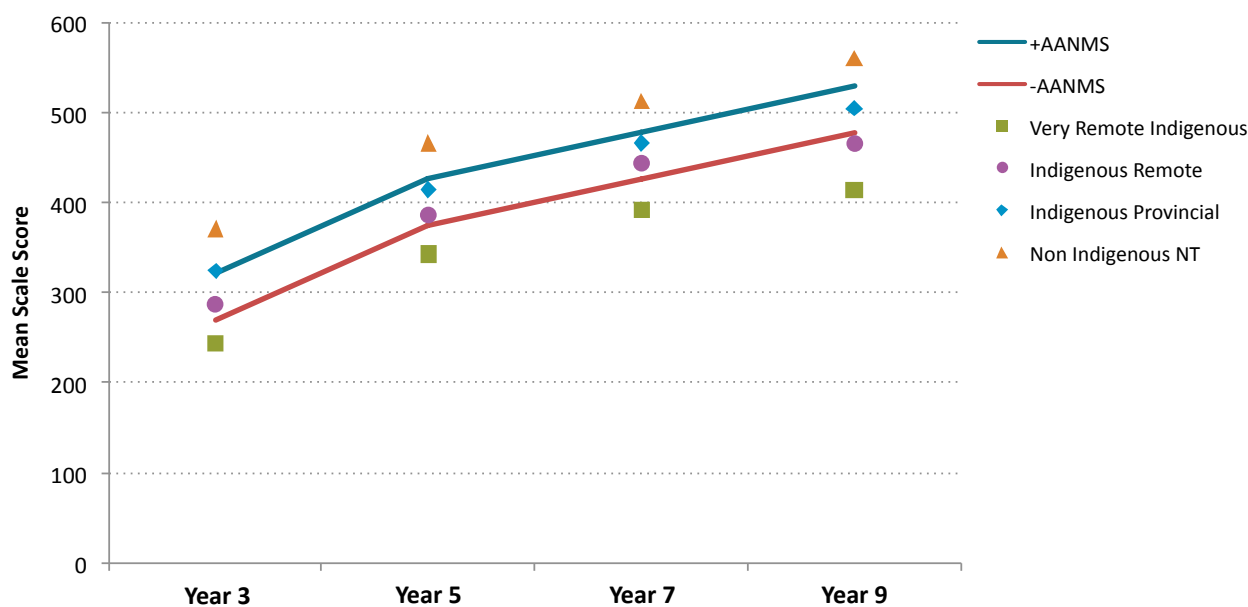
Numeracy

Although the review has examined numeracy data and discussed progress with numeracy in school visits and interviews, this report does not address numeracy in any detail. The view taken by the review is that numeracy is not as urgent a priority as literacy, that literacy is more foundational (i.e. improvements in literacy will probably achieve a degree of improvement in numeracy) and that for Priority 1 schools in particular it is important to focus on a limited set of goals to achieve improvement.

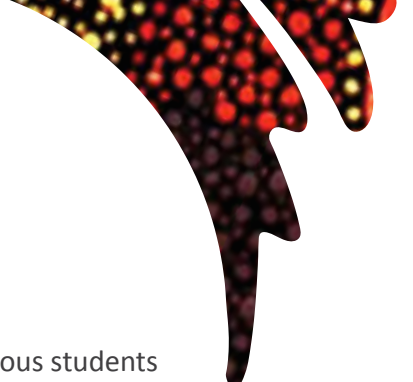
The evidence for the view that numeracy is a less urgent task is presented in summary form in Figure 15. This is equivalent to the reading and writing graphs presented earlier in this chapter. The key points are:

- the provincial Indigenous student cohort sits within the at-national-minimum-standard band;
- the remote Indigenous student cohort sits within, though close the bottom of, the at-national-minimum-standard band; and
- the very remote Indigenous student cohort is below national minimum standards for each year level, but the gap is noticeably narrower than for reading and writing.

Figure 15: Northern Territory Government Schools, 2013 NAPLAN Results – Numeracy¹⁴



¹⁴ AANMS represents the line above which students are achieving results above national minimum standards. -AANMS represents the line below which students are failing to achieve national minimum standards. Results between -AANMS and +AANMS indicate achievement at national minimum standards.



Other NAPLAN data confirm that the level of numeracy achievement for Indigenous students is generally higher than that for literacy (especially writing) and the gap between very remote Indigenous students and other students is materially narrower. While these results are still unsatisfactory, it is clear that the problem is much less urgent than for literacy. It is, however, our view that once the literacy initiatives are bedded down and showing improvement, a similar approach should be taken to numeracy:

- use data to identify the key area or areas of weakness;
- select the most practical, evidence-based and easy-to-use means of addressing those areas and monitoring progress;
- mandate one or more approaches for all Priority 1 schools; and
- encourage priority 2 and 3 schools to innovate around those key interventions.

Consistent with the pace of effective change and the need for strategic focus, however, it will not be feasible to start implementation of the numeracy process for a period of about two years. Preliminary research should be conducted during this period to map areas of weakness in numeracy achievement and identify intervention programs with a proven record of success for at-risk students.

If the literacy elements of DI are implemented in NT, consideration should be given to using DI numeracy programs in those schools. The review would also support the development of first language programs on DI principles in these schools.

Learning and Engagement Plans

The review notes the proposed development of Learning and Engagement Plans for Indigenous students as part of the NT's Schooling Implementation Plan. As a policy requirement under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, the NT has committed to increasing the number of students with personalised learning plans. The plans will be supported by department units and linked with data through Student Achievement and Information System (SAIS) and other systems.


A Learning and Engagement Plan is a teacher's overarching strategy for an individual student to address the learning and engagement needs of Indigenous students. They should set out the range of strategies to be used for a student and integrate approaches to attendance, engagement and achievement. These plans can either take the form of or build upon individual student plans including Educational Adjustment Plans, Transition from School Plan, Individual Behaviour Plan, Attendance Plan or a Flexible Learning Plan.

The review supports the development and use of these plans, and proposes that in the early years of primary schools they should focus on students whose AEDI scores show that they are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains. Beyond Year 3, they should focus on children whose NAPLAN results are below national minimum standard. A similar targeting is proposed in Chapter 9 on Secondary education.



Recommendations

20. Base primary years literacy programs on:
 - a. sustained teaching of first language, including literacy, to Indigenous children for whom English is not their first language, where feasible and where a trained teacher is available;
 - b. training of Indigenous first language speakers to teach the language both as fully trained teachers and on a Limited Authority to Teach basis;
 - c. provision of English language learning from the start of school;
 - d. delivery of the curriculum in English; and
 - e. the active presence of trained first language-speaking adults in the classroom where the curriculum is delivered in English to Indigenous students whose first language is not English.
21. Give priority to ensuring that all Indigenous children gain English literacy by progressively mandating approaches to early literacy and assessment in Priority 1 schools, including:
 - a. mandating a phonological and phonemic awareness teaching program and assessment instruments for all students at school entry, along with sight word, phonics and spelling programs;
 - b. undertaking further evaluation of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy model of Direct Instruction with a view to implementing the program, initially in literacy, in one or two clusters of 3-5 remote schools each including one larger hub school;
 - c. undertaking initial research to ensure that teaching programs and assessment instruments are effective with Indigenous students, including those in first language programs;
 - d. mandating a general test of reading progress in all schools;
 - e. following the implementation of the initial literacy program, evaluating the need for commonly used programs related to vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in Priority 1 schools to ensure a balanced literacy curriculum;
 - f. encouraging town schools, especially those with high Indigenous populations, to use programs mandated for Priority 1 schools and supporting them to adopt a broader range of evidence-based literacy programs;
 - g. establishing NT-wide age benchmarks for reading level, phonemic awareness and sight words, reporting against these benchmarks and using the data to monitor school effectiveness and program efficacy; and
 - h. including the effective implementation of required approaches in teacher and principal performance management processes, school Annual Operating Plans and school reviews.
22. Use the Multiple Year Levels materials to implement the Australian curriculum in Priority 1 schools.

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23. Strengthen the study of Indigenous cultures in schools by:
 - a. encouraging schools to enable and support Indigenous culture programs where the local community is supportive of a school role in delivering culture programs, and where local community members are able to assist with delivery of such programs (and their role is endorsed within the community); and
 - b. preparing a proposal for the Northern Territory Board of Studies to support teaching about Indigenous history, culture and experience in all NT schools.
 24. Provide support in implementation of mandatory literacy programs including sustained funding for professional learning and coaching including:
 - a. focusing this support in the first instance on high priority schools; and
 - b. providing training and support for teachers of first language in the teaching and assessment of phonological awareness.
 25. Conduct an internal review to advise on the state of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) practice and how the area can be effectively supported and improved.
 26. Undertake an internal analysis of numeracy teaching to map areas of weakness in numeracy achievement and identify intervention programs with a proven record of success for at-risk students, for mandatory implementation in Priority 1 schools from 2016, potentially involving the use of Direct Instruction numeracy programs in any schools implementing DI literacy.
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There is a remarkable absence of coherence and consistency across the system, even in an area such as English literacy, which has been such a clear weakness.



Chapter Nine

Secondary education


Secondary education opens future options to students. The quality of thought required to succeed in secondary schooling is the basis for citizenship, social participation and control over one's life. It provides access to jobs, training and further education. The lack of a complete secondary education is increasingly a barrier to life chances. At present, too many Indigenous young people in the Northern Territory (NT) do not gain these opportunities. This is not a result of a lack of effort or dedicated attention, but arises from factors that can only be managed by a structural shift in the delivery of secondary education.

The review has identified a number of factors contributing to the difficulty in delivering secondary education, especially in remote and very remote communities:

- factors that secondary schools cannot control: poor attendance, cultural and social factors affecting the attitudes to schooling of young Indigenous people, disengagement and disruptive behaviour, limited local employment opportunities, and social dislocation and negative community attitudes to schooling;
- poorly developed literacy skills;
- shortage of staff and resources needed to deliver high quality programs in remote locations and to take advantage of distance education to broaden curriculum options;
- limited curriculum options available with small student numbers;
- a lack, even in some larger urban schools, of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs with substance, that lead to real employment opportunities;
- secondary programs in many remote schools that do not provide a pathway to further education and training or articulate with jobs; and
- weaknesses in the arrangements made in some urban middle and senior schools to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- recognition of the difficulties of offering a quality secondary education in remote settings;
- a number of local accounts of successes in secondary schooling, presented as a counter argument to the negative picture shown by secondary student achievement data;
- discussion of potential risks involved in the proposal for secondary boarding facilities and a range of suggested ways of managing these concerns;
- argument about the risks of children as young as 11 or 12 leaving families and communities and the potential loss of language and cultural experience;
- concern about the capacity of urban schools to meet the educational needs of an increased cohort of remote Indigenous students;
- objection to any forced removal of young people from community in order to participate in secondary education;

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- concern about what happens to young people who choose not to attend secondary education facilities away from their communities;
 - reservations about the potential for distance education to meet the needs of children in remote settings;
 - discussion of the role of Learning on Country in supporting student engagement in secondary education;
 - discussion of the potential for additional secondary exchange partnerships between remote schools and interstate schools or successful NT urban schools;
 - support for offering secondary education in town schools, often conditional on continuing to offer secondary education in remote schools up to Years 8 or 9;
 - often negative reference to the history of Indigenous children attending boarding schools; and
 - discussion of the need for extensive community consultation in the implementation of changes to secondary provision.

Learning Lessons and other reviews

From the time of the Collins review, there has been a focus in the NT on expanding remote provision so it better matches urban provision, particularly in the delivery of secondary education to Indigenous young people. Recommendations made in *Learning Lessons* supporting the expansion of secondary education underpinned a 15-year focus on expanding secondary provision in remote and very remote locations. This was part of a concerted effort to expand opportunities for students in these locations, attracting considerable energy and enthusiasm.

The 2003 review of secondary education commissioned by the Northern Territory Government (NTG) reported that:

significant numbers of young Indigenous people of secondary age do not participate in education at all, and those who do are often disengaging by Years 8 or 9 in urban areas and even earlier in remote regions (Ramsey: 160).

The report noted the shortage of qualified secondary teachers, unreliable resourcing, limited curriculum breadth, watered down curriculum, inadequate teaching practices, busy-work and low expectations (ibid.: 160-64):

In many areas, but particularly remote, the review team doubts that what is being delivered meets acceptable criteria for secondary education (ibid: 164).

Despite this, in 2005, workshops designed to shape Indigenous education again argued for stronger secondary education in remote schools (SOCOM, 2005: 3). The *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006–2009* reinforced this trend. It committed the department to ‘continue to invest in secondary programs for remote communities’ with the goal of ‘increased numbers of schools providing an accredited secondary program’ (DEET, 2006: 29–30).



The situation now

Since that time, the position has changed somewhat, and in some ways for the worse. The most recent count shows that, apart from schools in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy there are 72 remote and very remote schools offering middle years programs and 51 offering senior secondary programs (or having enrolments of students in the senior years). The remote and very remote schools running these programs have an average middle school enrolment of 16 students, while average senior enrolments are 15 students. By contrast, there are only six provincial (Darwin/Palmerston) schools and eight remote (Alice Springs and Katherine) schools offering senior programs.

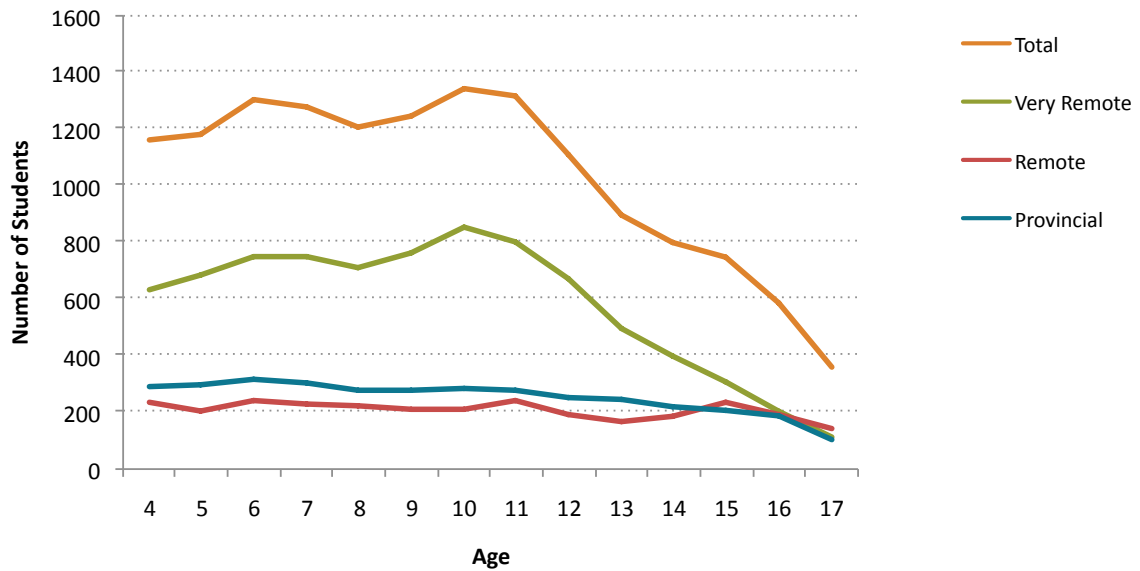
The average attendance of senior years students in very remote schools is about 30%. On a given day, therefore, an average of fewer than six students are attending each of the 51 very remote schools offering senior secondary programs. Average attendance in middle school programs is about 12. These numbers suggest that resources are stretched extremely thinly outside the towns, and that most very remote schools cannot offer programs with breadth to meet student needs.

In 2012 there were 4 329 Indigenous students enrolled in secondary schooling across the Territory. This represented an annual average growth rate of 3.8% since 2002, dramatically faster than for other phases of schooling. Despite this growth rate, apparent retention from Year 7 to Year 12 remains low. While non-Indigenous rates hover in the mid-70% range (and reflect some transfer to non-government schools), those for Indigenous students are in the mid- to high-30% range. For very remote students they are in the 20% range.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts have markedly different enrolment profiles. While non-Indigenous enrolments are highest at the beginning of schooling and trend down very slowly through schooling, Indigenous enrolments increase gradually through the primary years and then drop rapidly at the start of secondary school. This pattern is, however, almost entirely a function of very remote enrolment patterns. Where provincial and remote schools show a gradual decline in Indigenous enrolments in the secondary years (although with a somewhat sharper decline late in schooling), very remote enrolments fall dramatically after primary school. A total very remote Indigenous enrolment of about 800 students at the end of primary schooling declines to just above 100 by the end of secondary schooling.



Figure 16: Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2013 by Geolocation

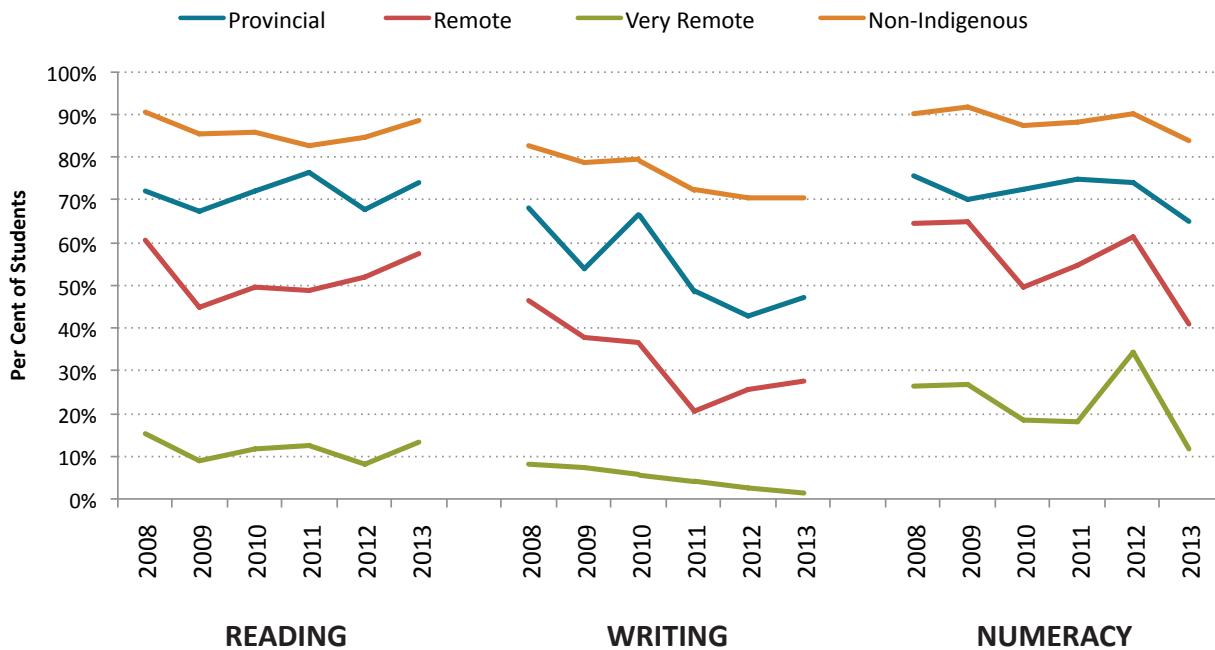


Source: Schools Age Grade Census data

The decade from 2002-2012 saw a significant drop in Indigenous attendance rates in all secondary schools, from 73.9% in 2002 to 64.3% in 2012. This accounts for the entire decline in Indigenous school attendance over the decade: attendance in primary schools increased slightly during the period.

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results in secondary schools show the same weak outcomes in writing and slightly better results in numeracy as in primary schools. They also show that achievement and remoteness are closely negatively correlated. With literacy rates for very remote Indigenous students around 10% by Year 9, there is little chance that these young people will gain a material benefit from secondary schooling.

Figure 17: Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Year 9 Indigenous students by Geolocation¹⁵



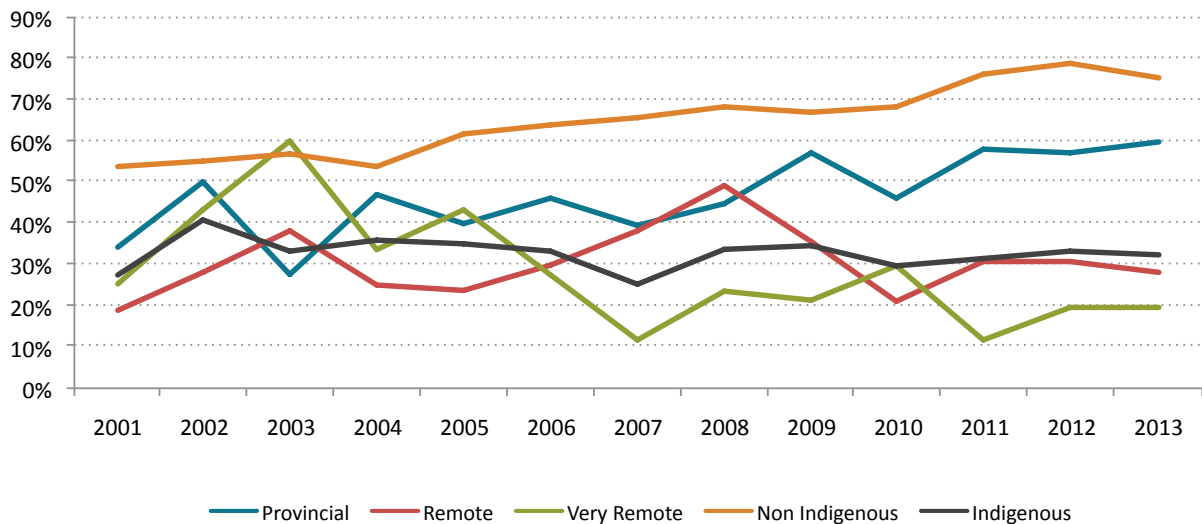
Source: DoE NAPLAN School Summary Results data

Results in the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) for Indigenous young people across the NT confirm flat performance over time, with NTCET completion rates fluctuating just above 30%. However, completions in provincial schools are on an increasing trajectory from below 40% to 60%. Remote school completions are volatile but average about 30%. But in very remote schools the graph heads down, with the trend line at 20% in 2012 and 2013 after being significantly higher in the early years of the century when only very small number of students were enrolled.

15. MSS is the Mean Scale Score. The Non Indigenous series are for students Northern Territory wide. There is a break in series for the writing domain from 2010 to 2011 due to a change in the testing genre from narrative to persuasive.



Figure 18: NTCE/NTCET Indigenous Year 12 Student Completion rate at Northern Territory Government Schools

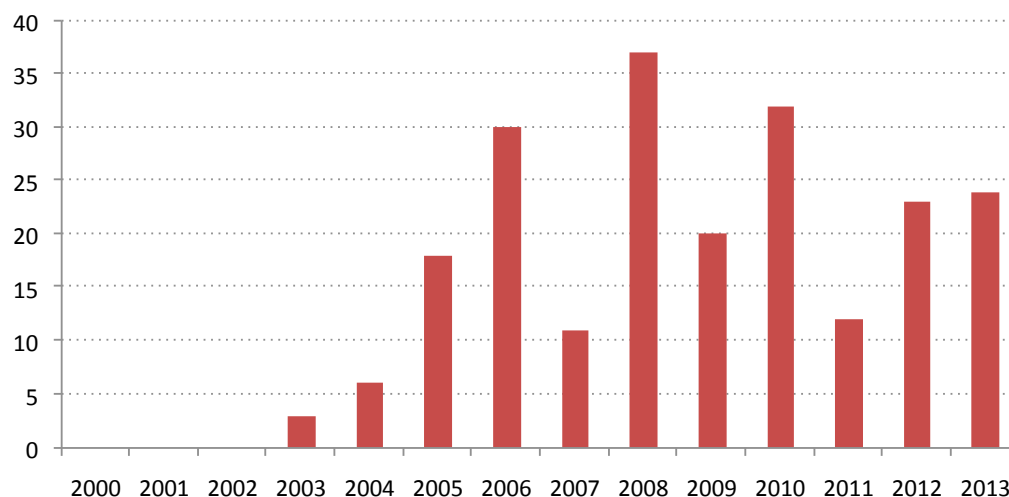


Source: SACE Board Datex 2010–2013

The raw numbers confirm this pattern. In very remote locations, the growth in completions from 2003-2006 has reversed and numbers have been flat or declining in trend terms from 2006–2012. The graph below includes very remote completions achieved as Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) enrolments. It should be noted that apparent inconsistencies between the graph above and the one below arise from:

- the inclusion of Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy completions in the graph above. These schools are not included below because their conditions are close to those of other urban schools rather than very remote schools; and
- dramatic increases in enrolments from 2003-2006 (from five to 133) resulting in an increase in completions but a drop in completion rate.

Figure 19: Very Remote Northern Territory Government Schools - Indigenous NTCE/NTCET completions (not including Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)



Nevertheless, there are examples of small-scale successes. A few very remote schools generate programs, usually based on VET, offering the chance for students to complete a qualification. These small successes are encouraging, but do not provide a firm basis for system provision. Patterns of results over time in each school suggest that while some schools achieve a measurable improvement for a period in student achievement, these are not sustained in the longer term.

Beyond the formal data, there is evidence of the limitations of much secondary provision in remote schools. The review found secondary programs without a clear intention to achieve a qualification and with no systematic overall structure, often staffed by teachers with primary training, responding as well as they could to students seeking a secondary education. Where programs are designed to lead to a qualification, they usually offer students a very narrow range of options. Many students in remote locations are still engaged in busy-work.

Young people engaged in these programs are (to an extent) fulfilling the legal requirement that they remain at school without benefiting from the moral requirement that they gain something worth having from this imposition. Students are often only minimally literate, largely disengaged from school, attending sporadically, looking forward to the end of their schooling with little prospect of gaining a formal qualification and in many cases without a realistic chance of gaining worthwhile employment locally.

Schools in different locations offer students different levels of aspiration. Urban students are usually in an environment where they see people occupying a wide range of adult roles, and where fellow students are aiming for university courses, VET qualifications and professional or qualified trade occupations. Remote students are often in schools where no Indigenous student, or almost none, has completed NTCET or a significant VET qualification, been to university or taken up a professional or significant technical or trade role. This experience inevitably limits their aspirations.



As Biddle and Cameron argue, expectations of educational outcomes are an important indicator of early disengagement from education. They note that:

a student's expectations may be self-fulfilling. Those who do not expect to complete high school are unlikely to put in much effort at school. [Expectations] are strongly influenced by the characteristics of one's peers, parents and teachers (Biddle and Cameron, 2011: 24).

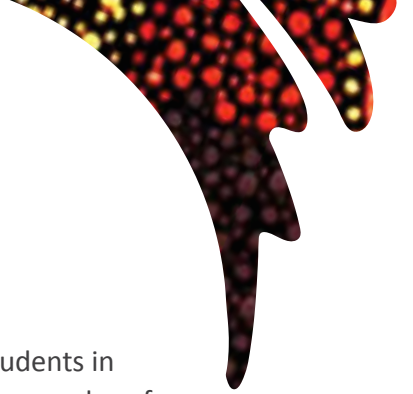
If the capacity of the remote Indigenous student population is normally distributed, there should be as many teachers, carpenters, nurses, doctors, veterinarians, plumbers and computer programmers emerging from these communities as from all communities. But as Figures 18 and 19 above show, there are not. This has an inevitable effect on the aspirations of young people in these schools.

One response to this situation has been to accept the limited horizon of the local community and initiate VET programs based on local employment opportunities. The weakness of this approach is that it limits the aspirations of whole communities of children to community work or rural operations, or whatever else is available within the boundaries of small communities. VET options are clearly important in engagement and as pointers and pathways to career options. But they should not be limited solely to the local horizon.

Students need a strong and realistic sense that they could gain materially from continuing their education, that there are future options beyond what they can see in their local community. For many students in remote settings, this is far from the case now.

This review believes that despite patches of success and occasional encouraging results from individual schools, the delivery of secondary education outside the larger centres has produced a minimal return for a significant investment. Since the Collins review, another generation of children in remote schools has largely failed to gain the benefits of a secondary education. This discussion is not intended to be critical of those communities and teachers who have fought to offer a secondary experience to young people in the most remote of settings. The effort, commitment and tenacity of those individuals and groups are admirable, but they are facing impossible odds. The years of effort to expand secondary remote provision since the Collins review have demonstrated that it is not possible to offer a comprehensive and substantial secondary program in most remote settings.

The data collection and consultation phases of the review also identified a number of issues in the way some urban middle and senior schools provide for their Indigenous students. Concern was expressed by a significant number of respondents about staffing arrangements that did not reflect the needs of Indigenous young people, inappropriateness of curriculum offerings for some Indigenous students, high rates of Indigenous student dropout from some senior schools, and the lack of induction and student support programs specifically designed for students from remote locations. Issues of this kind will become more significant as increasing numbers of remote Indigenous students enrol in urban schools.



The review also saw examples of strongly supportive programs for Indigenous students in urban schools. The role of Clontarf is significant for male students and there are examples of positive programs for girls, though without the same consistency across the NT. Some schools have excellent mechanisms for supporting student welfare and the role of Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (IEWs) and other Indigenous staff is clearly important for many students. The implementation of the review's recommendations will require all urban schools to have comprehensive programs to induct, support and mentor Indigenous students including those enrolled from remote community backgrounds.

How to proceed

It makes little sense to continue the unequal struggle to provide the full range of secondary education in the majority of remote schools with tiny numbers of attending secondary students. It would be more effective to strengthen offerings in a limited number of settings in which there are enough students to generate a high quality program covering a range of education and training needs. The only way to meet the needs of a small and thinly distributed student population for a substantial secondary education including a breadth of options in the senior years is to aggregate students into larger groups.

Secondary education, and especially the senior years of schooling, should be provided in settings that can offer a range of learning areas within the Australian Curriculum and a suite of VET offerings. The expansion of the range of offerings even in some more populated settings (e.g. Tennant Creek) will inevitably require a contribution from distance education providers, along with other forms of flexible provision, but this will only be effective where there are secondary-trained teachers and trainers able to provide supervision, support and advice to students studying by distance and other flexible modes.

To achieve a strengthened secondary offering, the review has identified a small number of key changes to policy and practice, which should be gradually implemented over an extended period:

- provision of most secondary education, and all senior secondary education, at schools in Darwin, Taminmin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy with the capacity to offer a range of programs and pathways;
- the development or expansion of boarding or other residential facilities (or use of existing underused facilities) located close to those major urban high schools, to enable students from remote locations to attend existing schools offering a viable middle years and senior secondary program;
- trials in some schools in very remote communities of the *Employment Pathways* model (see below and Appendix 3) in their schools; and
- based on successful trials, establishment in all urban schools of the *Employment Pathways* model (see below and Appendix 3) as a supplement to existing programs to assist in meeting the needs of the full range of students.



There might be families and students who would prefer to pursue non-government schooling options or distance education (although this report does not propose distance education for students without literate adults to provide support). Options for those students who do not choose these options and are not prepared or able to attend urban schools are outlined below.

Secondary schooling in urban schools for remote students

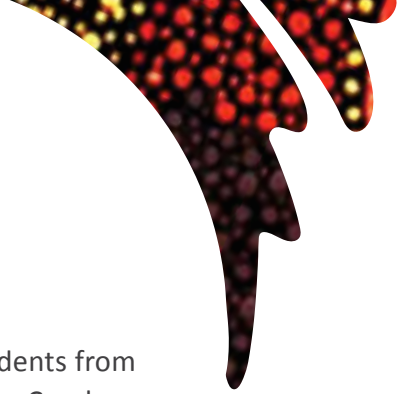
The discussion above of the inadequacies of secondary schooling options in most remote and very remote schools is the basis for the recommendation that secondary schooling should be progressively offered in urban schools with a critical mass of students. This applies most clearly to senior secondary schooling, which the review argues cannot be provided at a consistent level of quality in most small or very remote schools. In many cases, it is anticipated that families of middle years students will also choose urban options once the nature of that choice is developed and articulated.

If this shift is to be effective, there will have to be changes in practice in some urban schools. Each school will need to review its curriculum offerings to ensure that they cater for the full range of students. The proposal below for trials of the *Employment Pathways* model is intended to assist schools in this process. Schools will also need to ensure that their pastoral care arrangements are adequate to the task of supporting an increased enrolment of students who have undertaken primary, and in some cases middle, schooling in remote communities and are now living and attending school away from their home communities. Each school will need Indigenous support staff to assist in induction and support of students from remote communities as well as other Indigenous students. As noted below, there will also need to be effective transition and communication arrangements with families and communities of students who are away from home. Schools will require support in reviewing and, where necessary, changing their practice. The review also supports the establishment of stronger programs to support high-performing Indigenous students (see below).

The draft report of this review argued that the end of Year 6 should be a cut-off point for the delivery of education in smaller remote communities. This suggestion was strongly resisted in consultation responses and submissions. The submission from the Central Land Council (CLC) expressed a widely held view:

The CLC believes that, at a minimum, there should be Universal access to middle school (Years 7 to 9) in remote and very remote communities. It is not tenable that all children be expected to leave home to attend boarding school at Year 7, when some children are still 11 years of age (CLC, 2014: 12).

This report notes the consultation feedback and accepts that in many communities there will be similar views. There are also, however, families and communities that accept the argument of the draft report, evidenced by the fact that the 2014 trial of residential facilities in Tennant Creek has attracted both middle years and senior years students. This trial, using the Wangkana



Kari Hostel and providing enrolments to Tennant Creek High School, draws students from schools in Elliott, Alekarenge, Murray Downs, Borroloola, Epenarra and Canteen Creek. At the time of writing there were 18 senior years students and 12 middle years students. While this trial will no doubt have obstacles to overcome, reports to date have been very positive. It suggests that there is interest in a residential option designed to expand opportunities for Indigenous students from remote communities, and that the option should include opportunities for middle years students. The review proposes that additional trials of this kind are progressively established with volunteer communities.

Part of the difficulty with the secondary proposal is that, despite the long history of the use of boarding schools by remote Indigenous students in the NT, there are anxieties among some communities and families about the provision of education for their children being located at some distance from their homes. In the absence of positive stories and a history of success, these anxieties are unlikely to be allayed. For parents who feel that their Year 7 children are too young to leave home, these fears may never disappear. In order to provide reassurance to families and communities, it is recommended that the following conditions apply to the trials:

- the department should work with volunteer communities and families as has been done with the Tennant Creek trial;
- young people should not be involved in moving to urban schools without the support of their families;
- the year of secondary schooling at which young people begin to attend urban schools should be a matter for families to determine, as has been the case with the Tennant Creek trial, and advice should be provided to families about the effect of beginning the experience at earlier or later ages;
- community engagement and consultation processes should be established with those communities in which there is some support for the urban secondary option to ensure that each trial meets the needs of those communities;
- no major change should occur to the delivery of secondary education in remote locations while trials are being conducted, unless all attending secondary students from the remote school are involved in the trial, although staffing decisions should continue to be based on the current model unless this is changed;
- the trials should be closely monitored and evaluated, and information about progress of the trials collected and widely disseminated so that other families and communities have information to assist their decision-making process; and
- a representative advisory committee should be established by the Department of Education (DoE) to monitor the trials, report on progress and advise on overcoming obstacles.

Following these principles will ensure that community-based options will continue to be available for students while the urban provision arrangements are trialled and the processes tailored to need.



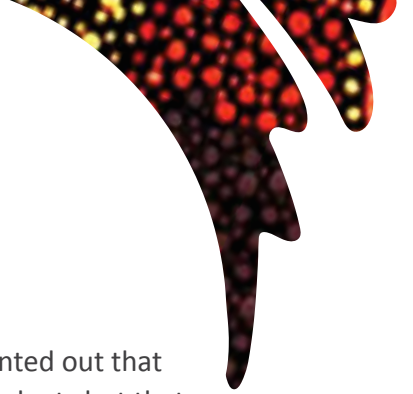
The review maintains its view that the provision of a full secondary education in most remote locations is not feasible. It is, however, recognised that the significant negative feedback about the involvement of younger secondary students cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, if young people in very remote communities are to gain the benefits of a full secondary education, it is recommended that they will need to attend urban schools from at least Year 9. For longer-term planning purposes following the conduct of trials, therefore, the review recommends that the following criteria be considered:

- provision of places in urban schools (and residential arrangements and support services) for all students of secondary age whose families support their involvement;
- progressive cessation of senior schooling (Years 10-12) in Priority 1 schools with extended lead times to enable planning for implementation;
- negotiation with each community regarding the provision of middle years programs in Priority 1 schools, with the expectation that within five years most students from these schools will attend urban schools from at least Year 9 onwards;
- in the years prior to student take-up of urban secondary options, curriculum programs should include efforts to work with students and parents to map student strengths and begin to articulate potential education, training and employment pathways to encourage aspirations that can motivate students to attend and participate in school;
- design of programs from Year 5 onwards in Priority 1 schools that prepare young people for the experience of attending a school away from their home community (and living in a residential facility); and
- provision for students of short intensive experiences, probably a week at a time, in urban schools (and residential facilities) during both of the final two years of primary or middle schooling as negotiated with each community. These experiences will both familiarise students with the experience of studying away from home and offer them intensive introductions to specialised options available at the urban school.

These mechanisms are designed to ensure that the move to urban schools is managed effectively, involves parents and communities in all decisions, and that the process is undertaken gradually to build up a record of success.

Establishing residential facilities

Conducting trials of urban secondary provision and progressively moving secondary education to urban schools will involve the establishment of residential facilities linked with those schools. A proposal of this kind must recognise and manage the history of boarding and residential arrangements for remote Indigenous students, a history which, despite some notable successes,



has not been generally effective. As long ago as 2003, the Secondary Review pointed out that some boarding schools in urban centres were catering for remote Indigenous students but that:

Poor retention and lack of achievement of outcomes at the secondary level are issues in some of these (Ramsey, 2003: xii).

The Ramsey review noted that one reason for the failure of young people to maintain enrolment at boarding schools might be homesickness, along with social issues in a new setting. Another is the fact that they have not been effectively prepared for the level of work required in secondary school (Ibid.: 166). The present review also notes the history of government provision of boarding schools at Kormilda in Darwin, Yirara in Alice Springs, and Dhupuma near Yirrkala, two of which were sold and one closed.

The present review's analysis and data gathering has demonstrated that some boarding options have generated a degree of success (see below). There are also continuing difficulties in some cases with student attendance, engagement and retention. There were anecdotal accounts of students from remote locations being overawed by their first contact with a large school. They quickly felt lost in its social and educational environment, and either reacted against the school with behaviour that schools find difficult to manage, or chose to leave the school early in their time there. Anecdotal data from boarding providers and visits to boarding facilities suggests that the picture has more positives than many respondents to the review would accept. One difficulty in undertaking an analysis based on data that is more than anecdotal is that the DoE collects no information on outcomes of government school students leaving the system to attend boarding schools.

Despite reservations, there is now a growing view that residential and boarding facilities are a viable solution. Noel Pearson, speaking in May 2013, said he was 'realistic about the fact that we can't offer quality secondary education in remote communities'. He indicated his support for 'the idea of boarding school for children in high school' (Kim, 2013). Some communities already embrace the boarding option. The review visited several locations where leaving for boarding school is the preferred option for the delivery of secondary education and in some of these cases it seemed to be effective for most young people.

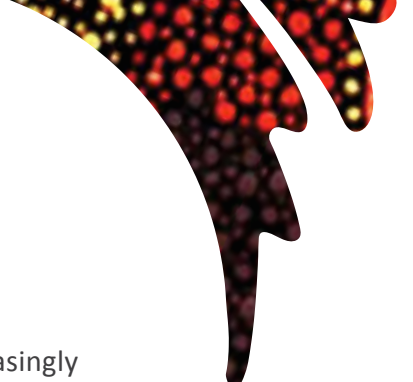
There are examples of successful residential accommodation facilities for Indigenous students, including Callistemon House in Katherine and Spinifex College in Mt Isa. Both provide a positive, attractive physical environment and a well-managed, systematic and consistent social environment. Both have strong systems of support and care along with high expectations of resident behaviour and a common understanding of the contribution made by residents in taking responsibility for themselves, and participating in the life of the community. Both facilities house Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, helping to broaden the social contact and aspirations of both groups. Each can cite evidence of student graduations and achievement at school.



A number of respondents to the present review were supportive of the use of boarding schools and/or hostels linked with large government schools as a partial solution to the delivery of secondary education. They were also clear, however, about the kinds of criteria that must be met by such facilities:

- a boarding facility has to be close enough to the communities so students can visit their homes and parents can realistically visit: a travelling time up to three hours, perhaps. It would also be valuable if students had family members or support in the town where the school is located;
- there must be an extensive transition process with contact between students from potential feeder schools, the residential facility and the school, including visits of children to the residential facility and secondary school and of teachers from the secondary school to the community;
- the residential facility must engage closely with communities and parents (e.g. an outreach program to ensure a regular flow of information to families and communities and to encourage visits and participation in activities);
- the facility should preferably house both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students;
- the boarding school or hostel must be closely involved in the urban schooling process and focused on outcomes and educational aspirations;
- school staff should have regular contact with and a thorough briefing from principals and teachers in the communities from which the students come;
- the residential facilities must have Indigenous staff members, preferably drawn from communities with which some students are familiar, and including staff members with a responsibility to support the engagement of parents and home communities. Wherever possible, there should be staff members representing family groups within these communities; and
- they must include residential accommodation for parents and community members during visits.

There are varying alternatives for the provision of residential options. One possibility is to build new residential facilities where they are needed. This will be necessary in some locations. Feedback from the consultation responses suggest that the best location for such dedicated facilities is some distance outside the relevant town: a distance of about two kilometres was suggested as appropriate to maintain easy access to the town and the school. Existing boarding schools with unused spaces might provide accommodation on a commercial basis for students attending government secondary schools. There are existing residential facilities that are under-used and those that are effective could be extended. Home stays or accommodation with family members living in towns could also be explored. Some smaller residential facilities are already located in town homes with employed house parents. Different approaches might be most effective in different locations, depending on current infrastructure and available options. These and other possibilities should be explored to provide as many different options as possible so that the needs of the variety of students can be met.



In the longer term, it is anticipated that residential facilities will become increasingly acceptable once good data and information are available about their effect on student achievement. This should lead to an increasingly high proportion of remote and very remote students participating in residential arrangements. This should be achieved, however, by working with communities over time and seeking volunteers rather than by short-term executive decisions.

Because this issue is controversial, and there are significant numbers of people who have reservations, the DoE should recognise that final policy decisions about remote provision might be some years away. This is part of the argument for a 10-year strategic plan for Indigenous education. During that time, considerable effort will be needed to engage with families and communities and to ensure that the urban schooling and residential model is thoroughly trialled and evaluated.

The Employment Pathways model

The proposals above assume a progressive and significant shift of remote and very remote Indigenous students to urban schools. This will require urban schools to adapt their practice and modify their curriculum offerings as the demographic profile of each school changes. The review proposes that work already under way in the DoE to develop VET pathways through secondary schooling should be trialled as a model for this shift in practice.

One key response needed is a broadening in curriculum offerings. The *Employment Pathways* model has been developed by the department to provide an alternative pathway through schooling and beyond. It provides schools with a guide to introducing employment-focused pathways in their schools. The model engages students in hands-on learning and aims to provide students with the skills they need to get jobs. The model is aimed at students who wish to complete their NTCET and go on to employment or students who wish to go straight to employment without completing the requirements of an NTCET. It is not focused on students who wish to attain an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). Urban schools already have programs in place that are designed to provide for students on the tertiary pathway.

The *Employment Pathways* model could be the primary model for many students. The model is particularly applicable to remote Indigenous students entering secondary education because it addresses the demonstrated critical gaps in their education to that point and provides students with a clear reason to attend school and a line of sight from school to employment. The model is also applicable to non-Indigenous students interested in going straight to employment or further training. It is location independent and based around VET programs and coverage of the Australian Curriculum that builds on the VET core.



This model is outlined at Appendix 3 and has been the subject of considerable development by staff in the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team in the department. It includes:

- a pre-VET program preparing students for the world of work supported by online resources from the Pre-VET™;
- an employment-focused VET program;
- a VET-based leadership program;
- an industry engagement process;
- an industry placement program;
- online resources for Stage One and Two subjects; and
- middle years subjects focusing on mathematics, English, science and civics and citizenship from the Australian Curriculum framework.

The model has not yet been fully developed and implemented. For this reason, the review recommends that a project be established to trial and assess its effectiveness. The team developing the project have proposed that four schools should be identified to monitor the impact of this model on the students and their outcomes. The schools suggested are Katherine High School and Tennant Creek High School, along with two very remote community schools. The schools should be selected on the basis that they will have somewhat different models of application of the *Employment Pathways* model. Results for this should be monitored over a three-year period.

Criteria will need to be developed during the trial to determine how widely this approach can be delivered. It is suitable for all urban secondary schools. Remote schools eligible for the program should be schools with a substantial existing secondary population, a realistic prospect of attracting a number of additional students from nearby communities, a relatively strong pattern of attendance, an existing secondary program with some experience of success and a moderately well-developed job market with different options for students. It is proposed that while the trial is conducted, modelling of school populations should be conducted across remote communities to determine specific criteria for the establishment of the *Employment Pathways* program.

Related issues

The proposals outlined here will raise a large number of issues, some, but not all of which, are dealt with here.



Secondary students not taking up urban schooling options

The proposals in this chapter raise important questions about students who do not choose to take up the urban schooling option. The perception will be that there is likely to be a substantial number of potential students who are denied an accessible opportunity for secondary education. This is a legitimate issue, and it is important that there is an understanding of the impact and options for these students. It is also important, however, to recognise that given the approach outlined above, there is time to work on the resolution of these questions and the design of approaches to meet the needs of this cohort and the obligations of the department to provide an education to every child.

The *Education Act* makes clear that young people are required to attend school until they complete Year 10. From that point until they turn 17, they are still obliged to attend school unless:

- they participate in approved education or training;
- from the age of 15 onwards, they are in paid employment or a combination of approved education or training and paid employment; or
- they are exempt from the requirement to participate.

The Act states that parents are responsible for the participation of their children in schooling or an eligible option as noted above. Parents can provide a ‘reasonable excuse’ for non-participation, which could include lack of provision of secondary education in a community, lack of infrastructure to support distance education, lack of parent capacity to provide home schooling or inability to control the young person’s behaviour to the extent necessary to ensure participation in compulsory education. This last factor can include cultural recognition of adulthood and its community responsibilities.

It is the argument of the review that the provision of high quality secondary education in urban settings, along with flexible residential options to assist participation, will over time meet the needs of the great majority of young people. It is likely, however, that some proportion of young Indigenous people in very remote settings will choose not to take up this option, just as they presently choose not to take up local provided schooling.

With the exception of approximately six schools, most students attending remote (rather than very remote) schools will have a secondary program within a reasonable distance. The 51 remote and very remote schools offering senior secondary programs outside the towns have a total enrolment in these years of just over 800 students at the time of writing. The seven largest very remote schools apart from the urban schools have a current total senior enrolment of 349. These students will be involved in trials in some cases or accommodated under current arrangements during the trials.

The remaining schools have an average enrolment of about 12 and attendance of four students each day. Most of these students are attending too infrequently to gain any significant benefit,




and in any case these schools are largely unable to offer programs of any breadth that provide access to further education, training and employment. For these reasons, virtually none of these students now gains a schooling qualification. The review proposes that these and many other students could be accommodated in residential facilities and offered substantial programs articulating with future opportunities. A small number of schools classified as very remote are also close enough to a town school or larger very remote school to take advantage of the secondary offerings available in those settings without the requirement for residential accommodation, although there will be a need for support with transport. There will be a major effort required to attract and retain the remaining students (and others not currently attending) under the new arrangements, but that effort should result in a significant improvement in educational opportunity.

The position for middle years students in these schools is similar. NAPLAN literacy rates among Year 9 students in very remote schools are around 10%, with almost none of them achieving the writing national minimum standard. The review's position is that this outcome is unacceptable. There are 72 very remote schools offering middle years programs, with an average enrolment of 16 students and an average daily attendance of 12. Of these, 13 schools have a middle years population of 40 or more, which would be maintained during the trials and in some cases possibly sustained longer term under the recommendations in this review, through the *Employment Pathways* model or some variation. A small number of additional very remote schools are close enough to a school likely to offer secondary schooling to take advantage of that opportunity.

The remaining schools have smaller populations. There are 28 schools with a middle years population below 10 and uneven attendance, so that, as identified above for senior students, programs lack breadth and relatively few students gain material benefits. There are more middle years students than senior students and they are younger. The review's proposal is that the shift to residential accommodation be managed gradually and that communities be engaged in the process. With community support, it is anticipated that the great majority of current students can eventually be moved to the new arrangements. Initial trials will identify potential barriers and enable mechanisms to be put in place to remove them.

Beyond these arguments, there will probably remain a group of very remote Indigenous students whose families do not support residential arrangements or who cannot be persuaded to attend school. It is important to develop a productive solution for these young people. While the nature of such a solution cannot be resolved at this time, it should build on and extend current arrangements.

The new Remote School Attendance Strategy will assist in ensuring that students not participating are identified and assisted in making the transition to the new arrangements. The strategy is intended to work closely with families and communities to support better attendance and engagement, and the presence of attendance officers in approximately 35 towns and communities (including the communities added as a result of the Australian Government's recent announcements) will be a key element in ensuring that the transition is well managed.



The provision of better quality secondary schooling with clear links to future options including employment, albeit in a different location, could provide a further incentive for students and families. Students will also retain options including distance education and home schooling, though these are unlikely on their own to be effective in many cases.

There are some current examples of success in engaging this cohort in remote settings, though usually on a small scale. A group of students at the Harts Range School, many of whom left school some years previously, were successfully engaged in a Certificate I in Agrifood Operations and five completed the qualification. At the time of writing, four of those five are in employment. Students preferring not to engage with residential arrangements and attend urban schools can be engaged in a VET-focused program aimed at skilling them for employment. Teachers can deliver the literacy and numeracy underpinnings of the VET program, supported by the work of the Regional Learning Agents of the NTOEC. The VET skills can be delivered by teachers or local industry with the capability to deliver VET programs, and assessments could occur digitally, on line or by purchasing VET assessors through the department Registered Training Organisation (RTO). In this way students would be prepared for employment in the local community and the broader NT.

For those aged 15 and over, options include:

- the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP), an Australian Government program that offers jobs, participation and community development services in remote regions. The program is delivered by local service providers and supports personalised skill development, employment and community participation. The program is offered in 23 NT communities;
- the Remote Youth Leadership and Development Corps is a component of the RJCP targeting young people under 24 in their transition from school to work. It aims to build foundational and vocational skills;
- Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) providing support for employers, business and other organisations for activities and projects that help increase employment and economic participation for Indigenous people. The programs provides support for Indigenous people in taking up training and employment opportunities;
- Green Corps, which provides work experience activities in conservation and natural resource management;
- distance education or home schooling options which could provide opportunities for some students with literate adult support;
- Skills for Education and Employment (SEE), an Australian Government program providing language, literacy and numeracy training to assist job seekers in obtaining employment or undertaking further education and training. The program is available in locations across the NT, and provides up to 800 hours of free accredited training delivered flexibly and also potentially including a work experience component;
- employment and training opportunities provided through community based options including community health, childcare, the local Shire, sport and recreation, lands management and specific opportunities such as the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation;



- opportunities in education including roles with Families as First Teachers (FaFT);
- the Child and Family Centres may pilot running educational courses for young women and men who do not wish to return to school but want to continue with their education in a more adult setting;
- apprenticeships and traineeships; and
- alternative education opportunities through Charles Darwin University or Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education or an interstate Technical And Further Education (TAFE) option.

While this is a substantial list, it is not argued here that it effectively meets the needs of all disengaged students. What is needed is a sustained planning process involving both the Australian and Northern Territory governments to build on these and other initiatives to establish a basis for meeting the needs of those secondary-aged students (including those under 15 and so largely ineligible for the programs outlined above) who are not involved in residential secondary arrangements and do not attend secondary school in their communities. It should be noted that this cohort already exists in significant numbers: the enrolment decline in very remote communities in the secondary years and the very weak NAPLAN literacy outcomes at Year 9 indicate this clearly.

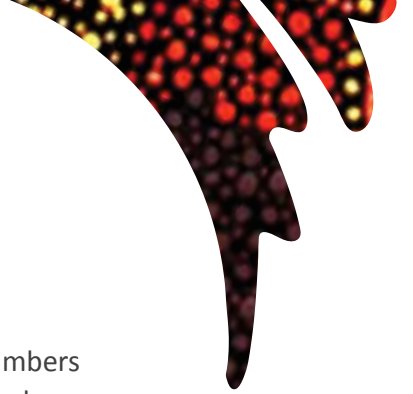
While it is anticipated that improvements in early childhood and primary school programs will make a material difference over time to the numbers in this cohort, they will not vanish. It is essential to plan a sustained and coherent program to meet their needs. This is not a new need, but it will be progressively thrown into relief as more secondary-aged students continue their education via town-based residential arrangements.

The review's core argument is that continuing to provide a poor quality secondary education in many communities is not a viable option. While the recommended approach in this report is challenging, it is also the only way in which many Indigenous secondary students will gain an education that gives them future options and a degree of power over their own lives.

Very remote primary schools

These proposals raise issues about the position of Priority 1 schools once the new arrangements are in place. It is proposed, as noted above, that regions negotiate with each community and school to determine what, if any, schooling each is equipped to provide beyond Year 6. Some schools will finish at Year 6 as entire cohorts choose to take part in urban schooling and residential arrangements. A number will have the capacity and community support to deliver one or two years of middle schooling. These decisions should be made with the full participation of the local community and based on clear criteria to be further developed, but including:

- the likelihood of a continuing viable enrolment base;
- an attendance record that underpins program effectiveness;
- explicit community support for attendance measures;

- 
- staff capacity to deliver the Australian Curriculum without above-formula numbers (but see the chapter on workforce planning for revised staffing proposals); and
 - infrastructure capacity to accommodate anticipated student numbers and meet curriculum needs.

These variations should not lead to the continuation of inadequate secondary programs delivered in communities that do not meet the criteria for maintenance of middle years programs.

Additional uses for facilities

Residential facilities could have a range of additional uses. It is intended that they would establish a relationship with remote schools located within a reasonable travelling distance from the facility. In addition to the secondary program, and transition arrangements for linked remote schools, the facilities could take groups of teachers, assistant teachers and a few community members on a residential basis for a week or two at a time, offering programs of professional learning. They could, for example, host groups for training in delivering the programs in literacy (including phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics) referred to in the previous chapter. This would help improve the quality of learning in remote primary schools, strengthen teacher and assistant teacher skills and also engage community members with the school and residential facility that children might attend during the secondary years.

The facilities could provide support for professional learning, including for assistant teachers engaged in training programs and potentially for Indigenous teaching trainees. Assistant teachers and trainees could visit the centres with their schools and also on other occasions with those undertaking similar training from different schools.

Distance education

Distance education is a much broader subject than the terms of reference for this review encompass. It is, however, relevant to the future delivery of education to Indigenous students. The set of proposals outlined in this chapter will raise issues about the role and provision of distance education in the NT. The remote secondary provision model will involve the use of online and NTOEC delivery. It should also involve the use of distance education in the middle years to extend curriculum options.

Accordingly, the review has examined the delivery of distance education in the NT. Further work will be needed to determine the best model for supporting those secondary students who remain in remote locations. This work should include further analysis of the best model for managing and delivering distance education.



DoE operates three local distance education providers:

- the NTOEC is a Senior Secondary School providing Northern Territory Board of Studies-approved subjects at Years 10–12 and a limited VET program. NTOEC is a key provider of senior programs to some urban and remote schools;
- Katherine School of the Air (KSA) caters for isolated primary school and middle years students in the top half of the NT, as well as residents temporarily travelling or based elsewhere; and
- Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) caters for primary school and middle years students in the southern half of the NT.

The three NT distance education schools are clear about the critical conditions for success, including the presence of a literate (and preferably trained) adult on site with the child, strong support for maintaining participation in the program, good relationships between the distance provider and the local school or family, effective communication, creative use of technology and high quality programs and courses.

KSA and ASSOA operate almost completely independently. They have independent management arrangements. They develop their own courses, and in recent years have conducted parallel work to develop courses to deliver the Australian Curriculum. Both schools have in recent years expanded their use of digital technologies to deliver online lessons and to improve communication with students and host schools. Both are moving into the delivery of middle years programs and are beginning to service children in schools, and to establish more wide-ranging relationships with those schools (in addition to the traditional market of mostly non-Indigenous children on cattle stations or living where formal schooling is not easily available). While their historical separation is understandable, the degree of overlap in their operations is clearly inefficient.

To the outside observer, distance education seems a service that should not be limited by geography. If a distance education service were being established today, it is unlikely that three separate schools would be considered a rational solution. Instead, an approach would be adopted to take advantage of economies of scale (e.g. in accommodation, management and administrative support), reduce overlap and duplication (e.g. in course development and delivery), benefit from a single investment in technology and a single program for technological innovation and group students engaged in less popular subject areas across the territory to maximize access.

The department should consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the current arrangements in the light of the changes, especially to secondary education, recommended in this review. If fully implemented, these changes will require the upgrading and strengthening of all aspects of distance learning services. This suggests that it might also be appropriate to review the broader issue of the structure and management of distance education.



High performing students

It is notable that there are limited commitments across the system to the identification and fostering of high performing Indigenous students. Given the compelling data about low performance, perhaps this is not surprising. It is likely, however, that students with high potential would benefit from programs that build on their strengths and offer them a broader horizon of opportunity than is currently available.

The department works with the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) to deliver the IMPACT program, a sustained engagement program that works with Year 10-12 students across the NT. Students meet regularly for workshops on issues such as goal-setting, public speaking, cultural identity and community contribution. About 50 young people have completed the program and in 2014 an expanded cohort of 25 started the program. According to FYA, their average school attendance is over 90% and they are taking increasing responsibility for their own learning (FYA, 2012).

Elsewhere, it was difficult to source data about programs for high performing Indigenous students. The data available through the DoE system did not provide detailed information of this kind, or about the nature of programs for gifted students generally.

Just as the Clontarf programs acts as a stimulus to student engagement for young men with a talent for football, it would be valuable to see a greater commitment to high performance programs in academic and other areas, especially for Indigenous students. This work should focus on urban secondary schools in the first instance as part of the effort to enhance the capacity of these schools to engage greater numbers of remote Indigenous young people who move to urban settings for their secondary education.

Learning and Engagement Plans

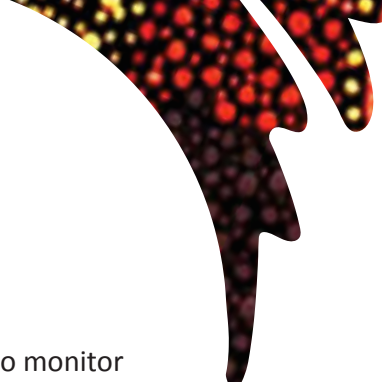
The review notes the proposed development of Learning and Engagement Plans for Indigenous students as part of the NT's Schooling Implementation Plan. In response to national policy, the NT has committed to increasing the number of students with personalised learning plans. The plans will be supported by department units and linked with data through SAIS and other systems. These plans were discussed in Chapter 8 on Primary education.

The review supports the development and use of these plans, and proposes that in secondary schools they should focus on students whose attendance is between 50% and 80% to enable dedicated efforts to lift attendance above the 80% attendance level which the review's research has confirmed is the key trigger point for learning.



Recommendations

27. Progressively move to deliver most senior secondary schooling and the majority of middle years schooling in urban schools with a critical mass of students, beginning with trials in Tennant Creek and other locations based on the following principles:
 - a. working with volunteer families and communities;
 - b. families deciding the year of schooling at which young people enrol in an urban school;
 - c. undertaking community engagement processes with participating communities to ensure that trials meet the needs of those communities;
 - d. maintaining secondary provision in participating communities if students remain enrolled during the trials;
 - e. evaluating the trials and disseminating information about progress; and
 - f. establishing a representative advisory committee to monitor the trials, report on progress and advise on overcoming obstacles.
28. Base the longer-term delivery of urban secondary education for remote students on criteria including:
 - a. provision of places in urban schools for all students of secondary age whose families support their involvement;
 - b. progressive cessation of senior schooling (Years 10-12) in Priority 1 schools with extended lead times to enable planning for implementation;
 - c. negotiation with each community regarding the provision of middle years programs in Priority 1 schools, with the expectation that within five years most students from these schools will attend urban schools from at least Year 9 onwards;
 - d. development of curriculum programs in Priority 1 schools to articulate potential education, training and employment pathways to encourage student aspirations;
 - e. design of programs from Year 5 onwards in Priority 1 schools that prepare young people for the experience of attending a school away from their home community; and
 - f. provision for students of short intensive experiences in urban schools during both of the final two years of primary or middle schooling, as negotiated with each community.
29. Develop residential facilities to accommodate remote students in towns, beginning with trials linked with the urban schooling trials recommended above, including:
 - a. conducting, evaluating and disseminating information about trials in Tennant Creek and other sites with volunteer families and communities;
 - b. negotiating with families and communities through a structured community engagement process to ensure that the form of the residential trial meets their needs;
 - c. establishing strong transition arrangements that are consistent across the system to support students in preparing for participation in residential arrangements;
 - d. maintaining close links with families and communities during the trials;

- 
- e. requesting the representative advisory committee recommended above to monitor the trials, report on progress and advise on overcoming obstacles;
 - f. taking account of the detailed criteria set out in this chapter in setting up and managing trials;
 - g. using the facilities as appropriate for professional learning programs especially for staff from remote schools; and
 - h. following these trials, making policy decisions about the progressive cessation of senior secondary schooling in Priority 1 schools and other policy issues required to support extended residential arrangements to provide high-quality secondary education to students from remote communities.
30. Trial and evaluate the *Employment Pathways* model in Tennant Creek, Katherine and two remote schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria, and:
- a. determine the effect of the model on student engagement and outcomes;
 - b. consider its applicability to all urban middle and senior schools; and
 - c. develop criteria for remote schools wishing to deliver the program and determine how many remote schools meet criteria to offer the program during the middle and senior years.
31. Require all urban secondary schools to review and adapt their arrangements for Indigenous students including:
- a. reviewing curriculum offerings to ensure that they meet the needs of the full range of students;
 - b. ensuring that they provide effective induction, support and wellbeing arrangements for remote students living away from home;
 - c. providing Indigenous staff to assist in student support;
 - d. establishing effective communication with parents of students living away from their home communities, including regular visits by staff to communities and community members to the school; and
 - e. reporting on their plans through review and accountability procedures.
32. Undertake a planning process involving both the Australian and NT governments to build on current adult education, training and support arrangements to develop a set of mechanisms to meet the education and training needs of students under the age of 17 in remote communities who are not in employment or training, and neither engage with urban schooling arrangements nor attend their local school.
33. Examine the three-school distance education arrangement and current practice to determine how well they are suited to the changed secondary schooling arrangements proposed in this report.
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Students need a strong and realistic sense that they could gain materially from continuing their education, that there are future options beyond what they can see in their local community.



Chapter Ten

Attendance

The Northern Territory Government (NTG) has spent incalculable resources over many years to improve the school attendance of Indigenous students, but without material improvement. Despite the establishment of major policy statements and the development of comprehensive strategies, attendance continues to lag.

The review has identified a number of reasons for this situation:

- factors that are outside the control of schools, such as cultural and ceremonial activities; family mobility; timing of royalty payments, the Darwin Show and similar events, football carnivals and rodeos; lack of parent and community support for attendance; overcrowding; social disruption affecting children including gambling, substance abuse and violence; lack of employment and the routines and benefits that accompany employment among parents; and natural events that disrupt attendance;
- the failure of schools to effectively achieve educational progress, especially in early literacy, among some attending students;
- the weakness of some secondary programs in schools and their lack of a connection with valued outcomes; and
- a lack of department and school focus on what schools are best able to do to improve attendance among their enrolled students.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- discussion of the importance of the teaching of first language and culture as a contribution to student attendance;
- concern that the Australian Government's Remote Schools Attendance Strategy puts additional pressure on schools without effective planning to manage the consequences of higher attendance by disengaged students;
- support for the proposal to focus school attendance efforts;
- concern about those students of secondary school age who are not attending school and for whom there are limited other options;
- support for efforts to improve parent and student engagement with education as a stimulus to improved attendance;
- arguments suggesting that weaker attendance followed the establishment of the four hours of English rule in 2008; and
- the view that attendance is not a good indicator of educational achievement.



Learning Lessons

Learning Lessons argued that ‘...children must attend school consistently to progress. In relation to indigenous education, poor attendance is without doubt the primary cause of poor educational outcomes’ (Collins, 1999: 141). The issues described by Collins included the lack of consistent attendance and the lack of expectation from a school, community and system perspective. A culture of low expectation and low motivation to engage in schooling was seen a major contributor to poor attendance and education outcomes. The nature and depth of the attendance story was difficult to quantify. System data did not convey the seriousness of the issue, nor could it be used to identify trends and patterns of school attendance.

The situation now

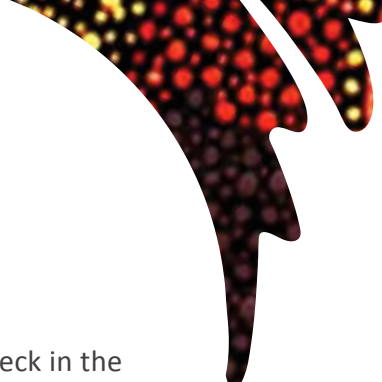
Since the Collins review, the situation has continued to deteriorate. The average attendance of Indigenous students in 2002 was 70%. By 2012 the percentage was around 68%, while attendance for Indigenous secondary students in very remote schools had dropped dramatically, heading towards 50%. A recent report shows that only 40% of Indigenous students attend school 80 per cent or more of the time (four days a week or more), which this review has demonstrated is a key benchmark for achievement.

This is not for want of trying. Both the Territory and Australian governments have made major efforts to improve attendance. The Northern Territory Department’s *Every Child Every Day* policy initiative sets out an ambitious and demanding program of action. The Australian Government’s School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) and more recently the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy both aim to address the problem head on.

Every Child Every Day set out a five-stage process which can lead eventually to prosecution of families if student non-attendance persists. The stages are:

- local support to families if a student has three consecutive unexplained absences;
- a face-to-face meeting with families if a significant pattern of absenteeism emerges;
- if there is ongoing failure to attend regularly another face-to-face meeting occurs, followed by the delivery of a formal notice indicating the Department of Education and Training’s (DET) intention to take action. An Individual Attendance Plan may be pursued at this stage;
- failure to comply will lead to DET pursuing a Family Responsibility Agreement under the *Youth Justice Act*; and
- when other avenues have failed, the department may pursue the prosecution of parents (NTG, undated A).

The program also has a range of other initiatives to address non-attendance and disengagement from school. It is supported by 46 School Attendance and Truancy Officers (SATO). The staged approach has been used with a substantial number of truants. While fines have been issued,



it appears that as many as 75% of those fines have not been paid. One bottleneck in the system concerns the inadequate availability of social workers, who are required at the point where conferences occur with families.

The SEAM program uses a similar staged process, but ending with a process of welfare management rather than fines. This has been trialled in 23 schools in the NT, supported by 16 Enrolment and Attendance Officers (EAOs) and Data Officers, and funded by the Australian Government under the Stronger Futures National Partnership (NTG, 2013: 4).

More recently, the Australian Government has announced a Remote Schools Attendance Strategy (RSAS) focused on improving attendance. The program began in January 2014 in 21 communities in the NT (and a total of 40 schools nationally). The program provides at least one School Attendance Supervisor in each community and one School Attendance Officer for every 20 students enrolled, the latter drawn from the local community. They work with schools and families supporting improved attendance. The focus of the program is not legal compliance, but there could be cases where more stringent measures are required.

According to Australian Government figures, attendance rates are up 14% in the first two months of the program's operation¹⁶. The Australian Government has recently announced an extension of the program to an additional 30 communities (Prime Minister et al, 2014; Karvelas, 2014). This will involve an additional 60 Supervisors and 210 Attendance Officers across Australia. Although the number of additional NT communities was not known at the time of writing, it is anticipated that the program could in future reach 35 NT communities.

There is anecdotal evidence that the appearance of additional students at school as a result of the program has caused some problems (*Tennant Times*, 2014). While the situation is expected to stabilise quickly, it is clear that forward planning at the department, regional and school levels would have assisted the process, ensuring that schools had mechanisms in place to deal with the attendance of additional students, some of whom are likely to be disengaged and with weak skills in literacy and numeracy.

Department monitoring of student attendance has dramatically improved, unlike the attendance picture itself. There are now very reliable records of attendance, updated quickly and accessible for planning and monitoring purposes. If data alone were the answer, the issue would be resolved by now.

The review saw sustained efforts by school staff to get children to school. Staff from many schools visit families each morning to collect children. Some schools have detailed records of attendance issues and take a case management approach. Others have worked with communities to seek support in encouraging children to attend. In many cases these efforts were beyond what could fairly be asked of teachers and other staff.

¹⁶ It is too early to regard this as a permanent improvement, and discussion below is based on attendance data collected through the normal processes of the Department of Education.



Despite all these efforts, the deterioration in attendance has continued in recent years. Table 5 shows that overall Indigenous attendance declined by 2% between 2009 and 2012 while enrolment remained static. While provincial Indigenous attendance improved by 2%, remote attendance declined by 2.2% and very remote by 3.7%. The evident decline in remote and very remote attendance occurred over the period when the *Every Child Every Day* policy might have been expected to begin to show results.

Table 5: Northern Territory Government Schools Attendance Rates by Geolocation, 2009 and 2012

	2009			2012		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Provincial	80.8%	90.6%	88.7%	82.8%	90.7%	89.2%
Remote	80.2%	92.0%	86.6%	78.0%	90.9%	84.8%
Very Remote	61.8%	89.3%	65.5%	58.1%	88.8%	62.1%
Total	69.7%	90.8%	81.4%	67.8%	90.6%	80.6%

The pattern of attendance in recent years, while generally showing a small decline, is uneven across schools. A shortlist of 29 NT schools with low levels of attendance prepared as part of planning for the Australian Government RSAS program, shows a small improvement in attendance between 2008 and 2012 (from 56.8% to 58%). Most of these schools have a proportion of Indigenous language speakers approaching 100%. This casts some doubt on claims by some proponents of bilingual education that the four hours of English announcement in 2008 had a significant negative effect on attendance by Indigenous students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Indeed the same data show that following the announcement, attendance increased by 2.5% in these schools between 2008 and 2009, with a 3.7% increase in schools that had bilingual programs in 2008.

Does attendance affect achievement?

The first question addressed by the review is whether it is worth focusing on attendance at all. Little work has been done in the NT on inflection points; those levels of attendance that seem to result in improved learning. If there is a pattern, it would make sense to focus effort on getting children to those levels. The attendance effort in schools occupies significant staff time and other resources. If this effort is not well targeted, it is likely that it detracts from the resources available to those students who attend regularly and who are engaged with schooling, without a corresponding benefit.

Figure 20: NT Government Indigenous students – % at or above national minimum standard for reading by attendance band

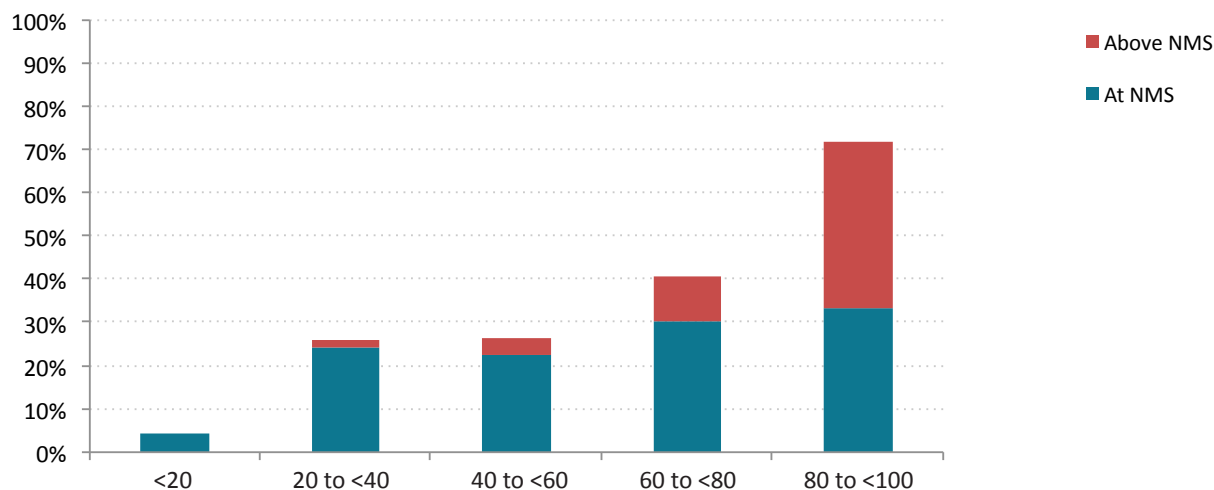
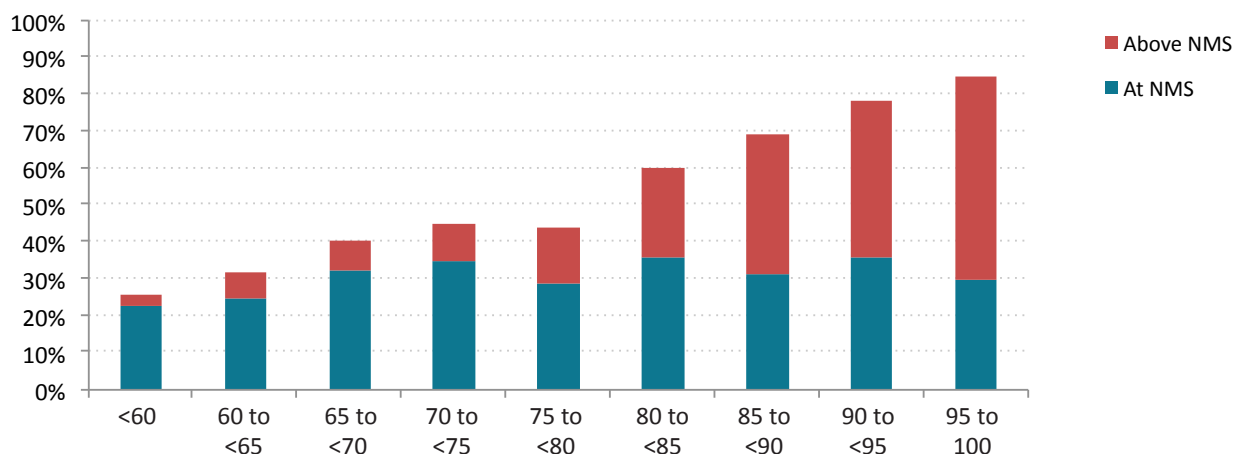


Figure 21 shows attendance bands for all NT Indigenous students and their relationship to achievement of the reading national minimum standard in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The graph demonstrates that up to 60% attendance (three days a week) very few students achieve the standard. Above 60% achievement improves substantially with each additional day of average attendance. The greatest improvement occurs once attendance rises over 80%, at which point over 70% of Indigenous students achieve or exceed national minimum standard.

The effect of relatively small further improvements in levels of attendance is equally clear as rates rise above 80% or four days per week. What is notable in Figure 22 is a very significant progressive increase in the number of students achieving above national minimum standard with each increase in attendance above 80%, with over 50% of Indigenous students achieving above national minimum standard once attendance is over 95%. The position is similar for numeracy.

Figure 21: NT Government Indigenous students – % at or above national minimum standard for reading by attendance band above 60%





These data are broadly confirmed by a very detailed and thorough study in Western Australia. This shows that for Indigenous students, only those attending 90% were likely to be above national minimum standard in numeracy, while in reading, ‘only Aboriginal students who attended almost all of the school year were likely to be performing above National Minimum Standards in Years 5 and 7’ with a similar pattern for writing (Hancock et al, 2013: 140).

The review argues below that attendance efforts should be directed to ensuring that students attend at least four days each week, since that is the point at which learning begins to accelerate. This does not mean, though, that four days a week is enough. The best results will be achieved with 100% attendance for every student, and this should be the goal in every school and throughout the education system.

Where should effort be directed?

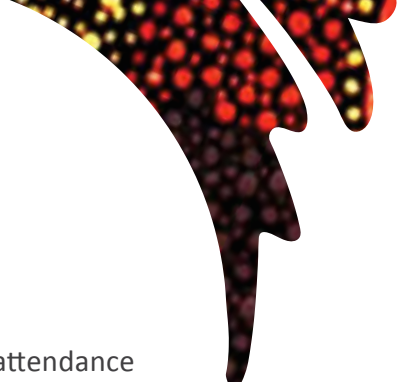
The review has proceeded on the assumption that attendance will be substantially improved by the areas in which recommendations have been made. This includes increasing efforts to improve community engagement, engage children and their families during early childhood, ensure effective literacy learning, improve the teaching of first language, provide high quality secondary education, manage wellbeing and behaviour issues systematically and improve the quality and effectiveness of school personnel and programs.

In addition, though, there is a need for programs designed to address attendance issues directly. The review proposes that what is missing is a clear strategic focus. A DoE paper prepared for a national meeting of Education Ministers suggests that among factors having a positive effect on attendance (though not always consistently) are:

- small size in remote schools;
- community stability;
- a close connection between community and school;
- quality school programs and leadership;
- stability in school staffing;
- family backgrounds with at least one working parent; and
- families with a high regard for education (NTG, 2013).

While some of these are within the influence of the DoE, some are factors that cannot be controlled or directly influenced by educators.

The same paper proposes a range of initiatives to improve attendance. These include welfare reforms, initiatives run through schools, community partnerships and integrated services across government service providers, and the establishment of boarding schools (Ibid.). There is a clear need to conduct further research to determine which approaches and programs have a material effect on attendance.



It is also important to determine which children should be the major focus of attendance efforts. At present, efforts have been directed to the full range of children who are not attending schools. Instead, energy should be directed to those children with whom we are likely to achieve the greatest improvement in attendance and student achievement. This suggests that the attendance effort by schools should be mainly directed to those students who are attending three days a week or more. There is likely to be little benefit in schools pursuing children who are attending less than this. By contrast, shifting a student's attendance from three to four days a week roughly doubles the chance of NAPLAN achievement.

Primary schools

Primary-aged children should be the first focus. The Telethon report on student attendance and educational outcomes notes that 'most achievement disparities are in place at the outset of Year 3' and that these achievement gaps remain in place throughout the school years. The report argues that improving the attendance of disadvantaged students might help to reduce these achievement gaps or prevent them from becoming wider (Hancock et al, 2013: vii).

The role of schools should be to work with all primary-aged children (and families in early childhood), seeking to establish a relationship with each family and an initial attendance pattern. Once attendance patterns are clear, schools should focus their own efforts on children attending at least three days a week, while maintaining regular contact with the families of low-attending students. These efforts should include regular contact with parents in which parents are informed about the attendance patterns of their children and the evident achievement effects of those patterns. The review notes the work undertaken in Maningrida to demonstrate to parents the direct link between better attendance and improved achievement.

In some communities we saw evidence that primary-aged children were uncontrolled in the community, staying up for much of the night, making their own decisions about attendance and failing to engage with schools. If these children are not attending regularly, schools are unlikely to achieve improved attendance. At the primary phase, there is a realistic chance that a child can be engaged or re-engaged successfully with schooling and establish a pattern of attendance that offers the chance of normal achievement. The use of stronger measures should be the means by which this is achieved. Where children are attending less than three days per week on average, the *Every Child Every Day* program and the Australian Government measures should undertake the main effort to manage their attendance. These children should be the principal focus of these stronger measures (rather than secondary students or higher attending primary children).

Secondary schools

Secondary schools should focus their efforts on young people already attending at least three days per week. In these cases, there is a realistic chance that attendance levels can be progressively improved so that the students gain substantial benefits from their schooling.



Visits to schools indicated that students in the secondary years who have not been regular attenders are unlikely to re-engage effectively and constitute a significant problem for schools. Significant numbers of secondary-aged young people are missing from school in remote communities. Where schools managed to get some non-attenders to come to school, attendance was very sporadic. In many schools, there was evidence of bullying of younger students, disruptive behaviour and role modelling that had a negative effect on primary-aged children.

One likely consequence of very successful implementation of the new RSAS could be rapid increases in the number of disaffected and disengaged secondary-aged students attending school. There is a widespread view about the relative ineffectiveness of current efforts through re-engagement centres and other initiatives under *Every Child Every Day* to work with young people who have substantially disengaged from school. Of the many hundreds of young people who have been involved, it appears very few are re-engaged for any substantial time. The addition of a significant further group of disaffected, largely illiterate secondary students unused to the routines of schooling would constitute a massive disruption. Even larger schools would find it difficult to manage a group like this. The review saw examples of this problem arising from the presence of even small numbers of these students.

The education system has not to date identified a solution for this significant group of disengaged secondary-aged young people. The approach to attendance and the other changes recommended in this report are designed to ensure that in future, smaller numbers of young people are in this position. If the numbers are substantially reduced, re-engagement, if it is needed, is more likely to be successful.

The potential consequence of the RSAS is critical. If schools are suddenly obliged to deal with additional groups of disengaged students without adequate planning, not only are they unlikely to succeed with these students, but their capacity to meet the needs of other attending students will be reduced. The review is concerned that the Australian and Northern Territory governments take action to avoid this problem. There should be action to ensure that attendance initiatives managed by the either government involve planning at departmental, regional and school level to manage the consequences of such initiatives. Schools should not be left to deal with unanticipated numbers requiring rapid emergency responses in difficult circumstances.

The problem of those secondary aged students who are disengaged and in many cases illiterate will not, however, automatically disappear. The chapter in this report on secondary education suggests approaches that might improve outcomes for these young people. It is not proposed, however, that their needs can easily be met by the programs now in place in remote schools.

In the situation faced by the NT, resources should be allocated by preference where they are likely to achieve the greatest improvement: to primary children and to secondary children who are attending. As noted above, proposals elsewhere in the report should also have an effect on attendance. The NT should aim to ensure that children who are now in their early years become the first recent generation to attend consistently and fully gain the benefits of their education.



Who is responsible for attendance?

The review argues that some current attendance efforts have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the situation in which communities, parents and students fail to take responsibility for attendance. Schools that collect children from home, feed them, offer them school uniforms, wash them and take responsibility for some of their health issues, raise questions about what responsibility is accepted by parents. These measures place no responsibility on students and families and provide no incentive for self-management of attendance. In this respect, they are the equivalent of welfare programs that meet basic needs but provide no incentive for self-efficacy: essential but potentially giving rise to unintended negative consequences.

The review argues that the success of Australian Government initiatives and the stronger measures under *Every Child Every Day* are critical to the future not only of the children but also of their families and communities. These measures, combined with the range of other proposals in this review, have the potential to strengthen community support and responsibility for schooling and improve the benefits gained by children. The viability of communities depends in part on their capacity and readiness to accept responsibility for their own children.

The review also recommends that all schools adopt programs of information and incentives to encourage all children and their families and communities to take additional responsibility for attendance. The information might be in the form of regularly updated attendance graphs for each child showing their percentage attendance over time and for the most recent period. This information could be linked, as discussed above, to achievement data showing children and their parents the relationship between attendance and achievement. Achievement data for this purpose should be drawn from the common assessment instruments recommended in this report as likely to measure and report improvement where it is occurring, rather than NAPLAN data which are less useful for tracking individual improvement in a fine-grained way. This information should be provided to each child, each family and the community if appropriate, and targets set for the improvement of attendance. In each case, the focus of targets should be on improvement as well as absolute attendance. Targets should also be linked to what the research tells us about the level of attendance that is correlated with measurable improvements in student achievement. Children who have been attending below key levels should be rewarded when their attendance consistently exceeds those levels.

Chapter 6 on Community engagement refers to the Student Education Trusts in use in the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy schools to encourage parents to make financial contributions to support student education. This and similar measures to encourage parent responsibility through a financial commitment are supported by the review.



Other matters

Non-enrolment

A number of respondents to the review referred to a disturbing suggestion that there are material numbers of young people in the NT who have never enrolled in school, or who have been off the rolls for substantial periods of time. More than one respondent offered estimates of the numbers: these estimates clustered round 2000 students, and it was commonly assumed that these students were predominantly Indigenous (e.g. DET, 2009B). There was little empirical evidence to support this contention, although one respondent referred to a 2007 study conducted in one regional area that identified about 110 such students. One assumption was that these young people were largely located in the substantial number of occupied Homelands that have no educational facility. It is not clear to what extent these young people are included in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics.

The issue of unenrolled students is one that the review has been unable to resolve. It is recommended that a study be undertaken to map the number and location of unenrolled students with the goal of establishing programs to encourage their enrolment. These programs should focus on primary-aged children, consistent with the approach recommended by the review. The discussion of homelands education in the chapter of the review on the education system is relevant to this issue.

Factors affecting attendance

One issue raised by several respondents was the absence of high quality research about the factors most likely to affect attendance rates. The submission from Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education argues that:

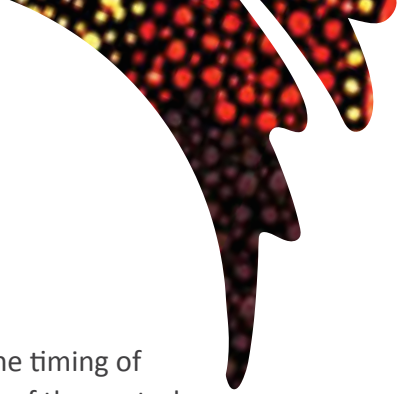
Attendance policy has largely been informed by anecdotal and indirect information about why children are not attending school.

The submission proposes that there should be:

systematic and rigorous investigation based on epidemiological principles to identify the relative importance of the range of school and non-school factors and the likely benefits which strategically targeted interventions could be expected to achieve. There is also a need for systematic evaluation of the implementation, impacts and outcomes of the current attendance programs (Menzies 2014: 8)

The review supports this proposal and recommends research into the influences on attendance and the effectiveness of attendance initiatives.

A consistent theme in the review was concern about the negative attendance effect of a range of other activities and initiatives. These included community programs run during school times,



such as rodeos, football carnivals and shows including the Darwin Royal Show, the timing of royalty payments and service policies of community shops. These are largely out of the control of schools and are difficult to influence. There have, however, been department and government initiatives to address these issues with communities, agencies and organisations responsible for these activities. There are examples of success in ameliorating some of these influences, such as the Groote Eylandt community program linking attendance to royalty payments. One initiative trialled in recent years is the change to the school year at Gunbalanya. Formal evaluation of these programs is proposed to determine whether there are measurable outcomes and whether these are likely to be replicable at other sites.

The review proposes that as part of the research program proposed above, a concerted effort should be undertaken at whole of department and whole of government level to analyse the effect of these extraneous influences and to address each of them with the relevant communities or organisations. While decisions about attendance rest with families and children, it would assist those decisions if some other negative influences were removed or reduced in effect.

The review also notes the valuable initiatives taken by some communities to reach agreement about timing of funerals and other ceremonial activities, including the Oenpelli effort to manage the timing of funerals. These are sensitive and important issues that bear on cultural responsibilities. It is proposed that community engagement programs should raise these issues to determine whether communities are prepared to consider the timing and the extent of student participation in some activities to assist in the improvement of attendance and student outcomes. One matter that could also be explored as part of these discussions is the establishment of means by which schools in kinship related communities can work together (as is now done in some cases) to encourage students attending funerals, for example, to attend school in the area.

Clontarf and programs for girls

Clontarf Football Academies offer the most prominent program provided to students in part as an attendance incentive. The program is offered to secondary boys only at 15 schools in the NT, all located in schools with enough students of the appropriate age to sustain the program.

The Clontarf Foundation's Annual Report for 2012 says that the program exists to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men and by doing so, equip them to participate meaningfully in society (Clontarf Foundation, 2012: 2).

The program uses football as the vehicle for Indigenous students to experience success and raise their self-esteem. Clontarf planning is based on five areas: leadership, education, employment, wellbeing and football, and all are important. The assumption is that the enthusiasm students feel for the game will attract them to school and keep them there. The evidence suggests that Clontarf does achieve an attendance improvement. There is less evidence about its effect on student behaviour, engagement and achievement in the core schooling program, and in particular on senior completions. In some cases this is part of a deliberate strategy by the Clontarf team in some schools,



they argue that their relationship and effectiveness with the student participants would be damaged if they took a more overt role in linking participation in Clontarf to broader school goals.

Clontarf staff argue, on the other hand, that in some cases it is the schools themselves that have reduced their focus on senior completions in favour of a middle years emphasis. They also suggest that in schools where principals are strongly supportive, and where high quality teachers are allocated to classes attended by the Clontarf participants, results have shown significant improvement. The review was unable either to confirm or dispute this contention. We did see evidence that in at least one senior school there was an unusual pattern of student dropouts early in the program, which the Clontarf staff attributed to poor school support for the program and the students.

Clontarf is doing valuable work and in cases where the program and the school leadership cooperate effectively it is likely to improve achievement and behaviour as well as attendance. The review supports its continuation along with joint planning involving the department, Clontarf and each school to maximise the benefit to student achievement from participation in the program.

There is no system-wide equivalent for Indigenous girls. There has been a range of programs run by the department, schools and non-government organisations, including Girls' Academies, GEMS, Girls at the Centre and Stronger Smarter Sisters. None of these programs has been present at a substantial number of locations, each has a different funding model and each requires dedicated attention from department officers. In at least one case, two of these programs have been in operation at one school. It is difficult to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of the programs since they have different aims and approaches.

It is important that more Indigenous girls have the opportunity to engage with programs that are likely to keep them at school, both for their own educational and social benefit, and because they are likely to be the mothers of the next generation of children whose health and educational future will be strongly influenced by the levels of literacy and attitudes to education of these young women. The review recommends that the department seek a common system-wide approach similar to Clontarf and focused on urban schools with senior years programs. This will enable the achievement of economies of scale and a systematic evaluation and roll-out. It is possible that one or more of the existing program providers might engage in a procurement process, or that a new provider might emerge. The program should have characteristics including:

- a funding model divided between the department, the Commonwealth and corporate and philanthropic sources;
- high-quality management with experience in the field;
- a focus on educational outcomes, health and wellbeing;
- a model specifically aimed at the circumstances of young women (rather than simply replicating Clontarf);
- dedicated, high quality support for the young women involved;
- provision of a range of activities to engage as many students as possible;
- high levels of formal and informal cooperation with the DoE;

- willingness to measure and report attendance, retention, participation, Year 12 outcomes and future destinations of participants; and
- effective accountability for funds and activities conducted.

Recommendations

34. Direct attendance efforts preferentially to early childhood and primary children aiming to establish regular patterns of attendance, and to secondary children attending on average at least three days per week:
 - a. focus attendance programs run by primary and secondary schools on children attending at least three days per week;
 - b. focus NT and Australian Government programs preferentially on primary children attending less than three days per week; and
 - c. adopt programs of information and incentives in all schools to encourage student, parent and community responsibility for attendance.
35. Undertake a whole of Department and whole of Government initiative to:
 - a. conduct research into the relative importance of the factors that affect attendance;
 - b. assess the impact of attendance initiatives and base future action on approaches demonstrated to be effective;
 - c. analyse the attendance effect of the range of community activities and initiatives (including football carnivals, rodeos, shows, royalty payments and service policies in community shops) and negotiate to achieve modifications that will reduce the negative effect on attendance of these community activities;
 - d. include in community engagement activities discussions with communities to determine whether communities are prepared to consider the timing and the extent of student participation in some activities to assist in the improvement of attendance and student outcomes;
 - e. investigate the number of students in the NT who have never enrolled in school or have been off the rolls for a substantial period of time, and consider approaches to engaging them with education; and
 - f. investigate the establishment of means by which schools in kinship related communities can work together to encourage students involved in funerals to attend school in the area.
36. Where major NT or Australian government attendance programs are planned, undertake advance planning to ensure that school and regions are equipped to manage increased attendance by previously disengaged students.
37. Maintain the Clontarf Program but jointly plan for improved achievement outcomes, and seek a similar system-wide girls' program with the characteristics outlined in the report.



Attendance efforts should be directed to ensuring that students attend at least four days each week, since that is the point at which learning begins to accelerate.

Chapter Eleven

Wellbeing and behaviour

Respondents to the review echoed a constant theme, especially but not only in remote schools; problems associated with student behaviour constitute a barrier to effective teaching and learning. In some cases respondents referred to a lack of staff capacity to deal with these problems. They identified hearing loss, lack of sleep, foetal alcohol syndrome, hyperactivity and trauma-associated emotional issues and other aspects of mental health as factors.


As is often the case in education, while teachers noted both the high levels of behavioural issues and also significant factors that affect a student's capacity to engage with school, there was less acknowledgment of the link between the two. It is impossible to manage difficult behaviour without understanding the underlying reasons for those behaviours and engaging in positive efforts to improve wellbeing and engagement as critical first steps.

The review has identified a number of factors contributing to difficulties in improving mental health and wellbeing and managing the behaviour of Indigenous students:

- matters that schools and the education system cannot control, such as poor physical or mental health of carers, multiple family life stressors, high residential mobility, poor quality of parenting, poor family and community functioning;
- weak early childhood pre-literacy and school orientation in children;
- poor early literacy achievement;
- inadequate secondary education experiences;
- low attendance levels creating difficulties in re-engaging and a sense of alienation and low self-esteem as a consequence;
- high levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- hearing loss and other areas of disability;
- the absence of a common approach to social and emotional learning and behaviour management across the Territory and of consistent professional development in this area; and
- a shortage of counsellors and psychologists, especially in remote schools, and their focus on clinical and assessment work, leaving little room to support whole school wellbeing models.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- considerable support for the recommendations in the draft report;
- concern that the wellbeing discussions in the chapter were unnecessarily focused on behaviour outcomes;
- lack of detailed attention to the provision of a whole-school, strengths-based approach to student resilience;

- 
- the need for attention to primary prevention programs for at risk children;
 - the importance of language, land, ceremony, kinship and law to Indigenous health and wellbeing;
 - the need to address resourcing of recommended approaches (e.g. Now Hear); and
 - concern about adopting and supplementing School Wide Positive Behaviour Support in preference to other social and emotional learning programs already in use in some schools.

Learning Lessons

Learning Lessons does not expand at length on the issue of engagement, wellbeing and behaviour management. The report does refer to the declining authority of parents over their children (not only in Indigenous families) and the consequent ‘need for programs offered at school to be relevant, interesting, enjoyable and challenging for students’ (Collins, 1999: 28).

The report provided a brief commentary on children with special needs, stating that special education in remote communities was an area that required further attention (Collins, 1999: 115). It also noted that behaviour problems in urban schools were disproportionately associated with hearing loss-affected children (Ibid.: 116) and with overcrowded classrooms (Ibid.: 65).

Learning Lessons refers to an impending Student Services Review and recommends that this review (KPMG, 2000) examines the provision of student services and special education for Indigenous students. The report also recommends appropriate provision for significant numbers of students with hearing impediments and other physical disabilities (Collins, 1999: 12 and 116).

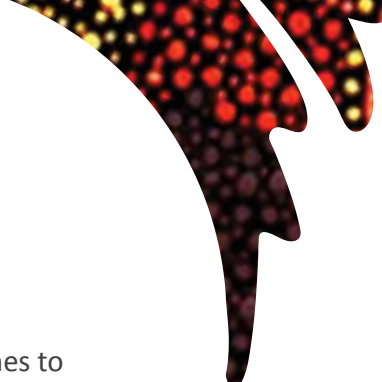
The KPMG review highlighted disproportionate resources and personnel being devoted to urban schools and a lack of special education teachers in the remote schools where the need was highest:

A concerted effort at both the school and systemic levels will be required to redress the inequities that some students may encounter in remote communities (KPMG, 2000: 2).

One outcome of this review was the placement of special education teachers and additional resources in remote schools.

The situation now

There is a growing body of evidence to support the notion that children who have well-developed social and emotional skills are more able to participate fully in the classroom and maximise their capacity to learn (CASEL, 2005). Similarly, educators understand that learning cannot happen unless there are effective classroom management strategies in place that create an environment in which students can devote their energies to learning. There are also health factors beyond social and emotional matters that affect children’s capacity to learn. The review argues that, if the learning of Indigenous children is to be as effective as possible, all three of these issues need attention: social and emotional learning, behaviour management and other health issues that impact learning.



As with many other areas, the review found there were widely varying approaches to behaviour management. Some schools, but far from all, had a clear whole school approach to the issue. Schools named (and identified in their Annual Operating Plans) a variety of social and emotional learning programs used to address behavioural issues. These included early intervention programs such as Families and Schools Together and Let's Start, and school-based programs including You Can Do It, Tribes, Friendly Schools Friendly Families, Rock and Water, Bounce Back, Restorative Practice and whole school frameworks such as School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support, KidsMatter and MindMatters. Even highly coordinated and effectively delivered programs did not seem to be having the desired effect and some teachers argued that the programs needed to be adapted to meet the needs of their cohort of students.

Respondents to the review recognised the disproportionately high level of health and mental health issues in the Aboriginal population. This is consistent with the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey research into Indigenous education, health and wellbeing which states that:

Nearly one in four Aboriginal children (24 per cent) are at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. These difficulties are associated with a substantial educational burden (Zubrick et. al. 2006: 503).

One factor that the draft report did not address directly, but that was raised in responses, is the rate of suicide and self-harm among Indigenous young people. This is discussed briefly in Chapter 3. The Menzies School of Health Research submission to the review refers to *The Indigenous Youth Life Skills Program* being trialled in Maningrida, possibly as the start of a broader strategy (Menzies, 2014). While the review has not evaluated this program, the department should consider its possible role in a broader strategy in schools to build resilience and capacity among young people. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* notes that where communities have successfully reduced problem behaviours and social and emotional problems, the success factors include:

- minimising children's exposure to biological and psychological harmful events such as child maltreatment, family violence and substance abuse;
- teaching, promoting and actively reinforcing pro-social behaviour, including self-regulatory behaviours and the skills needed to become productive adults of the community and society;
- monitoring and reducing opportunities for problem behaviour to occur; and
- fostering the development of mental flexibility, problem solving and the capacity for emotional self-regulation and self-reflection in children and young people (Department of Health and Ageing, 2013: 16).



The latter three of these factors are directly relevant to school programs of the kind discussed in this chapter. More broadly, and consistent with Recommendation 1 in this report, there is a need for integrated action across government departments and services to address the issue. As the national suicide prevention strategy argues:

There should be ongoing work with universal services – child and family services, schools, health services – to help build strengths and competencies and to protect against sources of risk and adversity that make children vulnerable to self-harm in later life (ibid.: 29).

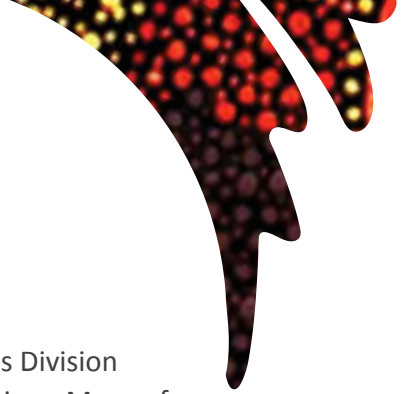
The 2012 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data support the view that wellbeing is an area of risk for young Indigenous people. In the AEDI domains of Social Competence and Emotional Maturity, respectively 27.1% and 28.7% of Indigenous children in very remote locations in the Northern Territory (NT) are developmentally vulnerable. From the first days of their schooling lives, more than three times as many Indigenous children as non-Indigenous children are vulnerable in these areas.

Many respondents to the review held that these issues are largely left undiagnosed and untreated (and therefore not supported by the relevant specialist services). Many staff expressed the view that the majority of their students would be classified as requiring specialist support if they were assessed appropriately and that they rarely received the support that they needed from the specialists in the department. Schools with their own counsellors, hearing specialists or other support staff were better placed, but those specialists seemed overwhelmed with high caseloads; managing a proactive, preventative model was out of the question.

Over the years there have been many attempts by the department to address the needs of Indigenous students and sometimes issues of mental health and behaviour have become absorbed into other areas. After the release of the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report into ways of protecting Aboriginal children from sexual abuse, the *Keeping Safe* child protection curriculum was rolled out to between 40 and 50 schools (with a focus on remote schools) in 2010-2011 to support students, families and the community to prevent and appropriately address child protection issues. Anecdotal views of recipients of the training were that it failed to meet the needs of Indigenous students, placed too much pressure on the trainer to deliver it with little departmental support beyond the initial training (there was only enough funding for one Keeping Safe trainer to cover the whole of the NT) and took the focus off wellbeing and behaviour. The initiative has largely vanished since the cessation of Commonwealth funding.

In the 2011–2014 DET Strategic Plan, there was a commitment made to implementing the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) program across the NT:

We will continue to increase the number of primary and middle years schools utilising School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support processes which ensure a focus on evidence-based practice in schools and will be explicitly included within School Improvement Plans (DET, 2011).



Since 2012, as part of the new NT government's reform agenda, Student Services Division was disbanded and has recently undergone a restructure as School Support Services. Many of the positions responsible for providing support and training to schools in key initiatives in the area of behaviour and mental health have not been continued in 2014, including the team responsible for the implementation of SWPBS. In their place, there is now a Crisis Intervention Coordinator who has responsibilities for the implementation of whole school approaches that promote positive behaviour. In the regional organisation chart, behaviour support is now focused on Positive Learning Centres (where children who are not able to function in mainstream school settings are placed) with centres in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs.

SWPBS is promoted as an organisational framework designed to assist schools with a systematic approach to teaching, supporting positive behaviour and preventing problem behaviour that is disruptive to learning. It provides teachers with a clear, consistent and positive approach to dealing with issues and supporting students to learn alternative ways of managing difficult situations. To date, 45 schools across the Territory have received the training and are implementing SWPBS (with varying degrees of success) and a further 11 are on the waiting list. Recent reports suggest that the program, when effectively implemented, is making a difference. We note, however, that the original mandated approach was not universally implemented and that data required was not consistently collected or reported by schools so the department has only limited evidence of effectiveness.

Central Australia has decided to mandate a common approach to wellbeing and behaviour. SWPBS is being examined as a behaviour framework, with the intention of adding an evidence-based social and emotional learning element tailored to meet the needs of students. The main resources required to implement this will be a Manager of Wellbeing and Behaviour (who works closely with the Manager of School Capacity Building) to support and monitor schools to implement the initiative. Teachers will need to be provided with the skills, time and reflective practice tools so that they have all they need for effective implementation. The region proposes that the school should be the key resource rather than being reliant on external experts.

The way forward

A key element of student wellbeing, which also contributes to improved behaviour, concerns the extent to which the school is a welcoming place, one that recognises and reflects the background, experience, language and culture of the student. Some of the recommendations in this report are likely to assist in making schools more responsive to Indigenous students. The focus on better teaching of first language, the inclusion of culture programs, the development of curriculum programs to strengthen the study of Indigenous history and experience, the provision of more consistent and sustained cultural training for teachers and improved community engagement are all key factors in assisting Indigenous students to feel more engaged and supported at school.



The strategy adopted throughout this review has been based on the view that each element of the educational experience of students should be coherent and consistent. Each element contributes to effective outcomes and helps students understand why they are at school and what they gain from the experience, which in turn is likely to improve behaviour.


Poor behaviours have a wide range of causes, some of which (as was noted above) are out of the control of schools, but everything a school does in its relationship with a student makes a difference. This report argues that behaviour is likely to be improved by a consistent approach to behaviour management (i.e. clear expectations and consequences), regular attendance, early orientation to the routines and expectations of schools, early literacy achievement, success in primary schooling, the delivery of a high quality secondary education, teaching that is effective and related to the needs of learners and improving the quality of principals and teachers. Children who are comfortable in schools, who experience success and who see their education leading somewhere are more likely to engage with educational offerings and work within the social framework of the school. This is what engagement means; a focus on positive relationships and actions, which is the counterbalance to poor behaviour and loss of attachment to schooling.

The review argues that addressing the range of improvements to engagement proposed in this report will be a contributor to reducing behaviour issues in schools. Once these initiatives are in place, the department and schools will have a better picture of the real level of behaviour problems.

Even after this, however, there will remain behaviour and wellbeing problems among the Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) student population. Some of these will be effectively addressed by a common approach to behaviour management. Others will require more specific interventions. These fall into several categories. Some involve social and emotional problems that are deeper seated or more serious than a school can effectively manage. Some are to do with physical health issues (notably hearing) that affect a child's capacity to engage with education. Others arise from cognitive and intellectual difficulties that hamper effective engagement with learning.

Behaviour management

The review supports the adoption of common approaches to behaviour management and social and emotional learning across all schools as one means of ensuring that mobile students and teachers see a greater degree of consistency in behaviour management across the NT. It also reflects the view that programs in Priority 1 schools should be mandated. The SWPBS program is a sound behaviour management model and has the advantage of being well-supported in a number of schools already. In recommending the adoption of this program, the key criteria are the adoption of a common, approach in all Priority 1 schools (and by preference in all schools) and the provision of effective support through both professional learning and access to coaching. Other programs with a similar focus should not be supported. The review recommends that the conduct of this work may require putting resources back into the delivery of initiatives that have recently been disbanded.



Resourcing the program will require the provision of SWPBS coaches in each region, with effective training for these coaches. This should include training in working with Indigenous communities, and support from community engagement personnel. Coaches should provide training for school principals.

The department has recently established a Behaviour Management Taskforce involving all the key stakeholders in education and chaired by an independent clinical psychologist and expert in wellbeing in schools. The purpose of this taskforce is to provide advice about the most appropriate behaviour management strategies. The review supports this initiative, which together with the outcomes of this review should form a coherent and consistent approach to the area.

A common behaviour management framework is an important contributor to improved behaviour in schools leading to improved learning. It is not, however, the only or the key mechanism for resolving behaviour issues in schools.

Social and emotional learning (SEL)

One important element of a response to student wellbeing issues is direct and specific attention to social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning is:

The process of developing the ability to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations effectively (CASEL, 2005: 5).

Consistent with the adoption of a health promotion focus on child and adolescent health and wellbeing, Australian education systems have recognised the need for three components:

- universal programs to develop students' social, emotional and behavioural competencies;
- selected interventions for students at risk of developing emotional or behavioural disorders; and
- targeted interventions for students identified as having an emotional or behavioural problem or a mental health problem (Urbis, 2011: vi).

This section of the chapter deals principally with the first of these: approaches to teaching social and emotional skills and behaviours, usually through curriculum programs. The review found evidence of many approaches, frameworks and SEL programs already being implemented (to greater or lesser degrees) in many schools. Mental health initiatives being used such as KidsMatter and MindMatters clearly identify the need for schools to have an SEL curriculum.



According to the KidsMatter website:

Through KidsMatter Primary, schools undertake a two- to three-year cyclical process in which they plan and take action to be a positive community; one that is founded on respectful relationships and a sense of belonging and inclusion, and that promotes:

- social and emotional learning (including evidence-based social and emotional learning programs);
- working authentically with parents, carers and families; and
- support for students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties (KidsMatter, N.D.).

The review acknowledges the value of focusing on these areas. Many of the recommendations in the report are designed to specifically deal with each of them in a manner that is evidence based and reflective of the needs of Indigenous students. Schools that have undertaken KidsMatter or MindMatters training will be well placed to build upon the more generic work already begun using these frameworks. However, KidsMatter stops short of providing schools with an SEL curriculum and associated professional learning. Instead it focuses on working with schools to understand the importance of SEL, what it is and how to go about selecting a curriculum, but it does not identify or provide professional learning in delivering an SEL program.

Responses to the review's draft report argued that the review should pay greater attention to this area, and that specific initiatives would be required to address student need in the area of social and emotional learning (see for example, Menzies, 2014). The Menzies response argued that the greater level of adversity faced by Indigenous children meant that programs should focus on resilience in dealing with risk factors. In particular, there was a concern that the draft report conflated behaviour management and social and emotional learning, and that behavioural programs like SWPBS, while important for behaviour management, were unlikely to impact on student social and emotional wellbeing. The review has acted on this critique.

While there are existing well-established programs aimed at addressing these issues (see above for a list of some of these programs), the review is concerned that they largely fail to address the specific needs of Indigenous children, and that there is no consistency across the NT in the use of these programs. Urbis argues that there are specific requirements in meeting the needs of Indigenous children (e.g. dealing with past negative experiences of school and the effects of racism) (Urbis, 2011).

There is good research indicating what works in the area of social and emotional learning, and demonstrating that it is effective in improving academic achievement (Menzies, 2014; Urbis, 2011; CASEL, 2005). Urbis notes that the literature in the field shows that emotional and social difficulties experienced by children can be prevented or ameliorated through school based interventions (ibid: vii). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) argues that effective SEL programs begin at an early age and continue through secondary school.



They aim to develop five areas of competence:

- self-awareness;
- social awareness;
- self-management;
- relationship skills; and
- responsible decision making (CASEL, 2005: 5).

There is a widely supported view that effective programs involve the whole school and involve changes to the school's environment. They involve parents and the wider community. They are implemented consistently over a long period of time.

The draft report of the review argued for the development of a social and emotional overlay for SWPBS as a means for addressing this set of issues. This is no longer the preferred model. Instead, the review recommends that a separate piece of work be undertaken to develop a social and emotional learning program specifically targeted to the needs of Indigenous children, beginning in pre-school and continuing into at least the early years of secondary school. This should adopt a positive approach (i.e. focusing on promoting mental health), draw on the experiences of Indigenous children and families and be designed for effective delivery in Priority 1 schools. It should, however, be made available and supported in all schools. The program should draw on the research supported, and guidelines developed, by CASEL. This work should seek external assistance. The submission to the review by Menzies School of Health Research draws attention to the need for specific work on social and emotional learning programs designed for the circumstances of the NT. Both Menzies and Charles Darwin University (CDU) indicate that they have capacity in the area (Menzies, 2014; CDU, 2014). Menzies drew attention to work, previously initiated but now terminated, on the development of a strategy to improve social and emotional development, improve mental health and contribute to suicide prevention.

This work will also require effective support for schools in implementation. This will include coaching for principals and staff and continuing professional learning both in the elements of the social and emotional learning program and in cultural competence to ensure that program delivery recognises the cultural experience and social background of students.



Health issues that affect education

Beyond positive social and emotional learning programs and behaviour management, there is a need for more specific targeted interventions to address physical and emotional health issues that impact negatively on learning.


The extensive review of Indigenous child health in Western Australia reached a conclusion that is echoed in this report. The report of that research argued for:

- strategies to identify and manage Aboriginal children who have speech and language impairments that interfere with learning; and
- development of appropriate educational risk-management strategies for Aboriginal students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, their implementation and reporting on their uptake and impact (Zubrick et al, 2006: 498).

Respondents to the review drew attention to a range of specific and general health issues that impact on learning. Most prominent among these was otitis media and the consequent conductive hearing loss. Other areas referred to included social and emotional problems, some arising from trauma; speech and language difficulties; foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; and developmental issues associated with early illness and nutrition. There was a widespread view, shared in the literature, that addressing such issues will require integrated approaches across different services and departments. Respondents also noted the need for services to be available from birth (and in some cases before) and to involve specialist service providers.

Chapter 2 of this review on the issues we can and cannot control identifies the need for an integrated and comprehensive approach to the range of issues that impact on Indigenous education. The review notes in particular the importance of joint work by education and health agencies to better address the needs of Indigenous children. This requires attention to early identification, diagnosis and treatment of children experiencing health issues. Where Families as First Teachers (FaFT) and pre-school programs are in place, it is recommended that health services are engaged in working with the children attending to identify and support treatment of health issues. Work of this kind should be integrated as far as possible with education provision through early childhood programs, the new Child and Family Centres and primary and secondary schooling.

With the possible exception of social and emotional issues, the hearing issue is the most prevalent barrier faced by Indigenous children in the NT. A report of the Australian Government-funded Child Health Check Initiative and follow-up audiology and ear, nose and throat (ENT) services found that between 2007 and 2011, almost 5000 children received audiology services and almost 4000 ENT services. About 66% of these children were diagnosed with a middle ear condition. Of those receiving audiology services,



53% had some kind of hearing loss and 33% had hearing impairment (AIHW, 2011: vii). The prevalence of chronic suppurative otitis media (OM) among Indigenous Australians is among the highest in the world, while the World Health Organisation states that the incidence of perforation rates is the highest of all populations studied. As the report notes:

Research has found that Indigenous children with OM have lower phonological awareness, and poorer reading and spelling skills than Indigenous children without OM ...This is especially a problem for children learning English as a second language (Ibid.: 2).

The *Now Hear* program was designed specifically for the NT to support children with hearing loss. The program was run as a trial in six remote schools with a high proportion of children with conductive hearing loss in 2013. The aims of *Now Hear* are:

to improve teacher and system capacity to provide effective learning opportunities to the large number of Indigenous students with Conductive Hearing Loss (CHL) in order to improve these students' learning outcomes (AIH, 2013).

The *Now Hear* continuum is a tool that provides schools with a guide to maximise the learning environment for students with conductive hearing loss. The continuum addresses acoustics and amplification, classroom support, ear health, identification and management of hearing loss and program sustainability. This informs teachers about the elements required for students to access learning, participate in class and be successful learners. The tool can also be used as a school audit to help form the basis of an action plan with a built-in evaluation capacity.

The Disability Services unit of the department has seen excellent results with the *Now Hear* program and consequently recommends that schools use the *Now Hear* tools as part of their wellbeing framework wherever there are high levels of hearing issues among students. The department can provide training, support and advice on these strategies. Where schools are using *Now Hear* well, they have noted significant improvements.

Implementation of *Now Hear* will require resourcing. Respondents to the review argued that this program is in itself insufficient to address the need (White, 2014; McGee, 2014). The review supports the view that in addition to the *Now Hear* continuum, there is a need to provide training and support for teachers in identifying students with hearing loss and implementing effective teaching strategies; provide additional hearing specialists to support schools; collect data on hearing loss and programs appropriate to supporting children with hearing loss; and investigate sound field amplification and acoustic treatment of classrooms.

As noted above, children with identified social and emotional problems should also have access to specialist services. While SEL curriculum programs are valuable, they do not constitute treatment. These services include access to psychologists and counsellors and support for school leaders and teachers in accessing specialist services and designing student support programs.



In each of these areas there are existing initiatives in the NT. There is, for example, the work undertaken by the Department of Education Special Education Program Manager in developing online courses in Introduction to Special Education, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Speech, language and communication needs, and managing behaviour. We have not reviewed the broad area of disability services or the provision of specialist expertise in these areas. These matters are whole-system issues that impact on Indigenous education but are not specific to it. Review respondents have consistently argued that such services are provided less effectively outside the towns, that there is a shortage of specialists in these areas (notably counsellors and psychologists), and that there are significant numbers of undiagnosed cases (and even more who have not been effectively treated) in some or all of these areas.

These matters cannot be addressed within education alone. As noted here and elsewhere, there is a critical need for an integrated approach across health and education, and in some cases more broadly.

Nutrition

The review notes the value of the School Nutrition Program (SNP), introduced in 2007 as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and administered by the Australian Government. In 2013 the program delivered breakfast and/or lunch and in some cases additional snacks at 67 very remote schools (62 of them government schools). Only 17 of the programs are offered by schools, others being delivered by shire councils, health services, community stores, women's centres and non-government organisations (NGOs). The majority of employees (73%) are Indigenous. It is delivered as part of the Stronger Futures Northern Territory (SFNT) national partnership. There is a view that funding and delivery arrangements should be more consistent. The Australian and NT governments are yet to reach agreement about future delivery of the program, although a reducing level of funding is available through to 2021-22.

The SNP shares goals with the intentions of the review, since it is aimed at improving school engagement and learning, although there seem to be no clear data measuring its effect. While this program is somewhat outside scope for the review, it appears to be useful and the review supports its continuation.

Recommendations

38. Work with the Behaviour Management Taskforce to develop and resource a whole-system approach to behaviour management and wellbeing, including:
 - a. mandating School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) for Priority 1 schools and advising other schools to adopt it;
 - b. developing a social and emotional learning curriculum for pre-school to secondary school with specific application to Indigenous children;
 - c. mandating the use of Now Hear in all Priority 1 schools and other schools with students experiencing the effects of conductive hearing loss, along with provision of specialist hearing support and the investigation of amplification and acoustic treatment of classrooms;
 - d. providing professional development programs, coaching and specialist support for implementation of SWPBS, social and emotional learning, whole-school approaches and data collection and the implementation of Now Hear; and
 - e. improving school access to psychologists, counsellors and other specialists and services addressing wellbeing and mental health.
39. Require all schools to have a school-wide approach to behaviour management and wellbeing, or to participate in a common approach across a cluster of small schools, including:
 - a. the establishment of a team, led by a member of the leadership group, with responsibility for behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion;
 - b. an explicit plan to deal with the impact of social and emotional problems, cognitive disability and experience of trauma on learning and behaviour;
 - c. the collection and reporting of data on behaviour and related issues and on specific health issues including conductive hearing loss;
 - d. implementation of the social and emotional learning curriculum and a consistent approach to behaviour management; and
 - e. reporting on the plan and progress achieved through the school review process.
40. Consistent with recommendation 1 in this review, establishing cooperative arrangements between the health and education departments and providers to ensure the early identification, diagnosis and treatment of health disorders (including suicide prevention) that impact on, or could be impacted by, student learning.



It is impossible to manage difficult behaviour without understanding the underlying reasons for those behaviours and engaging in positive efforts to improve wellbeing and engagement as critical first steps.

Chapter Twelve

Workforce planning¹⁷

The Department of Education (DoE) spends 52% of its budget on employee expenses. Teachers represent the bulk of this expenditure, and as Hattie's work indicates, teachers constitute the single largest variable in student learning for which levers for improvement are available (Hattie, 2003: 1-2). Effectively resourcing, planning for, managing and training teachers and other employees is a key factor in achieving educational goals. Yet the department has no current workforce plan, and there is as yet no effective strategy for the achievement of a number of key workforce goals impacting on Indigenous education.

Work undertaken by the review has identified factors contributing to workforce issues facing the department:

- the unforgiving geography and demographics of the Northern Territory (NT), and their effect on the capacity to staff remote and very remote schools;
- lack of central office expertise and experience in workforce planning;
- uncoordinated and fragmented recruitment programs and widely distributed responsibilities for areas of human resource management; and
- varied and uneven arrangements for the recruitment, training, induction and promotion of Indigenous staff.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- general support for capacity building of the remote workforce, especially the Indigenous workforce;
- recognition of the challenges in recruitment, training, professional development, retention and promotion of remote staff;
- acknowledgment of the need for long-term planning to strengthen the Indigenous workforce;
- support for improving employment and performance management arrangements for assistant teachers;
- concern over the conditions applying to local Indigenous teaching staff in housing, allowances, leave and other conditions of employment;
- concern over the declining number of Indigenous staff and poor outcomes from recruitment and training programs;
- differing views about commentary in the report on the quality of some Indigenous teachers;
- support for cross-cultural training for non-Indigenous educators; and
- concern that staffing arrangements for remote schools were discriminatory, in being based in part on attendance and not reflecting school needs.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise stated, data in this chapter come from the September 2013 workforce report (DoE, 2013E).



Learning Lessons

The *Learning Lessons* report identified the high level of reliance on local Indigenous staff in remote schools and the very high turnover of non-Indigenous staff (Collins 1999: 71). Critically, the report identified a lack of policy and strategy to support Indigenous staff, and called for the expansion of the mentoring arrangement to increase the number of Indigenous people in leadership positions (Ibid: 89).

‘Bums on seats’ was the recruitment strategy of that time, and was cited as a key issue impacting on good teaching practice in remote schools. The report argued that improvements needed to be made in recruitment, retention and development of personnel working throughout the education system. Collins pointed out that ‘all things point to the need for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy aimed at improving Indigenous education across urban and remote area schools’. Preparation and training, including ongoing professional renewal for teachers and school leaders was a missing area of strategy.

By 2005 the *Learning Lessons* status report described the implementation of a range of initiatives targeting professional development for English as a Second Language, cross-cultural awareness and orientation for staff taking up positions in a remote community school. The report noted, however, that many of the same issues still existed, that the Indigenous teaching workforce was declining and that there was little progress on developing and implementing a comprehensive workforce plan (LLISC: 2005).

The workforce now

In September 2013, the department had 4435 average paid full-time equivalent staff¹⁸. This was a drop of 163, or 3.6% from the period 12 months earlier. The bulk of the reduction was represented in 115 non-school-based staff, while schools lost 48 staff. Total employees (ie individuals rather than full-time equivalents (FTE)) numbered 4669, down by 4.2%. School-based staff were 85.8% of the total employee base and teaching staff 63.9% of the total (DoE, 2013E).

The reductions were concentrated among fixed period employees (those on term contracts). The year saw a reduction in their proportion of the workforce from 30.5% to 25.5%. Among classroom teachers the proportion dropped from 28% to 17.7%. Overall there was a drop in contract employees from 1,434 to 1,159, a reduction of 275, or substantially more than the overall employee loss. The year appears to have seen a proportional shift from contract to permanent employment.

Indigenous employees represent 12% of the workforce, while the Indigenous student cohort is around 40%. The majority of Indigenous employees are in the administrative and assistant teacher streams. The number of Indigenous employees decreased from 595 to 560 from a year earlier,

¹⁸ The staffing numbers in this first section of the chapter refer to staff employed centrally by the Department of Education. They do not include staff on school contracts except where that is explicitly stated.

a reduction of 5.9%. In addition, the age-grade census for 2013 shows 187 FTE Indigenous staff employed through school councils (246 by head count). There has been a noticeable increase in the average age of the Indigenous workforce over the years. In the period between 2007 and 2012, there were significant increases in the number and percentage aged over 50.

The year-to-year retention rate for all employees was 83.7% (down from 84.5% the previous year). The rate for principals decreased from 96.7% to 86.7%, for assistant principals from 98.3% to 91.7% and for senior teachers from 93.1% to 88.1%. The classroom teacher retention rate increased slightly from 85.2% to 86.3%.

There were, however, differences in annual retention rates in different parts of the system, with lower retention rates broadly associated with remoteness. Palmerston and Rural Region had the highest retention rate of 86.9%, while Barkly Region had the lowest rate of 79.2%.

Average length of service of department employees was 7.4 years, up from 7.0 the previous year, but slightly lower for teachers (6.9 years) and assistant teachers (5.7 years). The position for teachers in remote and very remote schools is almost exactly the same as the system average, at 6.84 years. Despite urban legends about the exceptionally short tenure of teachers in remote and very remote schools, the data show that median tenure is between two and three years. While more than a quarter of teachers are in their first year in the school, this is not an unusual proportion.

Table 6: Northern Territory Government Remote and Very Remote Schools Teacher Tenure

Service in current school	Number of Teaching Staff	Percentage
1st year	362	27.9%
1 to 2 years	247	19.1%
2 to 3 years	173	13.3%
3 to 4 years	112	8.6%
4 to 5 years	77	5.9%
5 to 6 years	53	4.1%
6 to 7 years	52	4.0%
7 to 8 years	28	2.2%
8 or more years	192	14.8%

The unexpected absence rate for all employees fell slightly to 7.1% from the previous year. Assistant teachers (AT) had a much higher absence rate at 25.4%, up from 24.4% in the previous year, although this reflects only centrally employed assistant teachers. Explicit data for all assistant teachers including those employed on school council contracts are not available, but anecdotal evidence collected from schools and during consultations suggests that attendance is low among a proportion of the AT workforce. This issue is addressed below.



Of the 42 Executive Contract Officer positions, only one is now occupied by an Indigenous employee. A similar picture is provided for Executive Contract Principal positions, with two Indigenous officers out of a total of 106. Fewer than 4% of both Senior Teachers and teachers are Indigenous.

In addition to the staff discussed above, there were 745 School Council staff (510.9 FTE) as at August 2013 (drawn from the 2013 Age Grade Census). Of these staff, 246 (187.3 FTE) were Indigenous. The most common classroom and student support positions for these members of staff were teacher aide/assistant (68), assistant teacher (33), Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutor (33) and Inclusion Support Assistants (ISA) (20).

Workforce planning


The Menzies report on remote workforce development observed that:

A coherent and comprehensive overarching DET workforce strategy is needed to align the disparate efforts toward addressing the complex needs of remote educators (Nutton et al: 59).

This review argues that there is the same need for an overall workforce plan for all areas of the DoE workforce, not only the remote workforce. While this is nominally the responsibility of the Human Resource Services Division, it represents a broader weakness in the department; a lack of consistent, coherent planning at senior management levels in recruiting, developing, supporting and managing a workforce tailored to the needs of the student population. A workforce plan should operate across all department units and divisions and should recruit support from those units and divisions in its development and implementation.

In researching and consulting on this area for the review, it was difficult to capture all the information on workforce development and workforce planning. There is no overall plan for achievement of the department's strategic goals and it seems that no area of the agency has overall responsibility for the workforce. Expertise is lacking, workforce planning has not been seen as part of core business of the Human Resource area, and many of the functions have either been devolved to schools or dispersed throughout the agency, Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). Whilst there are some benefits from resourcing different areas of the department for professional development and workforce management, devolution must be matched with effective central workforce planning.

The absence of such a plan exposes the department to risk, particularly when formal commitments have been made to improve Indigenous employment and development opportunities. The importance of workforce planning in the teaching service is illustrated by the fact that about one-third of current teachers are either eligible for retirement (aged 56 years or over) or approaching retirement (51-55 years). The highest proportions of those eligible for retirement are Executive Contract Principals (41.4%) and Principals (36.1%) (DoE 2013E: 24).



The review was also consistently advised of a variety of weaknesses in staffing arrangements for remote schools. The evidence for weaknesses in the recruitment and training of Indigenous staff are clear (see below).

The review proposes that the development of a comprehensive workforce plan is essential to meeting the needs of all children, and especially Indigenous children. The plan should focus specifically on the following issues as critical to the education of Indigenous children:

- undertaking a thorough scan of the environment and anticipated medium- and long-term changes in the make-up of the workforce engaged in the education of Indigenous children;
- identifying skill requirements associated with teaching in remote communities and with Indigenous students;
- identifying skill requirements to meet the areas recommended in this report, including improvements in pedagogy in general, Families as First Teachers (FaFT) and pre-school training requirements, early literacy, remote leadership and social and emotional learning support;
- strengthening initiatives to improve recruitment, training, continuing learning and retention of high quality teaching staff;
- conducting an audit of current skill levels and staff availability in the areas identified as priorities;
- identifying forms of support including training and coaching required to meet skill requirements in priority areas;
- focusing existing resources (including study leave) explicitly and only on department priority areas;
- strengthening the remote area workforce including attracting the best principals and teachers (those with the skills identified as essential to remote teaching) to remote and hard-to-staff schools;
- rationalizing and simplifying programs aimed at expanding the numbers and improving the quality of Indigenous employees; and
- building on strong existing data collection and reporting to monitor progress in priority areas on a longitudinal basis, showing trends over time.

The review recommends that the conduct of this work should follow recruitment of additional expertise in workforce planning and management.

Staffing levels

This chapter does not directly address the issue of the staffing resources required to deliver on the goals set out in the review report, or the means of allocating staff resources to schools. A section in Chapter 13 on finance and resourcing addresses these issues.



General workforce improvement

The issue of a general raising of standards across the whole DoE workforce is broader than the terms of reference for the review envisaged. There is, however, one area in particular where the review has identified a weakness that impacts generally on the student population but specifically on the educational outcomes for Indigenous students; the absence of a consistent and system-wide approach to improvement in the quality of teaching in NT classrooms.

It is notable that there is no common framework for teaching practice in the NT. While the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) offered a large volume of general and specific advice about teaching and learning, it did not constitute a common improvement framework. The policy statements outlined in that document (DET, 2009: 10-12) established broad principles. There have been policy statements and training initiatives in ESL and literacy and numeracy more generally, a National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on *Improving Teacher Quality*, another NPA focused on the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework, and one on the *Digital Education Revolution* that included a commitment to teacher training. There have been programs over the years aimed at elements of pedagogical improvement, but no common, consistent and system-wide approach.

The review supports the adoption of a system-wide approach to the improvement of teaching and learning. While this is broader than a focus on Indigenous students, there is an unambiguous benefit to Indigenous students in a more effective workforce in all NT schools. Without such a focus, the unsatisfactory outcomes experienced by a considerable proportion of the Indigenous population across NT schools in general are unlikely to be thoroughly addressed.

Central Region has recently adopted the John Hattie program *Visible Learning* for this purpose. While other programs serve similar purposes, it is clear that for many teachers the Hattie approach has been welcome and effective. Review data collection and consultation identified strong support for this program among teachers and principals involved. The review supports extension of this program over time to all schools in the NT, but proposes an initial review of progress to determine whether the extensions should be conducted on the same basis as has been undertaken in Central Australia.

While remote schools in Central Australia report very positively about *Visible Learning* (and the review supports their continued involvement in the program) the extension of the program to other Priority 1 schools is not supported at present. Although it will be valuable in all schools eventually, the McKinsey analysis outlined in Chapter 4 suggests that roll-out beyond the town schools and existing remote schools should be delayed until the initiatives proposed in this report (including early literacy, social and emotional learning and workforce changes) are bedded down. It is important to manage the training load and the expectations of changed practice in remote schools.



Study leave

Study leave is available to staff working in remote locations on the basis of a variable points system as part of a Northern Territory Government (NTG) program. Accumulation of sufficient points gives access to a period of study leave on pay. This approach is supported by the review as offering both an incentive to work remotely and an opportunity for mid-career renewal. The current arrangements, however, allow those on study leave to treat the time as a paid holiday. This should be addressed by requiring all study leave applicants to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.

Remote area workforce

The quality of the remote area workforce is one key to addressing the problems in remote education discussed in Chapter 4. From the days of *Learning Lessons*, a broad range of programs and resources have been put in place to improve recruitment and development opportunities for the general remote workforce and for Indigenous employees. The workforce issues still requiring attention include increasing Indigenous staffing numbers and quality, and the quality and longer-term tenure of employees working in remote schools.

Indigenous employees


As part of the Strategic Plan, and derived from the Smarter Schools National Partnership, the NTG has a target of 200 Indigenous teachers by 2018. Nutton et al note that:

A radically improved and better supported strategy will be needed to achieve the NTG target of 200 Indigenous teachers by 2018, especially if this number is to include a significant proportion of remote Indigenous staff (Nutton et al: 60).

While targets such as this can have negative effects (eg compromising quality to achieve target numbers), the review supports targets and dedicated efforts to improve the numbers (and quality) of Indigenous teachers. Effort has been applied to articulate career pathways for Indigenous employees, but the resourcing and design of initiatives to achieve progression along the pathway are less clear. High profile initiatives such as the *Remote Indigenous Teacher Education* (RITE) program have faltered, and there is a lack of coordination and consistency across the human resources domain.

Principals

The number and proportion of Indigenous staff at Principal level in the system has declined in recent years. This is a function partly of low levels of promotion across the Indigenous workforce in general, although some respondents to the review argued that there were employment decisions based on performance issues in some cases. It is difficult to overcome this problem at present, until there are more qualified Indigenous teachers occupying more senior roles.



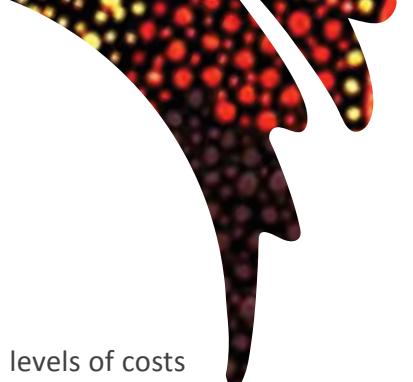
The apparent success of the co-principalship in place at Gunbalanya is noted. The review would encourage an evaluation of this model and consideration of other similar initiatives if the evaluation is positive and if there are available and appropriately qualified candidates.

Teachers

In September 2013, there were 603 senior teachers and 2046 teachers employed by the department. Of these, 22 senior teachers and 83 teachers were Indigenous. Various models for providing teacher education courses in a remote delivery mode have been in place in the NT over the years. The *Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE)* program, commencing in its initial form in the 1970s and in place until the 1990s was responsible for producing many of the Indigenous teachers in schools today. A number of respondents noted that a high proportion of those teachers came from bilingual schools. The RATE program was designed to provide a mode of study largely delivered on site in communities, with a workshop component at BIITE. The current teacher education model is the RITE program, which was delivered through CDU and trialled in a small number of settings but was regarded as unsuccessful after a relatively short life. This is another example of the early termination of programs before effective evaluation and without opportunities to adjust the approach in the light of evidence. The review understands that there were discussions involving the DoE, BIITE and CDU in consideration of a revised version of RITE, but that these discussions have ceased.

The department has invested heavily in its *More Indigenous Teachers (MIT)* Program by offering a range of scholarships, fellowships and cadetships, with each program offering a different support structure. The data for the programs since their initiation in 2007 indicate that there have been 138 recipients of Cadetships, Scholarships and Fellowships and 46 graduates since 2007. Of the 40 graduates employed by the DoE (29 of whom are still employed by the DoE), 15 were employed in remote or very remote schools. There are 43 current MIT recipients with six on Cadetships, 22 on Scholarships and 11 on Fellowships, of whom 16 are in remote or very remote locations (internal DoE document). CDU indicates that in 2013, there were 120 Indigenous pre-service teachers enrolled in different study modes in programs delivered through the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) a joint enterprise with BIITE.

The low uptake and/or success of programs, particularly for remote employees, has been attributed in part to the low level of literacy of candidates; many potential candidates are not ready to undertake tertiary level study. The Menzies report on the remote workforce highlighted low literacy and numeracy competencies in the department's remote Indigenous workforce (Nutton et al, 2012: 6 and 17). This problem is exacerbated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) requirement that teacher education students are in the top 30% of the community in literacy. There is potential for this requirement to make Indigenous recruitment to pre-service programs even more difficult. Tertiary preparation programs such as the Program for Tertiary Success or Tertiary Education Preparation are available,



but success relies on high levels of support. Other difficulties include very high levels of costs and support required to sustain programs.

CDU argues that ‘better co-ordination between providers and parity of employment with non-Indigenous teachers is required ...’ (CDU, 2014: 16). The review agrees with this view and would add the need for better coordination with the employing agency to ensure that training and employment expectations and practices are integrated. The Indigenous Workforce Team have worked with BIITE to develop a Shared Responsibility Agreement designed to identify responsibilities of all parties in supporting Indigenous teacher candidates in their pre-service study. This document could be reviewed to determine its usefulness in establishing clarity about responsibilities.

One important initiative would be the establishment of improved mentoring arrangements for new Indigenous teachers and those in early stages of their careers. Mentoring would be best provided by experienced Indigenous teachers and senior teachers and should be part of the recognised workload of those willing to play a mentoring role.

Candidates for teaching qualifications have traditionally come from the ranks of ATs. There has been considerable work done on defining pathways to teaching for ATs and providing incentives for completion, although the completion rate has not been encouraging. The ageing of the AT workforce (Nutton et al, *ibid.*) suggests that future teachers are less likely to come from this source, although the review encourages this approach.

The recommended option for AT advancement to teaching is to re-establish the RITE program in a new form similar to the NT Catholic Education Office–CDU program *Growing Our Own*, with external CDU lecturers supported by school-based staff. A working party inclusive of key stakeholders should be involved in the design and development of the new model. This is expensive, but it reflects a high government priority. Its expense demands that it achieve a high proportion of successful graduates. To achieve this, the program should meet criteria based on the following list:

- candidate selection should be rigorous, aiming to ensure that all candidates are tertiary-ready or can be supported through a limited, short-term readiness program with high confidence of success;
- programs for school-based personnel should largely be delivered in the school by allocated provider-employed tertiary lecturers supported by a local coordinator with appropriate expertise;
- each school should be funded to appoint a coordinator with time release to support pre-service candidates and assist other Indigenous staff with professional learning or other studies;
- instruction should be principally face-to-face by tertiary lecturers, though it can be supplemented online to a limited extent with support from the local coordinator;




- a common statement of responsibilities should be developed to define essential school support arrangements, including time allocations for study, physical arrangements to support study (e.g. a location in the school and information technology access) and support responsibilities of school staff;
- requirements of candidates should be clearly stated including expectations about attendance, completion of work requirements and participation in school activities;
- candidates should undertake a study load including practical experience consistent with general pre-service expectations but adapted to meet local conditions where necessary;
- assessment and supervision arrangements and standards for completion should be the same as for other pre-service teachers; and
- additional coaching and advisory support to enhance recipient success should be provided through the department, the school and the tertiary institution to ensure that potential difficulties for Indigenous candidates are managed and resolved.

Most critically, the department will have to demonstrate strong support for the program, maintain funding over the period of the 10-year strategic plan and guarantee that graduates will have access to positions in schools.

In addition, there is a specific need to train Indigenous language teachers. This issue was addressed in the chapter of the review on primary education. It was recommended that the RITE program or equivalent should include a specific intention to train teachers of Indigenous languages. It was also proposed that the Western Australian (WA) model of training Indigenous languages teachers on a Limited Authority to Teach basis be reviewed and used as the basis for a similar program in the NT. The training of language teachers using these two models is likely to enable more Indigenous teachers to be trained, and to meet needs for the teaching of first languages in a more consistent way. Adaptation of the WA model could form an additional career pathway into teaching for Indigenous people, building on their language strengths.

Initiatives will also be required to encourage school graduates and possibly Indigenous people from other areas of the workforce to undertake teacher training. The current MIT Cadetships program is aimed at this potential source, but there are at present only six recipients. The Cadetship program is currently only open to students studying on campus. The MIT Scholarships also seek five-year Indigenous residents of the NT. The Menzies report points out the exceptionally wide range of different and overlapping approaches to increasing Indigenous teacher numbers (only a few of which have been touched on here). The review would support a simplification, leading preferably to a single high-profile program aimed at school leavers and Indigenous members of the general workforce. Support would continue into employment with induction into teaching by an identified mentor within the school and specialists within the Regional Office.

The fundamental issue about the current arrangements for developing Indigenous teachers is quality. While there are clearly outstanding Indigenous teachers in schools, there was consistent feedback to the review about the unsatisfactory quality of some graduates.



A common view was that there was such a commitment to increasing Indigenous teacher numbers that in some cases standards had been lowered and assessment processes bypassed or distorted to ensure graduations. This is disputed by the providers and was rejected by some respondents. As was noted by respondents, the evidence is anecdotal. If the suggestion is true it is a destructive approach; it puts less capable teachers in classrooms, damages the reputation of Indigenous teachers in general and eventually puts the new teacher in an impossible position.

One factor cited by a number of respondents is the difference in employment arrangements and rewards for Indigenous teachers appointed in their own community. The lack of housing entitlement and related benefits for these appointees is seen as discriminatory, and was cited by Indigenous teachers themselves as both a disincentive to teach in their own communities and a practical obstacle to effective planning and teaching, given that in some cases they were living in crowded conditions with little opportunity for quiet study and planning.

Overcoming housing access limitations is likely to be extremely expensive, given the general difficulties with housing in many remote locations and the cost of expanding the housing stock. The review understands that the WA system has made progress in this area, while some local staff at Yirrkala are accommodated in government housing. Resolving this issue is outside the scope of the review, but the report notes the negative effect of a two-tiered reward structure for different teachers, the damaging implication that the difference, while historical, is based essentially on race, and the effect of this disparity on strategies to increase the number of Indigenous teachers working in their own communities. The review proposes that consideration be given to this issue in future funding allocations for housing, and that the department develop a case for the preferential allocation of resources to addressing the problem over time.

Assistant teachers

The review is concerned that the position of ATs (and some other Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees) is anomalous in a number of respects. They are employed under two quite different models: the formal department arrangement and school council employment contracts. Expectations seem to be lower for Indigenous staff; the poor attendance rate noted above is one example (although the review is aware of factors affecting attendance rates, the primary concern must be the welfare and educational opportunities of children). Many ATs have been engaged in an apparently endless cycle of training, which in many cases has produced little change in their qualifications or circumstances. This requires close engagement with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to ensure that training is associated with assessments and leads to accredited qualifications. AT roles vary dramatically from co-teachers in some schools to low-level administrative tasks in others. The department's statement of the responsibilities of teachers (DoE, 2013C) makes no reference to the role of teachers in working with ATs. This suggests that there are no clearly stated expectations of teachers in respect of their working relationships with local staff.

These and other characteristics of the current arrangements combine to reduce both the attractiveness of the role and the effectiveness with which this valuable resource is used.



The review proposes that ATs should usually be employed on a common basis to overcome the anomalies in the current arrangements. Where there is a permanent position available, ATs should be offered the opportunity to apply. The review supports the maintenance of contract arrangements in some cases to allow a degree of flexibility in staffing commitments, but this should not be the normal form of employment for assistant teachers. In particular, it should not be the means by which schools manage poor attendance or performance of ATs. As is the case for other classroom staff, they should be subject to probation and performance review processes. Expectations of attendance and performance standards should be consistent with those for other employees. The department should develop clear statements of the way in which teachers are expected to work with ATs, including their involvement in planning and recognition of their essential role in providing the educational bridge for children with little or no English. Support resources should also be developed to exemplify effective working relationships.


Non-Indigenous employees

Some reservations have been expressed over the years, and during this review, about the quality of teachers in the remote workforce. While the report acknowledges this issue, the review's visits to schools have identified excellent teaching in many schools. The basis for the review's workforce recommendations is the principle that the best teachers should be in those schools and classrooms that require the highest quality teaching and specialist skills. There are clearly not enough outstanding teachers volunteering to work in the often difficult and challenging circumstances of remote schools.

Principals

Respondents to the current review took the view that the quality of principals was the single most important factor in the quality of schools. More than one respondent argued that principal quality was the basis on which teacher quality, teacher retention and student learning in a school rested. The role of a remote school principal is complex and diverse. The range of responsibilities extends far beyond the provision of education programs, including, for example, the management of housing, furnishings, vehicles, pastoral care of staff out of hours, interagency work and power generation.

The review has identified the selection, training and preparation of remote principals as one element that could significantly affect the education of Indigenous children. There seems to be an expectation that teachers seeking promotion to leadership roles, or principals transferring to remote locations, will have gained appropriate skills and knowledge through their previous experience. Given the opportunity for teachers to gain leadership positions in some schools, including teaching principal positions, at a relatively early stage of their career, this expectation is likely to be flawed.



The review argues that there are several areas in which action could strengthen principal quality in remote settings (and to some extent more generally):

- Initial training is one key element. The initial training of new principals is weakly developed and inadequate to the critical role principals play. For remote principals, there is a specific need for a significant training program, which should be initiated with at least a full day of training in dealing effectively with and being culturally responsive to remote Indigenous communities. This should include an initial orientation to the educational implications of the languages spoken by Indigenous children in remote schools. In addition, there should be a substantial and extended training program for all new principals, including refresher experiences, aiming to develop the skills of principalship and covering the wide range of responsibilities of principals and the forms of support that are available. All principals should identify a local Indigenous mentor to support their continuing learning in the community.
- There should also be a clear statement developed of the responsibilities of remote principals. The review was unable to identify such a statement in relation to, for example, staff engagement with communities, cross-cultural training, management and support of Indigenous and other staff, effective use of assistant teachers or the importance and role of Indigenous languages in the curriculum. For new principals in smaller remote schools, especially following changes to the Group School and College structures, there will be additional responsibilities in key functional areas (e.g. HR, finance, strategic planning, reporting) with which many appointees will be unfamiliar.
- The third element concerns experienced external support for new and continuing principals. Too little formal use is made of experienced principals in mentoring and advising new or more junior principals. A number of teaching principals or remote principals referred to the very high valuation they placed on formal or informal mentoring arrangements with colleagues or a College principal. The separation of the mentoring role from the accountability role played by Director Schools Performance (DSPs) for remote principals seemed to meet their needs, potentially providing them with two sources of support with somewhat different roles and orientations. It is proposed that all principals have access to a mentor and/or a coach provided by the department.
- The review supports the establishment of local principal support groups in remote settings, involving a small group of principals in regular shared professional learning including instructional rounds in each other's schools. This should be accompanied by external input and support to question practice and encourage planned and effective implementation of priority programs and approaches.
- In addition, applicants for senior roles should have to demonstrate that they have established a pattern of relevant professional learning including specific required hurdle programs, without which candidates should not be appointed.



The department should also explore the possibility of identifying a small number of senior, successful principals with the characteristics appropriate to success in remote leadership and offering them substantial incentives (to be negotiated individually) to spend a minimum of three years leading a Priority 1 school. Principals prepared to take on this challenge should be provided with an enhanced degree of budget and staffing control, and should work in concert with other principals in remote schools to ensure that effective practice is shared.

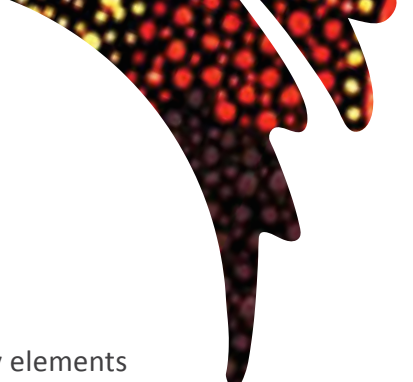
In addition, when principals are leaving (and especially when principals in remote schools are identified as having been very successful in establishing strong performance), the new appointment should be made some months ahead of the departure date, and arrangements established so there can be a handover period in which the new principal works with the outgoing principal to ensure an effective understanding of the processes and structures that have been successful. This is designed to avoid the problem of new principals feeling they have to make their mark by undoing the programs of the previous occupant and establishing a new approach.

Teachers

There are already incentives for teachers to work in remote locations. Teachers from outside communities (non-local recruits) are entitled to free housing and subsidised utilities. A points system based on tenure and location provides many teachers with study leave after a period in a remote school, with no apparent requirement to undertake study. Some respondents argued that the relative ease of picking up a promotion position in a remote school constituted a career incentive.

Current incentives appear to be adequate; while there is no doubt that the provision of additional incentives would be welcomed, it is not clear that they would produce a material change in teacher quality. Data provided earlier suggest that while staff turnover in remote schools is somewhat higher than would be desirable, the median period of teacher service in remote schools is between two and three years, and 53% of staff have been in their present remote school for over two years.

Teachers are likely to apply more willingly for remote schools if those schools are seen as worthwhile places to work. The outstanding principals observed during visits to schools had a demonstrable effect on teacher interest and retention. Consistent with this view, the principal of each school should have an enhanced role in staff selection. It is also valuable for local Indigenous community members, preferably those involved closely with the school through governance arrangements, to share this role.



Pre-service teacher courses conducted in NT institutions should reflect the key elements of this review. The department should negotiate with pre-service providers to ensure that courses, where appropriate, include attention to:

- the conditions of remote schools and evidence-based approaches to teaching in these schools;
- phonological awareness and phonics, other mandatory programs and assessment of student progress using common instruments;
- specific attention to knowledge about issues affecting learners of English as a an additional language or dialect;
- specific attention to an understanding of Indigenous languages and their effect on student attendance, engagement, learning and achievement;
- programs designed to familiarise pre-service teachers with the Indigenous cross curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum;
- School Wide Positive Behaviour Support, social and emotional learning programs and classroom management in very remote schools; and
- expectations of teachers regarding cultural awareness and community engagement.

Where possible, the review proposes that pre-service teachers undertake the practicum in at least one remote school.

The review notes the work of the Deakin University Northern Territory Global Experience Program. This program has placed pre-service teachers from interstate in schools in Darwin and 20 remote settings including schools broadly within the Katherine area, and Maningrida. Candidates are provided with induction and cultural training. Over 10 years, 237 pre-service teachers have been placed, averaging 39 candidates annually in the past two years. In the last three years, 49% of candidates have taken up employment in remote schools (Deakin University, 2014). The program is yet to be formally reviewed, but Deakin University is seeking permission to conduct research tracking these teachers.

The review argues that the department should seek to establish relationships with teacher training institutions around Australia with a view to encouraging student teachers to experience teaching rounds in the Territory, becoming a possible supply source for future appointments. These programs should be managed with input from DoE, Indigenous representatives and participating institutions to ensure that the programs prepare and support pre-service teachers effectively and engage productively with Indigenous communities.

Equally importantly, initiatives proposed in this report should be supported with dedicated training programs and access to high quality coaching and mentoring. Research cited elsewhere in this report indicates the importance of combining training with other forms of support and reinforcement.



Other workforce issues

In addition to issues specifically to do with the remote workforce, broader workforce matters impact on the education of Indigenous young people. While the report does not address these areas in detail, they deserve more sustained attention through the department's workforce planning processes.

Other Indigenous staff

There is a multitude of positions in addition to ATs that are specifically dedicated to Indigenous student welfare and learning, including Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW), Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutors, Inclusion Support Assistants (ISA), Aboriginal Resource Officers (ARO), Cultural Liaison Officers (CLO), Family Liaison Officers (FLO) and Home Liaison Officers (HLO). The review has not examined conditions or roles of these employees in detail. We are aware, however, of some anomalies in their allocation and distribution; in some areas (including Darwin), for example, allocations of AIEWs are historical and no longer reflect the distribution of the students they serve.

The review is also conscious that those employed in some of these positions, like ATs, often have no clear career path, little central coordination (despite the valuable work still undertaken in Darwin to support AIEWs) and often no security of tenure. It is proposed that the roles, responsibilities, numbers and employment arrangements of each category be reviewed and re-allocated on the basis of need. This does not suggest a reduction in numbers, but an evaluation to ensure that these valuable resources are achieving the maximum benefit for students.

Cultural training

The review is concerned that initial cultural training offered by the department to all staff has become very limited and the time available truncated. All staff should have access to a substantial, continuing program of cultural training, initiated with a minimum of a full day provided centrally and supplemented with further training once staff are located in workplaces. Such programs should also include recognition of the importance of first language in the educational engagement and success of children. New appointments to principal-level positions should receive further training in their roles and responsibilities related to community engagement and cultural awareness.

Recommendations

41. Engage additional expertise and experience to develop a comprehensive workforce plan as outlined in this report, aligned with the department's Strategic Plan, the Indigenous education strategic plan proposed in this report and the Early Years Workforce Plan.
42. Strengthen programs to increase Indigenous teacher numbers and quality including:
 - a. a revised version of the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program meeting the criteria set out in this report;
 - b. a rationalised approach to attracting school leavers and Indigenous members of the general workforce into teaching and supporting them in their training and induction;
 - c. evaluating co-principalship arrangements and considering extending them to expand the cohort of Indigenous educators with leadership experience;
 - d. providing mentoring arrangements for new and early career Indigenous teachers, using the services of experienced Indigenous teachers and senior teachers; and
 - e. recognising the effect of differential reward structures for Indigenous teachers in their own communities and developing a case for resourcing Indigenous teacher rewards, including housing on the same basis as non-Indigenous teachers in remote schools.
43. Establish employment and performance management arrangements for assistant teachers consistent with those of other staff, and ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and supported by all school staff, particularly classroom teachers.
44. Raise the quality of remote principals by:
 - a. strengthening initial training, including cultural competency training and an introduction to Indigenous languages;
 - b. developing a clear statement of the responsibilities of leadership in remote schools;
 - c. establishing mentoring (professional and cultural) and coaching arrangements for all principals;
 - d. establishing small groups of remote principals to engage in shared professional learning and instructional rounds in each other's schools;
 - e. requiring applicants for senior positions to demonstrate a pattern of relevant professional learning, including specific required programs without which candidates should not be appointed;
 - f. exploring the possibility of attracting a small group of outstanding principals to remote schools; and
 - g. arranging early appointment and release of new remote appointees to ensure effective handover.



45. Raise the quality of remote teachers by:
 - a. improving principal quality;
 - b. enhancing the role of the local principal in staff selection;
 - c. negotiating with NT teacher education institutions to ensure that courses take account of department priorities and the requirements for teaching Indigenous students and in remote locations;
 - d. working with interstate universities to establish a substantial program preparing and supporting pre-service teachers in undertaking teaching rounds in NT remote schools;
 - e. providing initial cultural training and some understanding of Indigenous languages to all appointees; and
 - f. ensuring that initiatives proposed in this report are supported with effective professional learning and coaching.
 46. Evaluate the implementation of *Visible Learning* in Central Region with a view to its continued implementation in current participant schools, in all Priority 2 and 3 schools in the NT, and later in all schools.
 47. Review the roles, responsibilities, employment arrangements and numbers of other school-based education workers with responsibilities for Indigenous education to ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from this important resource, and that allocations of Indigenous staff in ancillary positions (e.g. Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers) are based on need rather than historical practice.
 48. Require all applicants for study leave to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.
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Chapter Thirteen

Finance and resourcing

Resourcing of education has been a substantial theme in the consultations undertaken by the review. Across the entire scope of the review's Terms of Reference, respondents have argued variously that resources are inadequate, poorly distributed, excessive in some areas, lacking in others, badly managed or ineffectively targeted. Discussion often focused on the timing of funding decisions, and the poor articulation between those decisions and program needs. A significant proportion of the discussions included the proposition that the quantum of resources was not the problem and, often simultaneously, that additional resourcing was the key to better outcomes.

The review recognises all of these perceptions are true to some extent, or in some areas. There are several factors limiting the effectiveness of resourcing:

- the demographics and geography of the Northern Territory (NT);
- rapid and unexpected changes in department goals and funding arrangements;
- lack of understanding at school level of how allocations and timing of project and program funds are determined and how the use of these funds can be managed for student benefit;
- the substantial complexity introduced by the significance of Australian Government funding in the NT education budget;
- fluctuating patterns of enrolment and attendance, meaning that staffing formulae are rarely established on a consistent basis;
- dramatically different requirements in schools for specific services (e.g. disability services); and
- discrepancies between funding inputs and learning outcomes.

Following the release of the draft report of this review, consultation feedback and submissions raised issues related to this chapter, including:

- general support for the development of a more integrated, clearer and longer-term approach to funding of Indigenous education;
- proposals that a detailed costing of Indigenous education is required to give confidence about future funding commitments and the capacity to deliver on key goals;
- concern about what is seen by some respondents as a systemic under-funding of Indigenous education, especially in remote schools; and
- proposals about the inclusion of specific staffing issues in this chapter, including arguments about the benefits of needs-based staffing, and concern about the use of attendance data to adjust staffing.



Learning Lessons

At the time of *Learning Lessons*, in the 1998-99 financial year, the total budget of the Department of Education was \$330.1 million. The Australian Government contributed \$55.9 million (about 17% of the total). Indigenous education was estimated to consume \$137.3 million (or 41.6%) of the total, although the method for calculating this allocation would not stand rigorous scrutiny (Collins, 1999: 53).

Collins also noted the view expressed by both the Commonwealth and NT that their relationship was dysfunctional. The report argued that the onerous reporting arrangements for Commonwealth Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) funding, focus on inputs and processes, lack of focus on outcomes, and low-level targets ('lack of stretch') inhibited progress. It also suggested that the NT had been ineffective in accessing Commonwealth funding (Ibid.: 54-6).

The key resource issue raised by *Learning Lessons* concerned the extraordinary differences in 'levels of need, employment opportunities and service provision costs which apply across Indigenous Australia' (Ibid: 62). The review was also concerned that the department did not have sufficiently well-developed systems for tracking relative costs at all levels, including costs related to individual students.

The 2002 Secondary Education Review, discussing resourcing, also pointed to inequities in resource distribution affecting schools. It noted that 'Equity of resourcing does not mean equal resourcing – it means differential resourcing according to local needs' (Ramsey: xii). At the time, the review calculated that the average cost per full-time equivalent secondary student for the NT was \$13 057 (Ramsey: xiii).

The Northern Territory education budget¹⁹

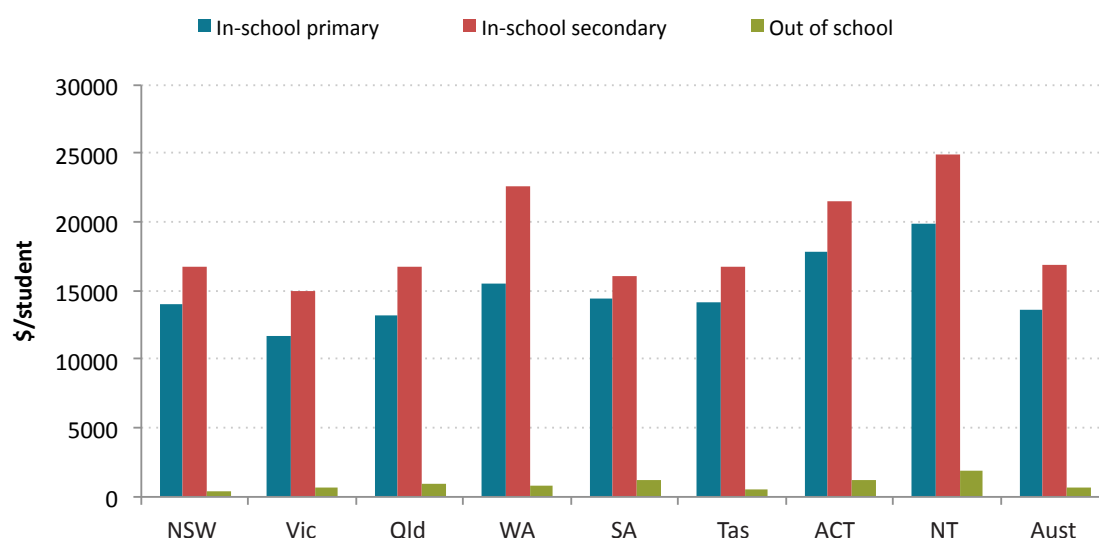
Many of the issues raised in earlier reports remain relevant. Although the department now has a much more professional and analytic approach to the management of resourcing, the issues that made resourcing less effective in previous years still apply.

The cost of operating the NT education system in 2012-13 was \$864.9 million. Income, however, was only \$814.5 million, leaving a net operating deficit of \$50.5 million. The Australian Government budgeted contribution to income was \$248 million, making up over 30% of the total budget. Government primary education cost just under \$340 million while secondary education cost just over \$251 million. Government pre-schooling cost almost \$40 million (\$11 717 per child) and child-care services almost \$17 million. Employee expenses made up 52% of expenditure (\$454 million). The department calculates that the cost of Indigenous-specific programs is almost \$51 million, of which almost \$42 million is Australian Government funded.

¹⁹ Data in this chapter, unless otherwise attributed, come from the 2013 Annual Report (DoE, 2013G) and from internal DoE briefings and working documents.

According to the Productivity Commission, NT costs are about \$17 857 per student in primary schools and about \$22 724 per secondary student.²⁰ These costs are higher than those for other jurisdictions. We note, however, that there is inevitably a higher average cost associated with education in the NT because of geography, the disproportionate location of students in remote communities, social factors impacting on these children, their language background and the range of forms of educational disadvantage they experience. In addition, the Territory is a relatively small system with little opportunity to achieve economies of scale: overheads (and in some cases direct costs) for many functions (e.g. development of new curriculum or support programs) are similar to those in large states but amortised across a much smaller enrolment, so the cost of such overheads drives per student costs higher.

Figure 22: \$ per Student by Jurisdiction and Stage of Schooling



Source: Productivity Commission 2013: 4.35

Note that Figure 22 shows accurate relativities between jurisdictions but varies slightly in quantum from the review’s calculation of per student costs listed above (Productivity Commission, 2013: 4.35).

Additional costs associated with diseconomies of scale in the NT are not evenly distributed. An internal DoE document provided to the review calculates the cost of education per enrolled student by geolocation and stage of schooling. The table below includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in a single calculation. For the purposes of this calculation,

²⁰ Note that costs cited in this chapter involve some differences in the calculation basis, and so different calculations may not be strictly comparable. The principal value of these numbers for the review is relativity rather than precise quanta: that is, we are more interested in the relative costs by geolocations or stages of schooling (or between education systems) than in whether the dollar amounts are accurate, since the review proposes new expenditure in some areas.



Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy have been included in the remote figures since their circumstances match more closely to smaller town schools than to most very remote schools. Cost per student in very remote locations is consistently more than 50% higher than for provincial locations and on average about 19% higher than for remote locations. Additional costs associated with delivery of education services in increasingly remote locations are inevitable given the logistical and other issues discussed above.

Table 7: Cost per Student by Geolocation and Stage of Schooling

	Cost Per Enrolled Student		
	Primary	Middle	Senior
Provincial	\$14 636	\$16 166	\$19 410
Remote (plus Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)	\$18 360	\$23 864	\$25 802
Very Remote (minus Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)	\$22 284	\$27 913	\$30 811

Source: internal Department of Education document prepared for the review

These per student costs are by student enrolled, not student attending, since this is a key part of the argument advanced by some respondents to the review for changing staffing arrangements (and therefore costs) so that attendance is not part of the calculation.

The department document also calculates the total cost respectively for the education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by geolocation. According to this calculation, costs in 2012 for the education respectively of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by geolocation were as set out in the table below.

Table 8: Total Cost Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Education by Geolocation

Geolocation	2012 \$ Indigenous	2012 \$ Non-Indigenous
Provincial	52 669 246	197 247 227
Remote	62 844 054	63 305 091
Very remote	173 154 458	12 209 665
Total	288 667 758	272 761 983

Source: internal Department of Education document prepared for the review

The calculation also provides data on per student costs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on a geolocations basis.

Table 9: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Enrolments and Costs per Student

	Enrolments			Cost per student	
	Total	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Provincial	15 756	3 089	12 667	\$17 051	\$15 572
Remote	6 120	2 875	3 245	\$21 861	\$19 510
Very remote	7 625	7 142	483	\$24 245	\$25 289
Total	29 500	13 106	16 395	\$22 026	\$16 637

Source: internal Department of Education document prepared for the review

These numbers suggest that additional resources are applied to the education of Indigenous students at each geolocation apart from very remote, where small numbers of non-Indigenous students and some special provisions raise expenditure. The situation in very remote locations is a notable departure from the general pattern evident in the costs.

One of the clearest cost issues affected by low economies of scale concerns the gross cost of achieving Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions in different geolocations. Over the three years 2010-2012 (2013 costing figures were not available when the calculation was done), the average costs of achieving an NTCET completion were as set out below. The cost per NTCET completion in very remote schools is more than nine times the cost in remote schools and almost 17 times the cost in provincial schools.

Table 10: Cost per NTCET Completion by Geolocation

Geolocation (adjusted)	Cost per NTCET
Provincial	\$86 115
Remote (plus Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)	\$158 348
Very remote (minus Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy)	\$1 460 789

Source: internal Department of Education document prepared for the review

This extraordinary difference is a function principally of low completions in very remote locations, but also of the diseconomies of scale involved in delivering senior secondary education in a large number of very remote locations with small numbers of students and low attendance.



The review and its effect on costs

The review did not start with a cost target. It approached issues of costs from the opposite perspective: what operations, processes, procedures, structures, programs and support are required to deliver a high quality education to Indigenous children in the NT? The costs associated with delivering an education of that kind will be analysed in a preliminary form in the implementation plan that will be developed on the basis of this final version of the report. Nor does the review take a position on the current quantum of funding of Indigenous education in general. Instead, the report recommends actions required. The implementation plan will begin to map required spending to put them into practice.

The review recommends that NT funding for Indigenous education should be reformed to ensure that funding is allocated on the basis of clear goals reflected in a strategic plan, and is maintained for extended periods. This will allow department units, regions and schools to undertake long-term planning, implement, monitor and evaluate key initiatives, and identify progress and modify plans in the light of evidence.

The items in the review's recommendations that are likely to require significant levels of funding are listed below. Initiatives that involve largely internal analysis or development without additional staff or external costs are not identified here. Activities that are essentially substitution of a new activity for a previous approach are also not listed. Some items that are not specific about the extent of activity involved (e.g. conduct of research) have not been listed. These items have not been costed (but initial costings will be undertaken as part of the implementation phase). In some cases they could be borne, in part at least, by the Australian Government. Recommendation numbers related to each cost area are provided in brackets:

- integrated service initiatives (1, 18, 39);
- additional staffing for the Indigenous Education Unit and possibly the establishment of a new Indigenous representative body (4, 5);
- possible costs associated with improving Homelands education and the education of unenrolled and disengaged students (7, 31, 34);
- support for community engagement and governance training for school councils (10, 12);
- extension of Families as First Teachers to new locations (15);
- definition of early literacy skills for pre-schools (17);
- funding of Child and Family Centres (18);
- additional first language teachers (19);
- costs for early literacy mandated programs and related coaching and professional learning (20, 23);
- costs associated with Direct Instruction if implemented (20, 23);
- costs associated with the engagement of local communities in delivering culture programs (22);
- trialling and implementing delivery of secondary education in urban settings (26, 27);

- construction, equipping, management and maintenance of residential student facilities (28);
- developing, trialling and implementing *Employment Pathways* (29);
- establishing a system-wide girls engagement program (36);
- implementing School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (37);
- developing a social and emotional learning curriculum (37);
- strengthening responses to conductive hearing loss (37);
- coaching, support and specialist staff for behaviour and wellbeing programs (37);
- additional expertise to develop the workforce plan (40);
- stronger support for recruiting, training and employing Indigenous staff (41, 42);
- strengthening remote teaching and principal recruitment, training and support (43, 44); and
- potential extension to the rollout of *Visible Learning* (45).

There are also some items that could result in direct cost savings or improvements in productivity:

- efficiencies associated with the adoption of consistent approaches across the system in key areas (3, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 29, 33, 37, 38, 45);
- economies arising from better planned and more effective implementation (6);
- improvements in staff productivity as a result of better preparation and training (10, 15, 23, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47);
- progressive reductions in staff and overheads for senior and possibly middle years programs in Priority 1 schools (26, 27, 28);
- economies of scale in urban schools as enrolments increase (26);
- reductions in costs associated with reduced numbers of disengaged, illiterate secondary students (31); and
- potential savings and efficiencies in distance education (32).

Much more substantially, however, the review argues that the cost of making the changes recommended should be measured against the long-term cost of not acting. These include broader social costs associated with illiteracy, undiagnosed developmental and social problems, lack of employment skills, social dislocation, welfare dependency and the range of other issues arising from an education system that does not effectively meet the needs of a significant proportion of the Indigenous population. The calculation must also take account of the substantial economic benefits generated by a better educated Indigenous population and a cohort of young people who are better equipped to participate in the economy and society.

A thorough cost-benefit analysis would demonstrate that the costs of not acting far outweigh the relatively contained costs of establishing a more coherent, consistent and effective system of education.



Staffing


A number of respondents made comment on the current set of arrangements for determining school staffing. The submission from Clark made the most extensive comments. This submission made a number of points that were echoed, though in much less detail, in other commentary. The submission argues, *inter alia*:

- there is a disparity in the funding of urban and remote schools in the NT. This disparity was noted in the Gonski review, which proposed greater percentage increases in funding for remote schools;
- school staffing is based in part on attendance, which disadvantages remote schools because of their relatively low attendance. Even if students attend only part of the time they remain the responsibility of teachers who need to plan programs for them, teach them when they attend, conduct assessments and maintain records;
- the NT does not fund the English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) needs of its remote Indigenous population comparably with similar students in other states and territories; and
- the NT has no needs-based component in its staffing, and does not have a publicly available set of staffing principles (Clark, 2014).

In the period since the finalisation of the draft report of the review, staffing arrangements have been examined in detail. The documents provided to the review indicate that current staffing procedures are highly detailed and initially based largely on formulae applying to different kinds of schools (e.g. primary, senior) for the ratios of staff to particular groups of students (the ‘per capita student multiplier’). Different ratios apply to different stages of schooling (as is the case in other Australian jurisdictions). In addition, there are allocations to schools based on:

- the Curriculum Access Factor, a formula for determining the need for additional staff to maintain subject access where student groups are small;
- Economies of Scale, which involved staff reduction in larger schools because they have access to economies of scale not available to smaller schools; and
- a number of other formulae to take account of general administration needs, teacher non-contact time and senior teacher and assistant principal teaching loads and other minor entitlements.

None of this constitutes a needs-based approach. There are variations applying to small schools and Homeland schools, but these are essentially variations to the base formulae. There are formulae for special schools and for special centres for high needs students with intellectual impairments in mainstream schools, which do constitute a needs based approach to some extent, but are obviously limited in application. In a small number of cases particular schools are allocated staff positions based on specific programs: Autism Spectrum Disorder, gifted programs, hearing impaired and special Indigenous units. There are also formulae to provide a small staffing increase for schools with a program for students with moderate disabilities and for four schools to intensive English units. These allocations are related to needs, but again have a narrow application.



Beyond these formula allocations, there are ‘out of model allocations’, constituting a lengthy list of programs, positions and activities that are staffed outside the standard mechanisms. School allocations are then varied by the application of an attendance factor that adjusts allocations in line with historical attendance data.

What is clear from the analysis undertaken is that there is or comprehensive approach to staffing schools on the basis of defined need. The current arrangements reflect what the Ladwig and Sarra review called ‘... a preponderance of ad hoc decision making in relation to allocation and distribution of resources’ (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009: 21). The allocation of staffing resources on a basis that is not entirely transparent, and that seems to favour one school over another without a clear rationale, like other practices noted in this review, does not encourage confidence among schools and communities. More critically, the absence of any real needs-based allocation of resources means that some young people may be missing out. As the current arrangements stand, there could be no difference in staffing allocations between two schools with the same student population, but only one of which has a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Equally, the application of a range of special factors and out of model allocations means that equivalent schools could have different staff allocations.

The review understands that there was a substantial departmental project to develop a proposal of this kind (referred to by Clark in her submission) based on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). The proposals outlined in this project were never implemented²¹. The basis for staffing in the latest iteration of the project included:

- a per capita student multiplier varied by stages of schooling but constant across geolocations;
- allocation of needs teachers based on ICSEA, which includes a range of components to develop an overall score, including socio-economic data, remoteness, the percentage of Indigenous students and a category called ‘Disadvantaged LBOTE’ (referring to Language Background Other Than English), comprising language background and the percentage of parents with an education of Year 9 equivalent or below;
- a curriculum access factor designed to ensure that smaller schools can meet curriculum needs; and
- an economies of scale factor, reducing the rate at which resources are allocated to a school as its size increases.

The range of special purpose programs and some out of model allocations were consolidated in the needs allocation. The proposal also included an allocation of non-teaching resources including core administrative staff, assistant teachers (ATs) and Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs), with a process similar to the process for allocating teachers, including the allocation of needs staff. The departmental work was conducted on the basis that its application would require no additional funding. Total staff numbers were essentially fixed. What would have changed if a needs-based approach had been adopted was the allocation of staff between schools.

21 The information on this project is based on internal department documents provided to the review.



The discussion of needs-based staffing is somewhat broader than the terms of reference for this review. While the review is not in a position to provide a firm recommendation about the specific modelling outlined in the proposal, an approach like this has two substantial advantages:

- it makes clear and public the basis on which staffing decisions are made and eliminates ad hoc decisions and special pleading; and
- it recognises that schools have identifiable and quantifiable differences in need arising from their student populations and that these needs have resource implications.

The difficulty with such an approach, especially in a climate of constrained resources, is that it would require the reallocation of resources from some schools to others. This is clearly a major hurdle. The common expectation is that the adoption of needs-based staffing will lead to new resources, so identified needs are met through additional staff. This is a further obstacle to progress.

The review notes both the advantages and the obstacles to any move towards a needs-based approach to the resourcing of schools. There are, however, compelling arguments for both the adoption of a more transparent and less ad hoc approach to the allocation of marginal resources, and for allocating at least those marginal resources on the basis of need.

The review recommends that the department develops a proposal for the allocation of all resources beyond those allocated automatically through the use of the per capital student multiplier on a more transparent basis. The proposal should identify the level of resources (teaching and non-teaching) falling outside that core allocation and consider how they can be allocated to better meet the needs identified through ICSEA and also the priority listing identified in Appendix 6 (which overlaps with ICSEA but allows a more fine-grained analysis of the needs of specific schools). The proposal should establish a new needs-based set of criteria for resource allocation and model its application to the current staffing position.


This approach will enable a discussion about the effect of such changes and a determination as to whether a more needs-based approach could be implemented with benefits to student outcomes.

Australian Government Funding

The report noted above that the Australian Government contribution to Northern Territory education, at about \$248 million in 2013-14, makes up about 30% of the total income of the department. These resources are provided through 30 funding agreements between the two governments. A full list of these agreements is attached to this report at Appendix 4.

Of these agreements:

- ten are National Partnership Agreements (NPA);
- fifteen are Commonwealth Own Purpose Expenditure (COPE) funded;
- two are Special Purpose Payments (under the National Education Agreement); and
- three are funded under other agreement types.



In 2014-15, 23 of the existing 30 funding agreements between the NTG and the Australian Government will expire. The remaining seven agreements will provide \$226 million in funding to the NTG in the 2014-15 financial year.

Of the 30 agreements, 16 have an emphasis on providing services for Indigenous students. In 2013-14, these agreements will deliver \$76 million in funding to the NT. Over 60% of this funding is provided under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (SFNT) National Partnership.

Of the 16 agreements allocating funding specifically to Indigenous education, only two will continue in 2014-15. One is the SFNT, with funding of approximately \$50 million in 2014-15. The SFNT Implementation Plan will provide \$659 million over its life (2012-22) to improve school readiness, attendance and achievement in 91 schools across the NT. Of this total, \$413 million is directed as follows:

- additional Teachers (\$166 million);
- additional Housing (\$52 million);
- quality Teaching Initiatives (\$126 million);
- SEAM (\$22 million); and
- School Nutrition Program (\$47 million).

The other continuing agreement is the Low Socio-Economic School Communities National Partnership, funding for which is linked with school funding reform, and which could therefore conclude at the end of 2013. This agreement provides about \$8 million in 2014-15.

The initiatives funded under the existing agreements directed to Indigenous education address ongoing needs. While the expectation is that these agreements could be renegotiated, this has not yet occurred and there is some uncertainty about timing and process. Some of these agreements are of key strategic importance. These include agreements on Families as First Teachers (FaFT), Child and Family Centres (CFCs) and the Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance Act (IETA). These programs address issues that are the focus of this review, including school readiness programs for Indigenous children and strengthening the quality of the remote teaching workforce.

The new Australian Government's election policy included a commitment to continuing the current level of funding for Closing the Gap initiatives but examining these programs to ensure that they are achieving their goals. The policy also noted issues to do with school attendance and literacy and numeracy achievement. These matters are also a focus for the current review. The policy included a commitment to extending the Schools Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) to all remote and very remote schools with attendance problems. SEAM was an initiative of the previous government under the SFNT to address attendance in line with the closing the gap targets. Following the election, the new Remote School Attendance Strategy has been implemented (see Chapter 10).




In addition, the recent resolution of future Commonwealth-Territory funding arrangements involves the provision of an additional \$272 million to the NT over the forward estimates. There have been no decisions announced by either government at the time of writing that suggest how this money will be spent.

The number and variety of these agreements (and specifically, for the purposes of this review, the agreements focused on Indigenous education) impose a considerable administrative burden on both the NT and the Australian governments. Reporting and accountability arrangements are onerous and deflect attention from program delivery to the fulfilment of administrative requirements. This difficulty arises in part because of the number of agreements and in part because of the detailed and prescriptive nature of each agreement. While such agreements need to ensure effective accountability to the Australian Government for funding acquittal and progress towards outcomes, it is the judgment of the review that the balance is skewed at present towards formal reporting processes and away from program effectiveness.

The review has identified numerous examples of distortions produced by funding mechanisms and timelines. The most common discussion during the extensive school visits undertaken by the review team concerned programs established with term-limited funding that had been terminated when funding ended, or extended in a cut-back form after the principal had spent considerable time and energy finding other funding sources, usually including School Council funding. These problems are not solely associated with Australian Government funding. Changes in DoE priorities and poor alignment and coordination at the NT level have contributed to the school level problem. But arrangements to manage Australian Government funding are a major cause of the problem.

This problem reflects a gradual shift away from the 2008 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) framework agreement designed to simplify what was then recognised to be a problematic funding model. The intention was to ensure that funding agreements between the Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions would be clearly focused on agreed outcomes and provide greater flexibility at the jurisdictional level regarding the allocation of funding. The current Australian Government-NTG funding agreements show little evidence of this ambition. They reflect a multiplicity of funding sources, fragmentation and lack of effective alignment across different sources. There are inconsistencies between NT and Australian government approaches to funding and reliance on short-term funding to address long-term problems. In some cases there have been unanticipated changes in direction as governments, ministers or senior executives change. Agreements focus on inputs as much as outcomes, and are accompanied by onerous reporting requirements and tight prescription within agreements that make it more difficult to shift direction in response to changing circumstances. The Australian Government has been frustrated with the lack of progress in the NT on key measures. There has been concern about cost-shifting and substitution.



The NTG has indicated its wish to establish a new funding relationship with the new Australian Government. The DoE is looking to establish a long term funding commitment based on an agreed strategic plan with clear outcomes. The intention requires a plan that ensures the strategic allocation and use of resources and reduces the administrative burden of a large number of small, seemingly unconnected funding arrangements.

A related point is made by the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services in his 2013 report on progress with Local Implementation Plans:

It is recommended that work commence on developing better incentives for whole-of-government collaboration and driving funding reforms for remote Indigenous service providers to better align and streamline funding agreements and, where possible, extend funding periods (Gleeson, 2013:46).

The review agrees that a new approach is essential, and especially for Indigenous education. This report argues for the development of a strategic plan for Indigenous education based on the recommendations in this review report (see Recommendation 2). The plan should have a very long term focus: at least a decade, with clear and explicit interim targets. Such a plan should be endorsed by both the Australian and NT governments. At both levels of government, it would ideally reflect a bipartisan agreement, as a means of assisting coherence and consistency over time in funding and its effects on implementation.

Funding arrangements between the two governments regarding Indigenous education should be focused on achievement of the goals and targets in the strategic plan. This should be reflected in a single, comprehensive, integrated agreement, supported by long-term commitments, as flexible in funding allocation as is consistent with effective accountability and enabling renegotiation of current funding agreements (including the SFNT) where this would assist better alignment and more effective targeting of resources. The agreement should set challenging but realistic interim targets for achievement, recognise the time it will take to achieve substantial improvement in core indicators and provide a degree of certainty among the recipients of funding, especially schools, as to their capacity to undertake long-term planning based on an assured resource base.

The agreement should also allow mutually agreed modification of goals, targets and funding priorities in response to evidence over time. One clear outcome of this review has been the lack of high-quality evidence about what works in Indigenous education. The funding agreement should commit both governments to high-quality longitudinal research on the effectiveness of key initiatives in such areas as school readiness, early literacy and numeracy achievement, alternative arrangements for the provision of secondary education, distance education as a means of provision in remote locations, attendance, school governance, community engagement as a contributor to student learning and the training, recruitment and quality of remote teachers and principals. Governments should use data emerging from the research to sharpen the focus of reform and redirect energy to those initiatives demonstrated to be the most effective.



Recommendations

49. Allocate long-term funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain a consistent direction across the life of the plan.
 50. Develop for discussion a proposal for the allocation of staffing resources beyond those allocated automatically through the use of the per capital student multiplier on a more transparent basis, including:
 - a. identifying the level of resources (teaching and non-teaching) falling outside that core allocation;
 - b. considering how they can be allocated to better meet the needs identified through the Index of Community Socio Economic Advantage and also the priority listing identified in Appendix 6; and
 - c. establishing a new needs-based set of criteria for resource allocation and modelling its application to the current staffing position.
 51. Seek a single, integrated agreement with the Australian Government on funding for Indigenous education (and more broadly) committing both governments to:
 - a. long-term goals and targets based on the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended by this review;
 - b. reasonable certainty in funding over an extended period allowing long-term planning;
 - c. flexibility in funding allocations by the Territory combined with effective accountability; and
 - d. longitudinal evaluation of all key initiatives enabling progressive modification of the plan in response to evidence.
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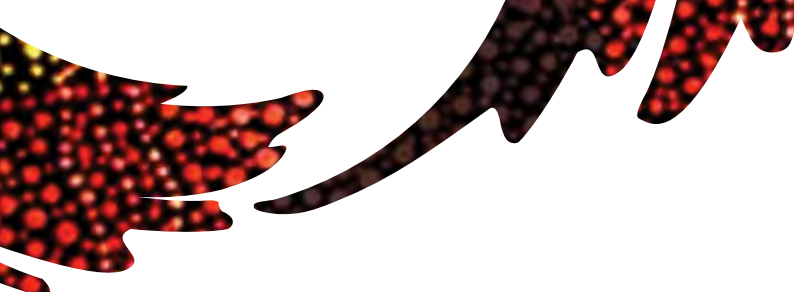
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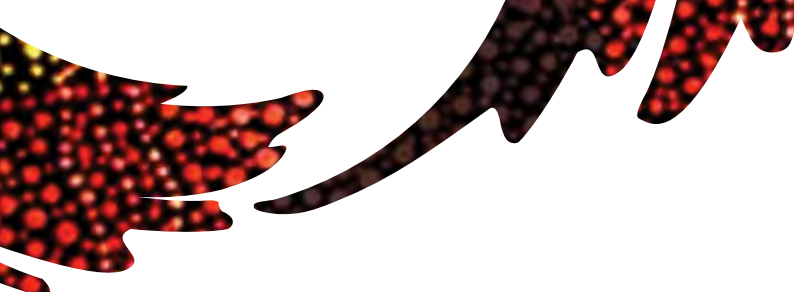
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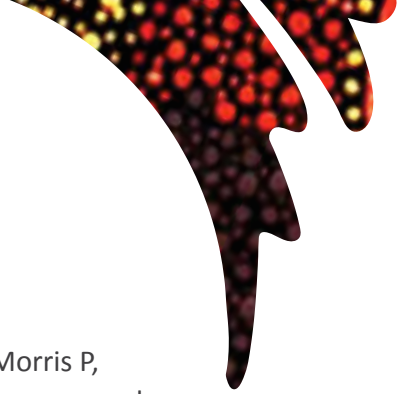
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Appendix One

Learning Lessons: a reflection on the Collins review

A number of reviews and reform agendas have shaped the Indigenous education policy currently in place. The review that is regarded as most significant in relation to Indigenous education is *Learning Lessons – an independent review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory* (Collins, 1999).

Learning Lessons was a comprehensive investigation into a broad range of factors affecting outcomes for Indigenous students. In 1998, the Northern Territory Government (NTG) established a Review Team, comprising the Hon. Bob Collins, Tess Lea, and a team of departmental personnel to fulfil the Terms of Reference to establish:

- the views and educational aspirations of Indigenous parents and community members in relation to their children’s schooling, with particular reference to English literacy and numeracy;
- the key issues affecting educational outcomes for Indigenous children; and
- supportable actions for educational outcome improvements.

The review reported in 1999, presenting 151 recommendations to government. The recommendations touched on virtually every area of the work of the department. They highlighted system changes urgently required to better support schools, including stronger relationships with parents and community, and rigorous assessment and reporting processes. The messages conveyed throughout the report are direct, and supported by data portraying unacceptable educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The *Learning Lessons* recommendations and discussion have influenced policy and practice for the subsequent 14 years. In 2005 the department compiled an implementation status report on the recommendations for the Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee (LLISC) co-chaired by Bob Collins and Esther Djayhurrnga, Principal Gunbalanya School. Of the 151 recommendations, 82 had been implemented fully and 51 were partially implemented with ongoing action. Seventeen recommendations were assessed as being superseded by new policy or legislation, and one, departmental housing for local recruits, had not had any government action (LLISC, 2005: 7 and 64).

In the period since the Collins review, major strategies were developed to drive the effort to improve student enrolment, attendance and retention, secondary education provision, staff recruitment and retention, literacy and numeracy and employment and training. These intentions are reflected in the Indigenous Education Strategic Plans of 2000-2004 and 2006-2009 (DEET, 2000 and DEET, 2006).



The Collins report was highly critical of the apparent attempt to bury or ignore the results from the bush, noting that at the time of the review the department had virtually no data management systems. By 2005 the story was different. Reporting infrastructure was in place and there was a continual roll-out of information technology. There was a clear goal to ensure that schools in remote communities were not disadvantaged by the lack of access to information and education programs and that data systems were available and accessible (LLISC, 2005: 7).

Much has changed in the political landscape and the department's structure (Ludwig & Sarra, 2009) since the 2005 status report was released. In undertaking the current review, it is apparent that the key themes of *Learning Lessons* still form part of the focus of the reform agenda for education in the Northern Territory (NT). This review has not revisited all of the recommendations of *Learning Lessons*, but it has been useful to reflect on some of the major reform areas and seek information on what critical issues remain.


Community engagement

Learning Lessons recommendations on partnerships and the self-managing schools program focused on the authority of the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory (IECNT). *Learning Lessons* explored options to break down the barriers between schools and communities and proposed the piloting of local and regional partnerships, under the auspice of the IECNT (Collins, 1999: 164). Negotiated agreements were to include components such as attendance, retention, flexible schooling, goals for improved education outcomes, improved facilities and professional development/staffing programs.

Collins identified two approaches to parent and community engagement in education decision-making: School Councils and a program called Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) committees. The effectiveness of either of these mechanisms was not known at the time of *Learning Lessons*, and the ASSPA program, which was funded through the Australian Government, ceased some time ago.

The *Education Act* and the Education (College and School Councils) Regulations provide for School Councils in the Northern Territory to have a wide range of functions and powers, including:

- advise the principal on the implementation of Territory educational policies;
- advise the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in relation to the educational needs of their school;
- advise the principal/CEO on initiatives in community education;
- advise the CEO in relation to the job description for the position of principal;
- advise the principal in relation to the job descriptions for teaching and ancillary staff;
- advise the CEO in relation to the building and facilities needs of the school;
- determine the purposes for which Government moneys allocated to the school are spent and to spend those moneys; and
- exercise general control of the buildings, and determine the after school hours use of school building for community purposes.



Information from within the department (internal departmental brief) indicates that remote schools have generally not taken up the degree of autonomy that is available to School Councils. Further, the department has acknowledged that there has been a lack of training in governance for School Council members, and in recent times the department has introduced annual school council governance training, aimed at building the capacity of school council members to fulfil their roles and responsibilities under the *Education Act*.

In conjunction with this the department has funded the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO) to develop and deliver school governance training to all government schools in the NT. The aim of the training is to work with School Council members and their communities to increase their awareness and understanding of governance processes. Thus all government School Councils have the opportunity to attend the annual Department of Education (DoE) training and then receive follow-up NTCOGSO training, which can be tailored to meet the needs of their communities.

Feedback to the Review indicates that there is a degree of variance in how School Councils are engaged in the business of the school, and the degree to which governance training is achieved.

Since the time of *Learning Lessons*, there have been a number of approaches to community and school partnerships and better representation of Indigenous people in the delivery of education in the NT. Information provided to this review indicates that the department explored options including Self-Managed Schools, Community Controlled Schools, Education Boards, Remote Learning Partnership Agreements (RLPAs) and more recently the Community and School Partnership Agreements. The Government now has, in addition, a policy for Community Driven Schools. Commentary provided suggests that there has been a genuine intent by all parties to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous students. Despite this, where outcomes were achieved they have not been sustained. As one contributor to the review indicated:

although... the establishment of RLPAs resulted in more relevant delivery of education services in these communities, the changes were not long lasting and were swallowed up in the next phase of reforms...., leaving those communities feeling disenfranchised, and...result[ing] in disengagement (Review contributor).

The evidence available to this review suggests that the *Learning Lessons* goal to improve partnership and greater local ownership in education has gained little traction, particularly at the system level. The Review has heard stories of success with local level partnerships, but feedback from the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council (NTIEC) and others suggests that there is limited impact on education policy and planning. Neither the Council nor the Department seems impressed with the outcomes to date on engagement and partnership actions.

What is apparent from the feedback received is that at the system and school and community levels, the goal of community engagement remains elusive.



Early Years

Collins (1999) acknowledged the critical importance of the early acquisition of literacy: ‘... children who fall behind are unlikely to catch up and in fact are more likely to find the gap widening in secondary school’ (ibid: 96). Schooling culture, particularly in remote locations, would need to be developed and supported. Collins found that many schools were lacking the techniques and resources to assist them in working with very young children in the attainment of reading and writing skills. Further, the engagement of families in early literacy acquisition was considered essential, and at the time of *Learning Lessons* a number of trial programs were running in very remote communities, involving parent participation in the schooling experience (ibid: 97).

The policy at the time of *Learning Lessons* made the provision of early childhood and pre-school experiences difficult for remote schools. Obstacles included inability to staff according to the formulae, lack of early childhood education skills or experience among the teachers and a lack of appropriate infrastructure in many of the schools.

Learning Lessons called for guaranteed access to play centres and preschools for all children in the three to five year age group, with multipurpose centres to include child health and child care services:

By providing the necessary space, props and developmentally appropriate activities, literacy and numeracy understandings will be developed that will assist the transition into the artificial and disciplined world of the classroom and its modes of instruction, making the transition to school more continuous and ultimately more successful (Collins 1999:99).

By 2005 the Australian and Northern Territory Governments were funding initiatives to increase access to early years programs throughout the NT. The *Learning Lessons* Implementation Status Report described the mobile preschools initiative and a rollout of childcare facilities and community initiatives to provide health promotion, care and early learning. Information provided for this Review indicates that effort in the early years has been an ongoing priority for Governments. Through Universal Access to early years learning the NT can now demonstrate that 90% of the preschool cohort has access to services in the year prior to full-time schooling. The Indigenous enrolment for this cohort is 79.3%.

The Australian and Northern Territory governments have been working to integrate child and family services, particularly in remote communities ‘where the population is among Australia’s most culturally diverse and geographically isolated, with the greatest health, wellbeing, education and infrastructure needs of any Australians’ (NTG Integrated Family Services Initiative handbook, YEAR: 8-9).

Integrating services continues to be a priority to ensure young children and families are engaged in early learning and care programs. Key initiatives include Families as First Teachers, mobile preschools and integrated service delivery through the child and family centre initiative. The NTG will need to work closely with the Australian Government to streamline and guarantee targeted and ongoing funding if the success of these early years programs is to be sustained.

Access and Provision – Primary school

The *Learning Lessons* report has a substantial focus on language and literacy acquisition. The review reported a view among many Indigenous respondents that children then at school had weaker literacy skills than earlier generations. The review team concluded that:

The Standard Australian English oracy and literacy of the majority of Indigenous students in remote and to a lesser extent urban schools are simply not at a level that enables full participation in further education, training or employment (Collins, 1999: 118).

The deficit was quantified through data on the percentage of students achieving year level benchmarks in 1998, with remote and English as a Second Language (ESL) Indigenous students performing very poorly:

Student Group	Year 3	Year 5
All students	68%	62%
Indigenous	31%	20%
Non-Indigenous	82%	78%
Urban schools only	78%	71%
Indigenous	54%	36%
Non-Indigenous	82%	78%
Non-urban schools only	6%	4%
Indigenous ESL	2%	3%
Indigenous non-ESL	25%	11%

Percentage of Indigenous students achieving benchmarks. Adapted from Collins, 1999: 35

The causes of poor literacy were less clear. The review cited ESL (EAL/D) status, ear disease and the need for a ‘structured induction process’ for literacy as potential reasons. It also noted, however, ‘the absence of well-defined and longitudinally tested pathways for the development of oracy, literacy and numeracy competence for Indigenous students’. As is still the case, the review noted ‘Staffroom after staffroom seemed to be saturated with literacy media and curriculum support materials’ (ibid., 131).

The solutions offered by *Learning Lessons* were less convincing than the analysis of the problem. Apart from a strong commitment to ‘two-way learning’ (ibid.: 130), the review argued for ‘increasing the exposure of Indigenous students to spoken Standard Australian English’, extending the ESL Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ILSS) program across the primary years and improving student attendance in the program (ibid.). Specifically addressing literacy, the review recommended explicit pedagogy (which seemed to refer in part at least to explicitness about how language acquisition programs are delivered in the school), the development of literacy and numeracy support materials, a unit to advise on student services, enhancement of remote school libraries and rationalisation of literature production centres (ibid.: 140).



The Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee report (LLISC, 2005) noted that there was then no current process for additional schools to receive Two Way Learning resources, nor any systemic financial support for resource development centres. The report noted that a considerable proportion of schools nevertheless had some form of Indigenous language and/or culture programs. It indicated that ESL was a priority and the Accelerated Literacy program (which Collins had noted positively) was being rolled out to urban and remote schools. The ILSS program had been run in 69 schools in 2004, and work was under way to improve attendance of students enrolled in these programs, although attendance continued to be problematic (LLISC, 2005: 38-40).

The Department also pointed to the development of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) which 'ensures consistency across the subject areas as well as providing consistent assessment frameworks', Curriculum materials were largely sourced at school level, and the potential disruption caused by student mobility and teacher turnover were dealt with by requiring 'a School Literacy and Numeracy Plan that commits the whole school to consistent approaches in English oracy, literacy and numeracy'. These plans, the department claimed, 'ensured that schools implement and document explicit pedagogies for English language, literacy and numeracy'. The Department was also providing professional development for '[m]any of these approaches'. It was intended that the forthcoming Indigenous education strategic plan was to 'focus on the evaluation of teaching programs at the school level' (ibid.: 40-41).

The current review has found that, while school plans still document approaches to literacy and numeracy, the range of programs in use is vast, and the evidence basis for the use of specific programs is extremely varied. There is no general commitment to 'explicit pedagogy' or, indeed, to any common approach to literacy education. Accelerated Literacy is no longer in general use, although it survives in pockets and has recently been adopted in a revised form in the Barkly. Although the 2006-09 Strategic Plan committed to 'revitalize the bilingual approach' this does not seem to have happened. Proposals to 'evaluate different methodologies for teaching literacy to find the approaches that best deliver outcomes for students' have foundered, although some advice is offered centrally on a range of programs (DEET, 2006: 24-5). As was noted in the MILaN review:

The confusion and vagueness of school leaders as to 'what works' documented in the evaluation is not merely the result of a hypothetical lack of readiness on their part, but also needs to be attributed to the shortage of large scale assessments undertaken in the NT or Australia that they can rely on and interpret (Tremblay, 2012 : 25).

The review team has observed some outstanding practice in literacy education including examples in very remote locations. Despite this, the outcomes for Indigenous children remain poor, especially in remote and very remote locations. The 2012 NAPLAN results for the Northern

Territory as a whole show the extent of the problem. The table below shows the percentage of students in each cohort attaining AANMS.

Student Group	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Provincial				
Indigenous	74.4%	63.6%	76.1%	52.3%
Non-Indigenous	89.9%	87.8%	90.4%	86.7%
Remote				
Indigenous	54.2%	44.8%	52.7%	40.5%
Non-Indigenous	92.6%	92.0%	92.1%	90.7%
Very remote				
Indigenous ESL	22.1%	8.6%	18.1%	7.4%
Non-Indigenous	95.8%	94.1%	91.6%	94.0%

Access and Provision - Secondary school

Secondary education access for Indigenous students, raised a lot of commentary in the *Learning Lessons* report (Collins, 1999: 106). Collins referred to a policy vacuum in the provision of secondary education in remote and called on government to provide greater access to secondary schooling, including the policy and resourcing for clear pathways to employment. A key issue was the requirement to change the policy to ensure that the larger schools, known then as Community Education Centres, could be given secondary provider status and be resourced appropriately.

In the intervening years much has happened in providing secondary schooling to students in remote Northern Territory. By 2005 the *Learning Lessons* Implementation Status Report described the expansion of secondary options for remote students. Formal secondary programs were being rolled out in a number of large community schools. Interactive Distance Learning options were expanded through the Northern Territory Open Education Centre and the Alice Springs School of the Air, Vocational Education and Training options were also increased, and the department now reports a significant investment in VET programs, including the VET In Schools program, in remote communities.

The Secondary Education Review of 2002 (Ramsay, 2002) reiterated the issues and it is again a critical area of enquiry in this current Review. The graphs below reveal the still low senior completions of Indigenous students and the notably weak outcomes in remote schools. They do not reflect the effort, the commitment and the resourcing that has been applied to improve secondary access and secondary education outcomes for Indigenous students. They do, however, indicate that the effectiveness of secondary education and its outcomes need to be a focus of this Review.



Attendance

Learning Lessons stated strongly that ‘... children must attend school consistently to progress. In relation to indigenous education, poor attendance is without doubt the primary cause of poor educational outcomes’ (LL 1999: 141). The issues described by Collins included the lack of consistent attendance and the lack of expectation from a school, community and system perspective. A culture of low expectation and low motivation to engage in schooling was seen a major contributor to poor attendance and education outcomes. The nature and depth of the attendance story was difficult to quantify. System data did not convey the seriousness of the issue, nor could it be used to identify trends and patterns of school attendance.

Fourteen years after *Learning Lessons* exposed the school attendance story of rising enrolments and declining attendance, there have been both Australian Government and Northern Territory Government major reforms and high levels of resourcing directed at improving school attendance.

The effort and resourcing focused on improving attendance rates, particularly in remote and very remote schools has been staggering. Feedback to the Review describes as common practice for many schools, that dedicated staff and vehicles are deployed in the community every school day to rally children to school. Reforms such as the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) and the department’s Every Child Every Day policy initiatives offer evidence of the effort at national, Territory and school levels.

Northern Territory Government school average attendance in 2002 was 70%. By 2012 the percentage was around 68%, while attendance for Indigenous secondary students in very remote schools had dropped dramatically, heading towards 50%. In a recent internal report, the data story describes the extent of the issues, mapping attendance rates through the stages of schooling and shows that in the Northern Territory, 25 percent of government students attend school 80 per cent or less of the time. Seventy-six per cent of these students are Indigenous.

This Review will focus on attendance because, despite the effort, results are not encouraging. The impact of low school attendance on student learning is not clear, and research should be undertaken to ensure that resources are directed to assist students to lift their attendance rates to a level that will help them gain improvements in their schooling.



Staffing, recruitment and retention

Addressing the high level of reliance on local staff and the high rate of non-local staff turnover in remote schools was a substantial section of the *Learning Lessons* report (Collins, 1999: 71). The following excerpt identifies recruitment as the most critical issue.

The nub of the problem goes to recruiting. The departmental approach is to put a bum on a seat. Not everyone is suited – people need to have some sense of privilege for being here, and a sense of desire to be here for the kids. It is not a job to do for dollars alone’ (ibid.).

There is a long tradition of discussion of the traits and skills required to work effectively in a remote school. Collins cited one respondent who listed:

- carry out their work with minimal resources and limited peer contact;
- act as a mentor for Indigenous co-workers, especially assistant teachers, and be prepared to offer them some support outside the workplace;
- learn to understand the culture and history of the community, and what aspects of the prevailing realities should or should not, can and cannot be changed, and what rate of change is realistic;
- make informed judgements about what demands and what work and social behaviours from Indigenous co-workers, e.g. assistant teachers are acceptable and which are in contravention of the community’s own rules and morals;
- make judgments in terms of this understanding, but none the less keep high standards and expectations;
- deal with urgent social and health problems which are not otherwise being met, and lobby for appropriate services to be put in place by the relevant authorities—which may be anything from the local council to some federal agency; and
- stay optimistic in the face of failures (ibid: 82).

Learning Lessons identified the need for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy to ensure the best programs and people are in place to meet the demands and needs of teaching Indigenous students in a range of contexts in the Northern Territory.



Appendix Two

School and site visits

The sites listed below are those visited during the course of the review process prior to the finalisation of the Draft Report.

Alyangula Area School	N'taria School
Amoonguna School	Ngukurr College
Angurugu School	Palmerston High School
Barunga School	Sadadeen Primary School
Callistemon House	Shepherdson College
Centralian Middle School	Spinifex State College Mt Isa
Centralian Senior College	Spinifex State College Residential Campus
Gray Primary School	Tennant Creek High School
Gunbalanya West Arnhem College	Tennant Creek Primary School
Karama Primary School	Umbakamba School
Macfarlane Primary School	Wangkana-Kari Hostel
Maningrida School	Wugularr School
Milyakburra School	Yirara College
Minyerri School	Yirrkala Homelands School
Moulden Park Primary School	Yirrkala School



Appendix Three

Employment Pathways

Provided by the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team in the Department of Education.

Secondary provision to Indigenous students in regional secondary schools and remote schools is characterised by what can be described as ‘patchy’ outcomes. These outcomes emerge from the challenges of delivering quality education in an environment of low attendance²². Effects of low attendance include poor literacy and numeracy, low employability skills and Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions well below national benchmarks. Improving the number of students who obtain an NTCET completion²³ is a key performance indicator to ensure every student is a successful learner²⁴. While Indigenous NTCET completions have seen an increase, they have largely been achieved in urban and provincial areas. Remote completions remain low.

The Department of Education (DoE) has a goal of increasing the number of students who achieve paid employment at the end of their schooling. The evolution of the Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) into the NTCET is a result of the desire to legitimise vocational pathways within schools and build flexible options congruent with the economic needs of the Territory. As a result of this, students remaining at school through to Year 12 will have a choice of three pathways: full academic, full vocational and a combination of the two. The academic pathway is well understood by educators and programs are often driven by the rules to achieve an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). A vocational pathway, while less understood by schools, allows a student to undertake compulsory NTCET Stage One subjects and then fulfil the educational pattern requirements by gaining credit towards NTCET completion with vocational and educational training (VET) programs. To achieve NTCET completion via the vocational pathway, students would be required to undertake a Certificate III level VET program which is deemed the equivalent of a Stage 2 subject. This presents difficulties due to the higher levels of literacy and numeracy demanded at this certificate level, resulting often in a mixture of academic and vocational. The third pathway is a blended mixture of the academic and vocational pathways.

22 One third of NT schools experience attendance less than 70% during Term 3 2013 ($\mu=76\%$ $\sigma=22\%$). <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/students/at-school/enrolment-attendance/enrolment-attendance-statistics>

23 NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community/curriculum-ntbos/ntcet>

24 Goal 2: Every student a successful learner. *Creating Success Together Department of Education Strategic Plan 2013–2015*



Proposal in brief

The aim of the *Employment Pathways* project is to improve NTCET and employment outcomes for Indigenous students through the introduction of the *Employment Pathways* model to school operations. Both NTCET and employment outcomes are considered desirable. For many students, both aims will be realised simultaneously. Students who gain employment and leave school prior to achieving an NTCET are considered successful by the department. The schools identified to undertake a trial are Tennant Creek High School, Katherine High School and two very remote schools yet to be determined. They schools will be chosen because of the various stages they are at in implementing stronger employment pathways. In each school it is recommended that the *Employment Pathways* model be properly introduced under the support of a Steering Group. This program include:

- a vocationally focused program preparing students for employment pathways, supported by online resources from the Pre-VET package in the middle years;
- an employment-focused VET program that follows a clear and staged model;
- a VET-based leadership program associated with an engagement program such as Clontarf, Girls Academies or Cadets;
- an industry engagement plan incorporating an industry placement program; and
- online resources to support the delivery of stage one and two subjects.

The project is based on the *Employment Pathways* model developed by the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team. This model will be the core operating basis for the project.

A Steering Committee will be established consisting of senior staff of the chosen school, members from the IEEP team, the Senior Years team and distance education providers.

Proposal in detail

The DoE strategic plan commits it to working with key stakeholders to achieve the best possible educational outcomes and pathways for young people in the NT. Indigenous students' NTCET outcomes are a key priority. This achievement provides students with choices once they have completed their time at school, but does not guarantee successful post-schooling employment and progression options. For several years the *Employment Pathways* model has evolved under a united goal to empower regional and remote Indigenous students to achieve qualified sustainable working futures as Australian citizens, and as individually and culturally respected members of their local community. Resource development, service delivery models and the development of trade training facilities are all aligned to this critical goal.



NTCET outcomes and the NTG Blueprint

The NTCET is an outcome that can be flexibly achieved. It is an internationally recognised qualification, designed to recognise the knowledge and skills that have been acquired through formal education and training. It provides students with access to flexible learning arrangements where students have increased opportunities to develop the academic, interpersonal and employment-related skills needed for the future²⁵. Students must earn 200 relevant points to achieve the certificate. While there are many permutations, at its simplest an NTCET can be achieved by engaging in a VET or academic pattern which includes a compulsory Personal Learning Plan (PLP), two compulsory literacy subjects and one compulsory numeracy subject at a Stage One level, aggregated with a minimum of 60 Stage Two credits associated with agreed subjects or VET equivalents (typically within a Certificate III level VET program).

The DoE Strategic Plan 2013–2015 supports the Government’s *Framing the Future* agenda²⁶ which commits to working with industry and education providers to create structured pathways to employment for students to ensure a capable and flexible workforce can meet the demands of NT business.

An NTCET outcome can be achieved in conjunction with employment pathway. However, for some students a vocational and blended pathway can lead to gainful employment and not to an NTCET outcome. Employment in an apprenticeship or traineeship, provided it is equivalent to a Stage Two outcome, will still allow an NTCET to be achieved. Direct employment into a job that is not part of further training is aligned to outcomes for the NTG Blueprint and for RSP trial purposes is recognised as a positive outcome even though it is not able to contribute to an NTCET outcome.

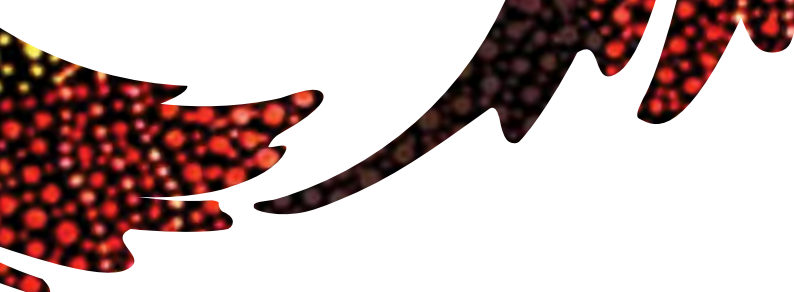
The Employment Pathways Model

Through the course of its work over the last three years, the IEEP team has developed a model for the conduct of an employment pathway for students in school. Given the disadvantage experienced in a significant number of remote communities many students have restricted exposure to concepts of work. In regional towns the situation is similar for a significant but smaller percentage of Indigenous students. Addressing this issue is the core element of changing the pathway from further dysfunction and disadvantage.

The Employment Pathways model is easily understood by students allowing them to envisage their preferred future. With post-schooling employment focus at its core, the Employment Pathways model provides the student with an underlying reason to attend school and offers a clear pathway through school to a job, thus answering the question ‘Why come?’, supporting sustained engagement.

25 Curriculum, Assessment Reporting and Certification Policy: Years 10–12 <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/teachers-educators/ntbos/policies-and-guidelines>

26 NTG Framing the Future Blueprint p.7 http://www.dcm.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/59780/FramingTheFutureDraftStrategy.pdf



The Employment Pathways model uses VET as its main tool and introduces VET in various stages. It subsequently engages the student increasingly in the work place to validate the career choice and to maintain a consistent increase in employability skills acquisition. This prepares the student effectively for their life after school. The model unfolds in stages:

Years 7 and 8 Students engage in a pre-VET program, introducing them to the world of work. This can be supported by online resources and should include engagement with role models who are in jobs. It requires students to undertake excursions to work places and interact with employers.

Year 9 Introduce the first formal VET Certificate programs in a broad-based course relevant to local employment circumstance (eg: Resources and Infrastructure in a mining area). Introduce job work placement and simulated placement.


To ensure that students gain the additional skills required by employers that are not obtainable under Certificate programs, JobSkills funding is used to boost student achievement and skills acquisition. This grants-based funding provides support for short-term one-off courses such as white card and first aid skills.

Years 10–12 Introduce the Certificate II level programs with the Stage One compulsory subjects, also Stage One and Stage Two VET focused subjects to complete the student’s pattern.

Alternatively, once the compulsory subjects have been achieved, the student can be focused on a strong Certificate II outcome then in Year 12 move to a School Based Apprenticeship at a Certificate III level. The attainment of a Certificate III will, in most cases, count towards Stage Two equivalents and therefore can be used to fulfil the remaining elements of a student’s pattern.

In both cases on-the-job placement needs to increase during this phase to allow the student to obtain skills to enable authentic engagement. IEEP have also introduced what has been referred to as ‘finishing schools’ where students can bring all their learned skills together in an authentic environment. This is currently achieved through training focussed stations owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation or managed through an Aboriginal Land Trust. A ‘practice’ mine would be another useful example of a ‘finishing school’. JobSkills will again provide additional complex one-off training programs to enhance employability skills.

The Employment Pathways model is dependent on effective delivery of VET in a school program. Effective delivery is not via block delivery mode which provides a single week of training during a term. VET programs need to be a regular feature of the school’s timetable and guided by an embedded trainer reporting to a recognised Registered Training Organisation.



Literacy and numeracy should be a contextualised learning experience²⁷. The Employment Pathways model is also dependent on school leadership to ensure teachers contextualise curriculum so there is an authentic connection to the VET program. As a collaborative team teaching-training model, students undertake learning as a means of strengthening both vocational and academic outcomes.

VET programs are more successful when a mentor is engaged. However, this is frequently outside the scope of school budgets. An important stakeholder, the mentor needs to be a traditional owner with a vested interest in the success of the program that acts as an important link between community and school by providing support and understanding to the student before they disengage.

Engagement programs within the *Employment Pathways* model

Various engagement programs are run in schools with the intent of ensuring that students who attend school remain at school. Programs such as Clontarf and Sporting Chance for Girls are now widely known and well-established models facilitated by third party organisations. In every school some form of engagement program is undertaken. The Clontarf program exists in three of the four identified trial schools. Girls' engagement programs are run in each school in various forms. Cadets do not currently operate in any of the identified trial schools, however discussions are being undertaken between DoE and the Department of Defence.

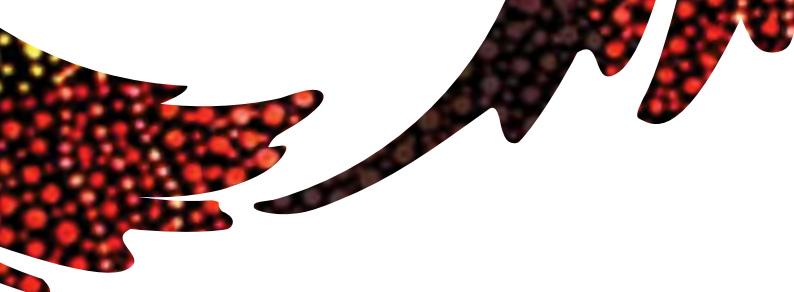
Engagement programs play an important role in supporting the Employment Pathways model. Gaining the literacy and numeracy necessary to achieve a VET outcome requires school attendance and engagement while at school. Often the employability skills necessary to get employment can be learned as part of the engagement program.

Online Resources within the *Employment Pathway* model

The team has developed a suite of online courseware to support that will underpin the model in any context. It is well suited to remote delivery and in supporting indigenous students who are in a regional secondary school. Pathways products are ideal for new teachers in NT remote schools or teachers inexperienced in delivering a particular subject. For experienced teachers, Pathways products are an exceptional resource for adaption as a whole, or in components for integration into existing programs.

Pathways online courseware products provide extensive support in prepared documentation and course materials. The Pathways products focused on are Pre-VET™, Ready to Run, Nodes™ and Fliplets.

²⁷ McGlusky, N., Thaker, L. (2006). Literacy support for Indigenous people: current systems and practices in Queensland. Adelaide: NCVET. p.24



Nodes™ and Fliplets products both focus on hospitality and tourism and extract the literacy and the numeracy required for a learner to be able to achieve a successful outcome in a VET program. They scaffold the student’s broader learning with relevant resources that are applicable to everyday items known to the student’s world. They help makes sense of the training program to the student.

Showcasing a broad range of possible jobs, Pre-VET™ provides a set of resources to teachers and information to students that unpacks the elements of a series of jobs. It uses everyday Indigenous people as role models to introduce positive ideas about work and connect the work activities to the classroom through layered support resources. Pre-VET™ opens up possibilities for each student and gets them thinking about employment, usually in circumstances where they rarely engage with long term employed Indigenous people. Ready to Run subjects support VET Pathways by providing teaching and learning materials for Senior Years subjects through four NTCET recognised subjects: Personal Learning Plan, Workplace Practices, Design and Technology Stage 1 (Talking Poster) and Stage 2 (Vamp TV Music Video). Each course is designed to improve digital literacy, problem solving skills and focus wherever possible on post schooling employment pathways. New teachers in the NT or teachers inexperienced in delivering a particular subject would significantly benefit from the standards modelled in this courseware. Ready to Run provides extensive support in prepared documentation and course materials. For experienced teachers this is a comprehensive resource available on DoE’s learning management system (Moodle) in a cloned form for adaption or in components for integration into existing programs.





Bringing it all together

The above programs have been developed in broad consultation and are aligned to employment pathways but largely in isolation of each other. Now they are being brought together to operate more effectively in schools. The individual parts of the outlined Employment Pathways model can operate well together. However an effective linking together can be achieved by the introduction of an employability skill focused VET led program operating alongside existing engagement and VET programs.

The introduction of such a program would strengthen and build on work already being achieved in key engagement programs such as Clontarf and offer an outcome that can contribute to the students' overall educational achievement. To date, the work of Clontarf-type engagement programs have been useful as character builders and in improving attendance, but have not directly contributed to the educational attainment of a student. Equally VET programs, while ensuring employability skills are addressed, do not exclusively focus on them. As part of the Employment Pathways Model, it is proposed that VET-aligned Leadership Certificates be developed to act as the link most suitable for this task. Currently, the identified Certificate is based on a Western Australian program and will require a significant amount of development to reflect NT contexts. Embedded trainers will be required to deliver the program. The DoE has a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in place, but the Leadership Certificate will need to be added to its current scope of registration to allow the delivery of certificate to occur.

The outcome will be a project in four schools that takes the following shape:

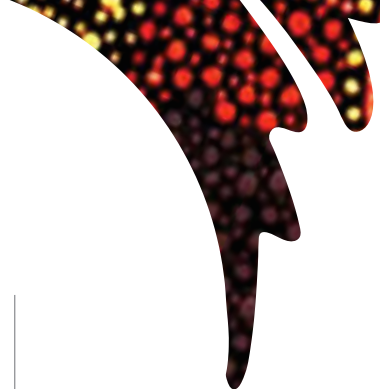
- a Steering Committee made up of IEEP, Senior Years, NTOEC and KSA will monitor the introduction and progress of the project;
- the model of operations adopted will be based on the Employment Pathways model outlined above;
- linked to this model will be a leadership program that is VET orientated to support students involved in defined engagement programs;
- a VET Consultant and Senior Years representative will work together to advise schools on student patterns; and
- the eLearning and Development team and the DoE RTO will develop a leadership program and senior years VET focused subjects for online delivery.

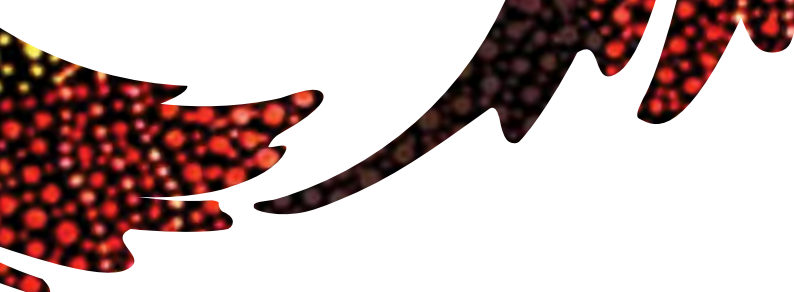
To overcome the problems associated with school staff turnover, each school site and the project team will be asked to sign a three-year agreement.

Appendix Four Australian Government Funding Agreements

Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
National Partnership Payments						
1 Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory 2013-2022	412.65	46.49	50.60	Improve school readiness, attendance and attainment of students in 91 remote and very remote schools. \$52.121M of this is for housing construction and is provided to the Department of Housing.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
2 Low Socio-Economic School Communities 2009-2016	70.13	10.43	7.95	To improve student engagement, educational attainment and wellbeing in participating schools, make inroads into entrenched disadvantage (including in Indigenous communities), contribute to broader social and economic objectives and improve understanding about effective intervention.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
3 Improving Teacher Quality 2009-2013	5.92	2.14 <i>(Reward)</i>	0	To improve teacher and school leader quality to sustain a quality teaching workforce with additional funding for the Principal Professional Development project.	No	DE (DEEWR)

Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
4 Improving Literacy and Numeracy 2013-2013	6.63	2.21	0	Support the implementation of evidence based literacy and numeracy practices in selected participating schools with a particular focus on students performing at or below national minimal standard in the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).	No	DE (DEEWR)
5 Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 2013-2015	8.30	5.10	3.0	Universal Access to, and improved participation by children in, quality early childhood education in the year before full-time school, with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	No	DE (DEEWR)
6 National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care 2010-2014	2.61	0.84	0	Establish a jointly governed unified National Quality Framework for early childhood care and Outside School Hours Care services.	No	DE (DEEWR)
7 Rewards for Great Teachers 2013-2019	11.10	0.39	1.23	To recognise quality teachers through a teacher reward payment scheme and contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of all teachers by ensuring they have access to constructive performance and development processes and will contribute to improved learning outcomes for students.	No	DE (DEEWR)



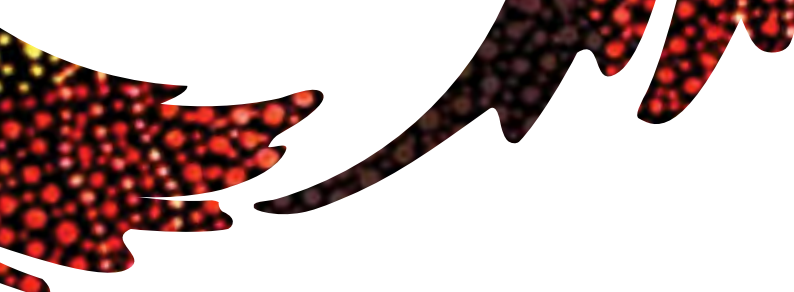


Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
8 More Support for Students with Disabilities 2011-2014	2.94	0.78	0.58	Australian schools and teachers are better able to support students with disabilities, contributing to improved student learning experiences, educational outcomes and transitions to further education or work.	No	DE (DEEWR)
9 Youth Attainment and Transitions 2009-2014	1.43	0.18	0	To increase the educational engagement, attainment and successful transitions of young people. To achieve a national Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90 per cent by 2015, provide an education or training entitlement to young people aged 15-24; better engage young people in education and training; assist young people age 15-24 to make a successful transition from schooling into further education, training or employment.	No	DE (DEEWR)
10 Closing the GAP: NPA on Indigenous Early Childhood Development 2009-2014	42.35	5.62	0	Improve developmental outcomes for Indigenous children and achieve key targets as agreed by Council of Australian Governments (COAG). \$26.239m of this funding is for construction and is provided to the Department of Infrastructure.	Yes	DSS (FaHCSIA)
Sub Total (National Partnership Payments)		74.18	63.36			

Commonwealth Own Purpose Payments

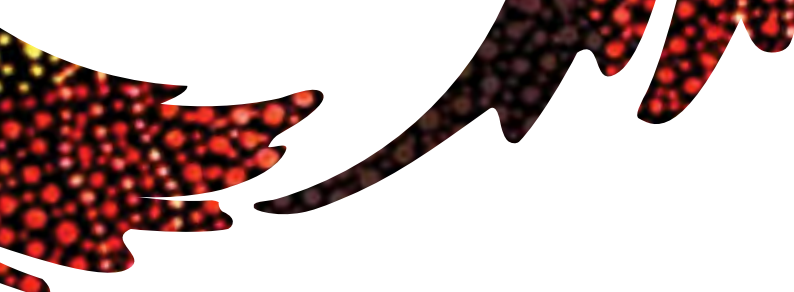
11	Employment Pathways for Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants in the Northern Territory - Education Support 2010-11 to 2013-14	24.08	5.582*	0	Create career paths for Indigenous Australians in Northern Territory (NT) schools and provide ongoing support for employees in these funded positions. Funds available to assist with accredited training costs. *This is the total amount available under the agreement for 188 positions. Funding received may be less due to decreased participant numbers.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
12	Family Support Program - Families as First Teachers 2010-2014	15.39	3.41	0	The program consists of two schedules. Schedule one is focused on increasing the number of Indigenous families and children that have access to parent-child services and actively promoting positive outcomes for young children. Schedule two provides regular playgroup sessions by qualified staff in remote locations.	Yes	DSS (FaHCSIA)
13	Ongoing National Implementation Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)- 2012 collection cycle under The Child Care Services Support Program 2012-2014	0.51	0.22	0	The NT through the AEDI community engagement program will promote the AEDI and facilitate ongoing community engagement, dissemination of data and community action planning.	No	DE (DEEWR)





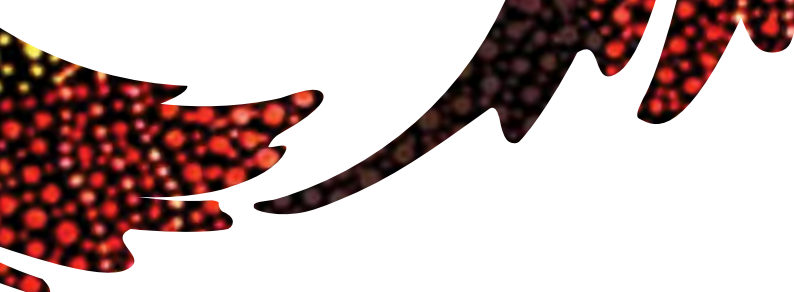
Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
14 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 1 - Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) (preschool only) 2009-2014	0.92	0.46	0	SRA is available for government and non-government providers that meet eligibility criteria and aims to accelerate the educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians beyond those which could reasonably be expected from mainstream and own source funding alone.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
15 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 6 - Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) 2009-2013	2.23	0.23	0	This project allows the IECBs to consult with ATSI communities and provide advice to the Australian and State/Territory Governments to progress the achievement of goals of the National ATSI Education Policy (AEP) and the ATSI Education Action Plan 2010-2014.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
16 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 15 - Teach Remote Stage 2 - Phase 1 2011-2013	1.60	0.80	0	The National Alliance for Remote Indigenous Schools (NARIS) is a high level steering committee driving collaboration between the NT, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales (the NARIS Jurisdictions). The aim is over time to build a high status, high quality, committed and competent workforce for remote schools, with a focus on recruiting, selecting and supporting teachers in remote communities.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
17 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 13 - Teach Remote	2.12	0.08	0	As above.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
18 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 15.1 - Teach Remote Stage 2 - Phase 2 2013	0.94	0.83	0	The objective of Teach Remote Stage 2 (the Program) is to support NARIS in building a high status, high quality, committed and competent workforce in remote Indigenous communities across Australia. The Program will contribute to effective recruiting, selecting, training and supporting teachers who work in remote and very remote communities.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
19 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 14.5 - NTIEC PaCE Governance and Administration Training 2013	0.32	0.32	0	Establish the Tiwi Islands Education Board that will provide community driven governance and direction to all schools on the Tiwi Islands.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
20 Providing Access for Immigration Detainee Children in the Northern Territory to Education in Northern Territory Government Schools 2013 (4-15 years)	1.89	0.92	0	Providing all detainee children between the ages of 4 and 15 years who have been in or may be expected to be in immigration detention for longer than 3 weeks will be considered by DIAC and DET for placement in a NTG school.	No	DIBP (DIAC)



Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
21 Providing Immigration detainee children (16-17 years) access to education in government schools and providing an educational holiday program for immigration detainee children (5-15 years)	2.37	0.77	0	Placement of detainee children aged 16 to 17 years in NTG Schools giving them the opportunity to obtain an education whilst in detention.	No	DIBP (DIAC)
22 Providing Immigration Detainee Children Aged 16 to 17 years with access to Education in Northern Territory Government Schools and Providing an Educational Holiday Program for Immigration Detainee Children Aged 5 to 15 years (2012)	1.64	0.72	0	Placement of detainee children aged 16 to 17 years in NTG Schools giving them the opportunity to obtain an education whilst in detention.	No	DIBP (DIAC)
23 Indigenous Ranger Cadetship Pilot in Maningrida Community Education Centre 2013-2015	0.50	0.33	0	Generate stronger ATSI community engagement, improve school capacity to retain ATSI students to Year 12 and assist students transition from school to further education, training and work. Contribute to lifting Year 12 attainment levels for ATSI students and to closing the gap in learning outcomes between ATSI and other students.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
24 Indigenous Ranger Cadetship Pilot in Yirrkala Community Education Centre and Shepherdson College 2012-2015	1.00	0.50	0	As above.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
25 Katherine High School (KHS) Stronger Smarter Sisters Academy 2010-2014	0.59	0.08	0	Deliver girls only school-based sports academy, focusing on improving the participation and engagement of Indigenous female students that are at risk of not completing Year 12 or equivalent. The academy will operate in KHS during the 2010, 2011 and 2012 calendar years.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
Sub Total (Commonwealth Own Purpose Payments)		15.25	0			



Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
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Special Purpose Payments

26	National Education Agreement – Government Schools	Ongoing	57.47	56.50	Contributes to shared outcomes including ensuring that all children are engaged and benefiting from schooling with a goal to lift the year 12 attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2015; ensuring children meet basic literacy and numeracy standards; and continuing to improve overall literacy and numeracy achievement. This funding is untied and is used to supplement core budget.	No	Cwlth Treasury
27	National Education Agreement – non-government schools	Ongoing	99.37	106.06	Agreements are between DEEWR and non-govt schools - DoE acts as a "post-box" in that it receives money from the Australian Government and facilitates payments to non-government schools.	No	Cwlth Treasury
Sub Total (Special Purpose Payments)			156.84	162.56			

Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
Other						
28 Focus School Next Steps Initiative 2012-2014	3.22	0.28	0	Through the ATSI Education Action Plan Focus Schools Next Steps Initiative, the Australian Government in consultation with education providers have targeted 101 of the Focus schools across Australia that require extra assistance to achieve the Closing the Gap education targets. The NT has been allocated Next Steps funding for 10 government and one non-government schools.	Yes	QUT via DE (DEEWR)
29 Agreement with Education Services Australia - MOU 2013	0.8	0.80	0	Integrate Scootle into DoE IT environment to facilitate online support of the Australian Curriculum.	No	ESA
30 Mobile Families as First Teachers (MFaFT) – Central Australia	0.68	0.68	0	To promote positive outcomes for vulnerable Indigenous families with young children (aged 0-5 years old) living in small remote communities in Central Australia by providing intensive, targeted and coordinated support to improve child development, child safety and family functioning.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
Sub Total (Other)	1.76	1.76	0.0			
GRAND TOTAL ALL AGREEMENTS	248.03	248.03	226.01			

Appendix Five

Indigenous Education Review Survey

The tables below show results of the first seven questions in the online survey conducted as part of the data gather phase of the review. Questions 8–11 involved open-ended answers. These were used in the development of this report.

1. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes - Aboriginal	73	15%
2	Yes - Torres Strait Islander	3	1%
3	Yes - Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	6	1%
4	No	370	78%
5	No Response	23	5%
Total		475	100%

2. Tick all that apply to you

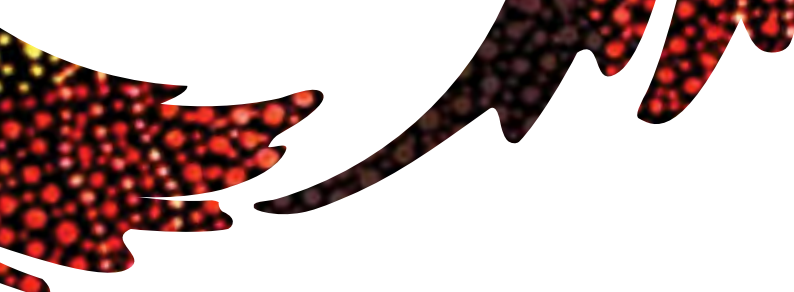
#	Answer	Response	%
1	I am a parent or guardian of a child/children aged up to 5 years	45	10%
2	I am a parent or guardian of one or more school aged children	132	29%
3	I am a parent or guardian of a child or children older than 17	101	22%
4	I work or have worked with children at a school	367	80%
5	I work or have worked with children in a childcare setting	53	12%
6	I work or have worked with children in another setting	113	25%
7	None of the above	17	4%
8	No response	11	2%
Total		456	100%

3. Which of these best describe you?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I work in a Northern Territory government school	257	56%
2	I work in the corporate area of the NT Department of Education	81	18%
3	I work in another government department	27	6%
4	I work in a Northern Territory non-government school	13	3%
5	I am a member of the general public/other	64	14%
6	No response	14	3%
Total		456	100%

4. Are you....?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	A Principal	33	12%
2	A registered teacher in the school leadership team	69	26%
3	A registered teacher not in the school leadership team	95	36%
4	An assistant teacher (A/T)	7	3%
5	Other teaching staff	23	9%
6	Non teaching staff	35	13%
7	No response	5	2%
Total		267	100%



5. How long have you been employed in the education system?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Less than 2 years	28	8%
2	2 or more years, but less than 5 years	48	14%
3	5 or more years, but less than 10 years	62	18%
4	10 or more years, but less than 15 years	64	18%
5	15 or more years, but less than 20 years	37	11%
6	20 or more years	105	30%
7	No response	4	1%
Total		348	100%

6. Where do you live?

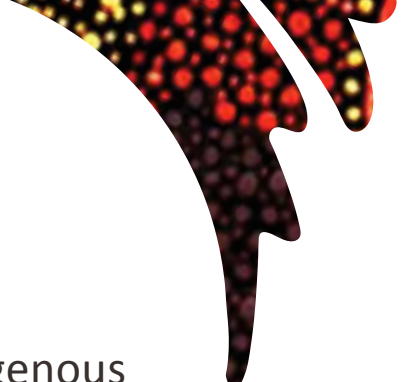
#	Answer	Response	%
1	Darwin, Palmerston or Darwin rural area	181	40%
2	Townships near Darwin including Batchelor, Wagait, Adelaide River	6	1%
3	Alice Springs	56	12%
4	Katherine	44	10%
5	Tennant Creek	12	3%
6	Nhulunbuy	17	4%
7	In the NT but outside of these town centres	111	25%
8	In Australia, but outside of the NT	16	4%
9	Outside Australia	0	0%
10	No response	10	2%
Total		453	100%

7. For each statement, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Can't say or Not	Total Responses	Mean
1	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides programs that prepare children for learning in the early years of school	19	66	60	189	41	24	399	3.45
2	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory encourages parents to be involved in their children's schooling	25	109	69	152	32	12	399	3.15
3	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is good at teaching English literacy to Indigenous children with English as an additional language or dialect	88	159	57	60	21	14	399	2.39
4	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides the opportunity for Indigenous children to achieve a quality secondary education	108	141	43	64	30	13	399	2.40
5	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition into primary school	22	83	85	147	27	35	399	3.20
6	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from primary to middle years of schooling (i.e. from Year 6 to Year 7)	37	109	85	114	26	28	399	2.95
7	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from the middle years to senior years of schooling (i.e. from Year 9 to Year 10)	66	112	84	78	23	36	399	2.67
8	I think education is highly valued by parents in my school community	45	93	63	121	60	17	399	3.15
9	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is meeting the needs of Indigenous children	164	143	40	37	9	6	399	1.94
10	I think that the government education system in the Northern Territory is improving learning outcomes for Indigenous children	105	120	71	77	16	10	399	2.43



Statistic	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides programs that prepare children for learning in the early years of school	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory encourages parents to be involved in their children's schooling	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is good at teaching English literacy to Indigenous children with English as an additional language or dialect	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides the opportunity for Indigenous children to achieve a quality secondary education	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition into primary school	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from primary to middle years of schooling (i.e. from Year 6 to Year 7)	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from the middle years to senior years of schooling (i.e. from Year 9 to Year 10)	I think education is highly valued by parents in my school community	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is meeting the needs of Indigenous children	I think that the government education system in the Northern Territory is improving learning outcomes for Indigenous children
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.45	3.15	2.39	2.40	3.20	2.95	2.67	3.15	1.94	2.43
Variance	1.12	1.25	1.34	1.60	1.13	1.28	1.40	1.64	1.10	1.43
Standard Deviation	1.06	1.12	1.16	1.27	1.06	1.13	1.18	1.28	1.05	1.20
Total Responses	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399



8. In your opinion, what are the strengths of Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	254

9. In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	278

10. In your opinion, what helps to improve Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools? What could enable improvement?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	275

11. In your opinion, what doesn't help to improve Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools? What are the barriers to success?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	267

12. Is there any other feedback you'd like to provide into the review into Indigenous Education?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	191





Appendix Six

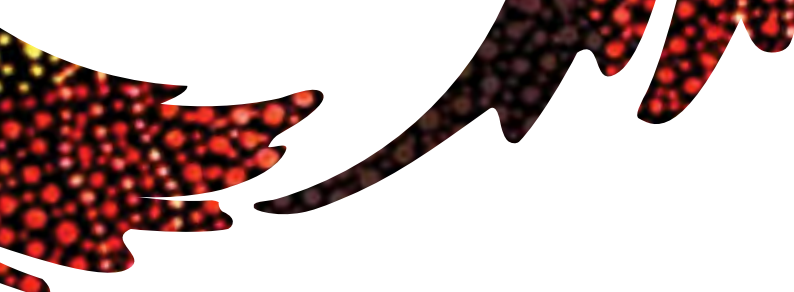
School categories

Schools on the list below are categorised as Priority 1, 2 or 3 schools. The list is designed to be used in interpreting discussion and recommendations in the report referring to the different treatment of these categories of school. Distance education schools and special schools remain uncategorised.

‘Geolocation’ categories listed are as follows:

- P: Provincial (Darwin and Palmerston)
- R: Remote (Alice Springs and Katherine)
- VR: Very Remote (all other schools)

- ‘Indigenous’ refers to the percentage of Indigenous students enrolled in the school.
- ‘Remoteness’ refers to whether the school is in or near a town centre.
- ‘ICSEA’ refers to the 2013 Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) scores provided by ACARA and published on MySchool in 2014.
- ‘Average enrol’ refers to the average number of students enrolled over the 2013 school year.
- ‘Att rate’ refers to the average attendance rate for the school over the 2013 collections.
- ‘NAPLAN’ refers to the average proportion of students at or above national minimum standard across all National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) domains and year levels over the three years to 2013.
- ‘AEDI’ refers to Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) results (a yes/no flag where a ‘yes’ indicates over 25% of early years students tested were developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDI measures in 2012; ‘no’ indicates fewer than 25% vulnerable on two domains; ‘N/a’ indicates fewer than five (but some) children tested and the result has not been included; and ‘-’ indicates that no AEDI tests were completed for the school in 2012).
- ‘Lang’ refers to the percentage of students recorded as coming from homes in which an Indigenous language is spoken in the student and parent data recorded at enrolment.
- ‘Priority Level’ refers to whether the school is listed as Priority 1, 2 or 3.

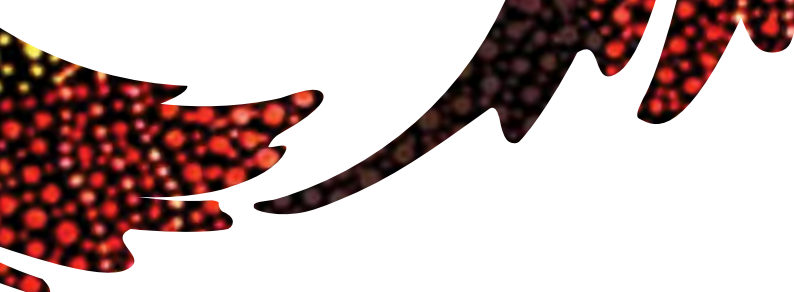


Colour coding is intended to assist ease of use. Red cells are intended to identify elements that provide a basis for additional resourcing or support. They refer to schools that:

- are not in a town centre;
- have relatively lower ICSEA scores;
- have relatively lower average enrolments;
- have relatively lower attendance rates;
- have relatively lower NAPLAN scores;
- have at least 25% of students developmentally vulnerable on at least two AEDI domains; and
- have relatively higher percentages of students recorded as coming from homes in which an Indigenous language is spoken.

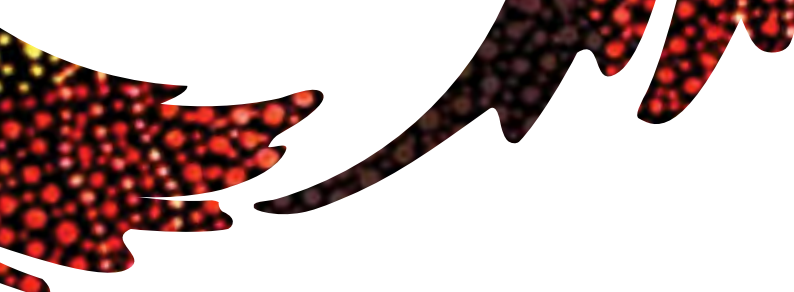
Green cells refer to schools that do not share these characteristics, or that share them to a lower degree.

School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Epenarra School	VR	100%	No	315	63	54%	16%	N/a	100%	1
Baniyala Garrangali School	VR	100%	No	320	44	65%	3%	N/a	100%	1
Angurugu School	VR	100%	No	352	253	31%	4%	Yes	94%	1
Areyonga School	VR	98%	No	388	44	73%	19%	N/a	96%	1
Milingimbi School	VR	99%	No	400	317	39%	7%	Yes	90%	1
Nyirripi School	VR	100%	No	415	45	46%	16%	Yes	86%	1
Haasts Bluff School	VR	100%	No	417	36	74%	8%	N/a	94%	1
Mbungghara School	VR	100%	No	455	8	70%	29%	-	100%	1
Amoonguna School	R	97%	No	472	29	69%	41%	N/a	83%	1
Milykurra School	VR	97%	No	484	36	60%	37%	N/a	95%	1
Elliott School	VR	98%	No	490	78	70%	14%	Yes	100%	1
Mount Allan School	VR	100%	No	513	76	55%	21%	N/a	78%	1
Maningrida School	VR	97%	No	514	637	46%	15%	Yes	96%	1
Minyerri School	VR	99%	No	517	197	75%	25%	Yes	98%	1
Barunga School	R	97%	No	522	67	66%	17%	Yes	92%	1
Alcoota School	VR	99%	No	524	46	60%	17%	N/a	97%	1
Titjikala School	VR	100%	No	526	24	56%	41%	N/a	100%	1
Yarralin School	VR	96%	No	545	55	62%	22%	N/a	100%	1
Belyuen School	R	100%	No	550	34	79%	45%	N/a	55%	1
Ariparra School	VR	99%	No	554	184	62%	22%	N/a	99%	1
Nganmariyanga School	VR	99%	No	555	116	67%	26%	Yes	95%	1
Yirrkala Homeland School	VR	100%	No	562	140	55%	6%	N/a	99%	1
Alpururulam School	VR	99%	No	564	131	72%	33%	Yes	100%	1
Pigeon Hole School	VR	100%	No	570	26	75%	17%	N/a	94%	1
Laramba School	VR	100%	No	579	65	63%	46%	Yes	97%	1



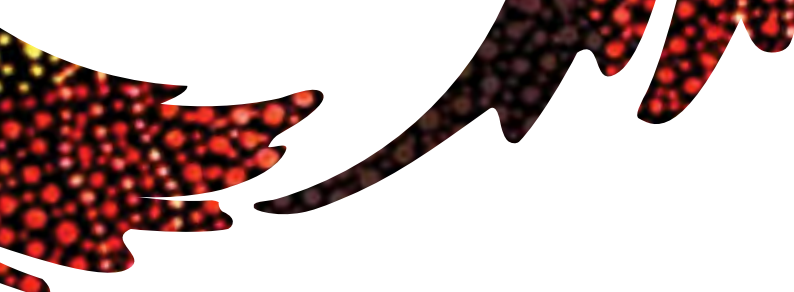
School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Rockhampton Downs School	VR	100%	No	582	12	78%	43%	N/a	0%	1
Finke School	VR	100%	No	586	38	49%	15%	N/a	100%	1
Nganambala School	VR	95%	No	588	20	92%	18%	N/a	100%	1
Kalkaringi School	VR	99%	No	588	157	64%	21%	Yes	95%	1
Robinson River School	VR	98%	No	590	74	72%	25%	N/a	30%	1
Yirrkala School	VR	97%	No	590	194	43%	7%	NO	88%	1
Walungurru School	VR	98%	No	591	65	68%	31%	N/a	73%	1
Jilkminggan School	VR	98%	No	593	114	56%	16%	Yes	96%	1
Peppimenarti School	VR	98%	No	594	40	89%	25%	N/a	100%	1
Raminging School	VR	100%	No	596	254	56%	20%	Yes	99%	1
Newcastle Waters School	VR	90%	No	597	9	69%	71%	N/a	67%	1
Ntaria School	VR	99%	No	599	170	59%	23%	Yes	69%	1
Bulman School	VR	98%	No	600	66	56%	19%	N/a	100%	1
Bonya School	VR	88%	No	604	15	71%	29%	-	57%	1
Mamaruni School	VR	94%	No	605	83	59%	22%	Yes	95%	1
Wugularr School	VR	98%	No	607	116	49%	18%	Yes	96%	1
Bulla Camp School	VR	96%	No	609	27	86%	37%	N/a	100%	1
Kiana School	VR	83%	No	613	9	87%	34%	-	100%	1
Murray Downs School	VR	98%	No	614	39	74%	30%	N/a	91%	1
Warruwi School	VR	99%	No	616	120	63%	17%	Yes	99%	1
Gunbalanya School	VR	98%	No	620	279	50%	13%	NO	96%	1
Urapunga School	VR	100%	No	626	31	79%	61%	N/a	100%	1
Imanpa School	VR	96%	No	626	25	64%	22%	N/a	100%	1
Pine Creek School	R	83%	No	630	53	70%	34%	Yes	27%	1
Ngukurr School	VR	100%	No	631	319	59%	19%	NO	98%	1
Papunya School	VR	99%	No	633	108	50%	21%	Yes	90%	1

School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Numbulwar School	VR	100%	No	634	162	49%	14%	Yes	100%	1
Harts Range School	VR	98%	No	635	93	68%	18%	N/a	94%	1
Yuendumu School	VR	95%	No	641	204	47%	9%	Yes	97%	1
Alyarrmandumanja Umbakumba School	VR	100%	No	644	109	48%	9%		91%	1
Watarrka School	VR	92%	No	646	12	73%	49%	-	100%	1
Manyallaluk School	VR	100%	No	647	22	77%	34%	N/a	92%	1
Ti Tree School	VR	98%	No	648	98	57%	35%	Yes	92%	1
Amanbidji School	VR	92%	No	648	15	89%	54%	-	100%	1
Gapuwiyak School	VR	99%	No	655	268	54%	15%	No	96%	1
Mutitjulu School	VR	98%	No	656	33	55%	39%	N/a	100%	1
Mulga Bore School	VR	100%	No	657	29	53%	40%	-	100%	1
Pularumpi School	VR	98%	No	659	78	80%	49%	No	95%	1
Borroloola School	VR	93%	No	662	260	56%	29%	Yes	98%	1
Docker River School	VR	97%	No	666	44	46%	50%	N/a	100%	1
Willowra School	VR	100%	No	672	59	51%	20%	Yes	100%	1
Stirling School	VR	97%	No	674	15	49%	18%	-	93%	1
Canteen Creek School	VR	99%	No	676	90	68%	27%	Yes	90%	1
Woolaning School	R	100%	No	677	7	60%	74%	-	0%	1
Shepherdson College	VR	98%	No	682	622	45%	17%	Yes	100%	1
Watiyawanu School	VR	100%	No	683	29	71%	40%	N/a	100%	1
Lajamanu School	VR	98%	No	691	212	48%	10%	Yes	79%	1
Neutral Junction School	VR	88%	No	694	15	63%	50%	N/a	100%	1
Alekareng School	VR	99%	No	698	136	53%	24%	N/a	96%	1
Milikapiti School	VR	96%	No	715	79	84%	52%	Yes	100%	1
Amplatwatja School	VR	100%	No	716	106	58%	20%	N/a	96%	1



School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Woolianna School	R	80%	No	728	70	82%	49%	N/a	91%	1
Timber Creek School	VR	93%	No	735	63	84%	44%	N/a	75%	1
Gochan Jiny Jirra School	VR	90%	No	N/a	9	69%	N/a	-	100%	1
MacFarlane Primary School	R	90%	Yes	662	213	77%	44%	NO	65%	2
Tennant Creek High School	VR	81%	Yes	678	175	68%	38%	-	44%	2
Sadadeen Primary School	R	63%	Yes	737	219	78%	57%	Yes	60%	2
Tennant Creek Primary School	VR	71%	Yes	743	432	69%	49%	Yes	55%	2
Braitling Primary School	R	68%	Yes	743	260	80%	70%	No	32%	2
Centralian Middle School	R	64%	Yes	773	337	75%	71%	-	37%	2
Moulden Primary School	P	56%	Yes	780	404	84%	68%	Yes	20%	2
Gillen Primary School	R	64%	Yes	787	288	86%	68%	NO	61%	2
Batchelor Area School	R	54%	Yes	797	149	77%	63%	Yes	45%	2
Clyde Fenton Primary School	R	65%	Yes	799	245	83%	69%	Yes	64%	2
Karama Primary School	P	51%	Yes	803	251	87%	72%	Yes	44%	2
Manunda Terrace Primary School	P	51%	Yes	812	218	87%	71%	NO	30%	2
Malak Primary School	P	48%	Yes	814	288	87%	79%	Yes	24%	2
Millner Primary School	P	43%	Yes	823	233	85%	69%	Yes	36%	2
Jabiru Area School	R	54%	Yes	863	290	76%	67%	Yes	41%	2
Wallace Rockhole School	R	100%	No	873	19	70%	77%	N/a	100%	2
Adelaide River School	R	32%	Yes	934	38	84%	81%	Yes	17%	2
Mataranka School	VR	27%	No	935	51	85%	76%	N/a	80%	2
Katherine South Primary School	R	30%	Yes	939	398	87%	81%	Yes	13%	2
Alyangula Area School	VR	22%	No	940	204	86%	84%	NO	77%	2
Nhulunbuy Primary School	VR	16%	Yes	997	566	87%	91%	NO	62%	2
Nhulunbuy High School	VR	13%	Yes	998	235	85%	84%	-	59%	2
Gray Primary School	P	44%	Yes	835	329	88%	78%	NO	10%	3

School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Katherine High School	R	43%	Yes	867	586	73%	66%	-	68%	3
Sanderson Middle School	P	32%	Yes	879	399	86%	72%	-	18%	3
Larapinta Primary School	R	43%	Yes	885	291	88%	83%	No	29%	3
Ludmilla Primary School	P	35%	Yes	887	157	85%	82%	Yes	82%	3
Bradshaw Primary School	R	43%	Yes	889	408	88%	84%	Yes	92%	3
Centralian Senior College	R	45%	Yes	889	430	76%	N/a	-	63%	3
Humpty Doo Primary School	P	26%	Yes	898	407	89%	78%	No	22%	3
Berry Springs Primary School	P	22%	Yes	906	225	93%	83%	No	4%	3
Rosebery Middle School	P	29%	Yes	913	636	85%	83%	-	17%	3
Howard Springs Primary School	P	14%	Yes	915	250	89%	82%	No	9%	3
Driver Primary School	P	25%	Yes	915	486	92%	82%	No	19%	3
Alice Springs School Of The Air	R	41%	Yes	916	136	95%	85%	No	54%	N/A
Alawa Primary School	P	33%	Yes	916	198	89%	86%	No	9%	3
Woodroffe Primary School	P	22%	Yes	923	429	90%	87%	No	10%	3
Wagaman Primary School	P	26%	Yes	926	314	88%	91%	No	34%	3
Middle Point School	P	12%	Yes	934	25	86%	77%	N/a	0%	3
Wulagi Primary School	P	29%	Yes	936	234	90%	88%	Yes	23%	3
Nightcliff Middle School	P	23%	Yes	939	242	87%	80%	-	26%	3
Palmerston Senior College	P	29%	Yes	945	490	80%	80%	-	0%	3
Taminmin College	P	15%	Yes	946	1017	86%	82%	-	9%	3
Anula Primary School	P	19%	Yes	949	416	92%	86%	No	6%	3
Katherine School Of The Air	R	27%	Yes	957	236	99%	80%	No	53%	N/A
Dripstone Middle School	P	19%	Yes	971	643	89%	88%	-	10%	3
Girraween Primary School	P	9%	Yes	973	426	91%	89%	No	5%	3
Moil Primary School	P	14%	Yes	982	328	90%	87%	No	5%	3



School	Geolocation	Indigenous %	Town Centre Test	ICSEA 2013 Score	Average Enrol	Att Rate	NAPLAN	AEDI	Indig Language	Priority Level
Bakewell Primary School	P	16%	Yes	982	657	93%	92%	No	6%	3
Rosebery Primary School	P	11%	Yes	985	454	91%	89%	No	11%	3
Casuarina Street Primary School	R	12%	Yes	988	281	90%	88%	No	11%	3
Dundee Beach School	R	7%	No	995	14	92%	97%	N/a	#N/A	3
Bees Creek Primary School	P	10%	Yes	998	352	92%	94%	No	7%	3
Jingili Primary School	P	18%	Yes	1006	341	92%	91%	No	9%	3
Leanyer Primary School	P	11%	Yes	1007	538	92%	94%	No	8%	3
Yulara School	VR	16%	No	1011	53	90%	90%	No	75%	3
Nightcliff Primary School	P	10%	Yes	1011	505	90%	91%	No	11%	3
Wanguri Primary School	P	17%	Yes	1012	428	90%	91%	No	16%	3
Durack Primary School	P	9%	Yes	1019	392	93%	93%	No	5%	3
Darwin Middle School	P	10%	Yes	1039	637	89%	92%	-	23%	3
Stuart Park Primary School	P	6%	Yes	1041	554	92%	94%	No	11%	3
Ross Park Primary School	R	14%	Yes	1053	455	92%	95%	No	6%	3
Parap Primary School	P	6%	Yes	1055	511	93%	95%	No	14%	3
Nakara Primary School	P	9%	Yes	1064	504	92%	95%	Yes	7%	3
Larrakeyah Primary School	P	5%	Yes	1075	380	90%	94%	No	64%	3
Douglas Daly School	R	0%	No	1102	8	95%	100%	-	#N/A	3
Tipperary Station School	R	0%	No	1390	7	93%	97%	-	#N/A	3
Casuarina Senior College	P	19%	Yes	N/a	920	83%	N/a	-	#N/A	3
Darwin High School	P	7%	Yes	N/a	1165	89%	N/a	-	#N/A	3
Acacia Hill School	R	68%	Yes	N/a	58	85%	N/a	-	83%	Special
Henbury School	P	29%	Yes	N/a	89	88%	N/a	-	27%	Special
Kintore Street School	R	74%	Yes	N/a	23	85%	N/a	-	17%	Special
Nemarluk School	P	39%	Yes	N/a	140	88%	N/a	-	17%	Special
Tivendale School	P	93%	Yes	N/a	38	97%	N/a	-	#N/A	N/A
Northern Territory Open Education Centre	R	44%	Yes	N/a	551	100%	N/a	-	#N/A	N/A

Appendix Seven Comparison of student achievement in bilingual schools 2008 and 2013

Domain and Year level	Yuendumu			Milingimbi			Lajamanu			Maningrida			Yirrkala		
	2008	2013	% Change	2008	2013	% Change	2008	2013	% Change	2008	2013	% Change	2008	2013	% Change
Y 3 reading	-	154		120	64	-47%	96	241	151%	98	167	70%	-	160	
Y 3 writing*	-	160		221	233		184	194		167	201		143	193	
Y 3 spelling	-	218		223	208	-7%	-	233		198	229	16%	-	245	
Y 3 G&P	-	174		159	51	-68%	-	207		29	100	245%	-	245	
Y 3 numeracy	-	192		303	190	-37%	-	197		186	192	3%	282	191	-32%
Y 5 reading	-	355		243	219	-10%	-	329		288	282	-2%	172	332	93%
Y 5 writing*	-	193		213	198		-	276		290	191		220	252	
Y 5 spelling	-	297		213	295	38%	279	359	29%	306	309	1%	-	325	
Y 5 G&P	-	338		213	258	21%	52	163	213%	240	260	8%	-	276	
Y 5 numeracy	351	353	1%	337	287	-15%	261	345	32%	317	307	-3%	355	332	-6%
Y 7 reading	-	235		302	234	-23%	-	371		362	211	-42%	-	280	
Y 7 writing*	377	207		364	179		-	210		269	178		285	252	
Y 7 spelling	-	380		377	352	-7%	-	365		364	359	-1%	-	360	
Y 7 G&P	-	312		309	117	-62%	-	308		275	130	-53%	-	237	
Y 7 numeracy	-	299		357	323	-10%	366	398	9%	389	326	-16%	339	384	13%
Y 9 reading	-	-		381	289	-24%	-	-		364	387	6%	-	354	
Y 9 writing*	-	-		303	294		-	-		294	247		-	326	
Y 9 spelling	-	-		375	412	10%	-	-		402	401	0%	-	415	
Y 9 G&P	-	-		281	252	-10%	-	-		324	291	-10%	-	297	
Y 9 numeracy	-	-		357	385	8%	-	-		413	436	6%	-	434	

Scores are mean scale scores in NAPLAN assessments reported on the MySchool website.

* Writing rows are shaded to reflect the fact that the scores between the two years are not comparable because of a 2011 change in NAPLAN writing tests from Persuasive writing to Narrative writing.



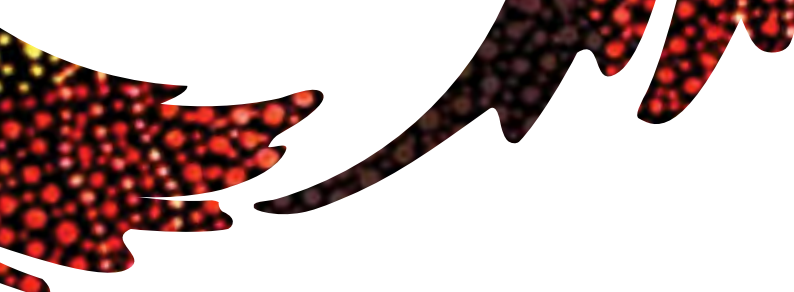
Appendix Eight

Consultations and submissions


This appendix lists the activities undertaken as part of the consultation process for the review principally immediately prior to or following the launch of the draft report on 7 February. While every effort has been made to ensure that the lists are complete, the reviewer apologises to any individuals or groups inadvertently not included:

- Individuals engaged in consultation discussions
- Northern Territory Department of Education groups to which presentations were made during the consultation process
- Parliamentary briefings
- Organisations with whom meetings were held
- Public consultation meetings to which open invitations were issued
- Organisations and individuals from whom submissions were received


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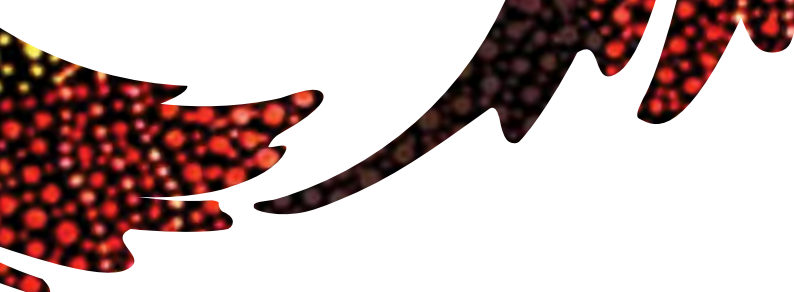
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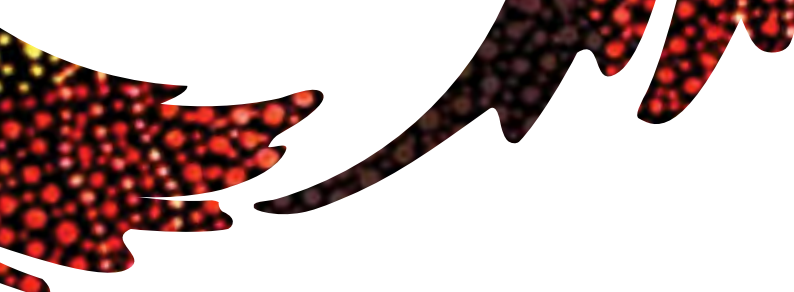
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Department presentations

School Education Division	Northern Territory Department of Education
Organisational Services Division	Northern Territory Department of Education
Education Partnerships Division	Northern Territory Department of Education
Arnhem, Palmerston and Rural Principals Group	Northern Territory Department of Education
Alice Springs Principals Group	Northern Territory Department of Education

Parliamentary briefings

Bess Price MLA	28 January 2014
Larissa Lee MLA	3 February 2014
Francis Xavier MLA	3 February 2014
Garry Higgins MLA	3 February 2014
Chief Minister Adam Giles MLA	3 February 2014
Parliamentary Wing	4 February 2014

Organisations


Organisation	Briefing Date
Tiwi Land Council / Tiwi Education Board	28 January 2014
Thamurrur Education Board /Regional Council	29 January 2014
Anindilyakwa Land Council	30 January 2014
Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council	31 January 2014
Northern Land Council	3 February 2014
Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory	4 February 2014
Youth Yindi Foundation	5 February 2014
Central Land Council	6 February 2014
Australian Education Union Northern Territory Branch	7 February 2014
Catholic Education Office Northern Territory	7 February 2014
Association of Northern Territory School Education Leaders	7 February 2014
Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations	7 February 2014
Association of Independent Schools in the Northern Territory	7 February 2014
Meeting of Heads of Northern Territory Government Agencies	26 February 2014

Public Meetings

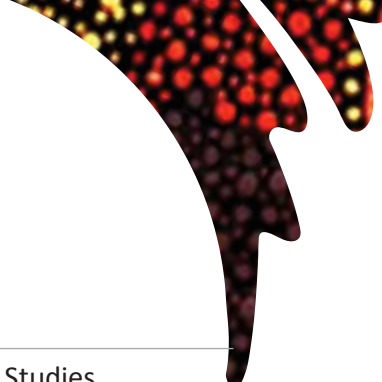
Public Consultations Phase 2	
Katherine (2 meetings)	12 February 2014
Yirrkala	14 February 2014
Nhulunbuy	14 February 2014
Alice Springs (2 meetings)	24-5 February 2014.
Darwin (2 meetings)	26 February 2014
Maningrida	28 February 2014
Tennant Creek (2 meetings)	4 March 2014
Ali Curung	5 March 2014

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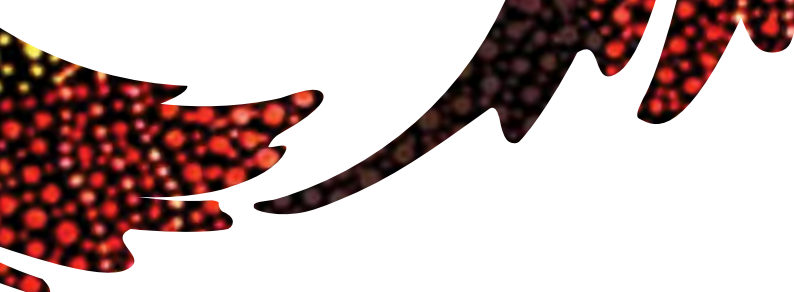
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Mr	Patrick White Community Member	
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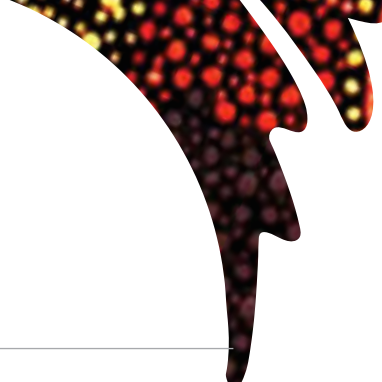
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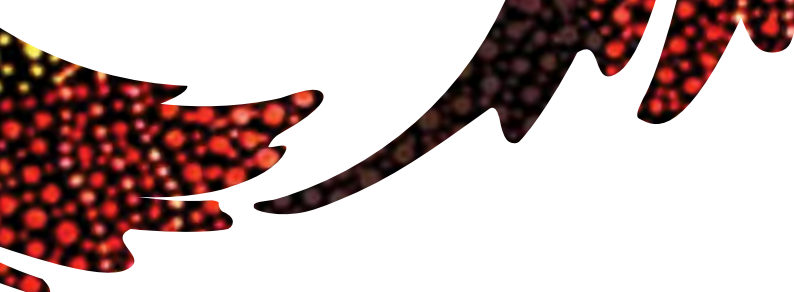
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This report outlines the findings of the review of Indigenous education conducted by Bruce Wilson, a director of The Education Business. Bruce began his career as a journalist, then taught in Victorian technical schools for 16 years. He worked in policy development in Victoria and nationally, and became Chief Executive of Curriculum Corporation in 1996. For the past decade he has undertaken a wide variety of projects on behalf of governments, representative organisations and companies.