

# The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education

*Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaarri  
Guurulaw Yirringin.gurray*  
Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future

**New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated  
and  
New South Wales Department of Education and Training**

**August 2004**



## Acknowledgements

The artwork throughout this Report was created by Victor Cabello and Katherine Pond (Jan/Feb, 2004, *Untitled*, digital print and acrylic on paper).

The artists gave this interpretation of their work:

The work is a merging of people, places and ideas, all the illustrated points interlocking and weaving. Each point meanders through time and land: watermark images of time clocks and earthy textures emphasise this. It is about unity and progress through collaboration and the way all these elements can create harmony.

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The Gumbaynggirr language is the language of the communities of the Mid North Coast, from the Clarence River to the Nambucca River.

The Review Team would like to thank Uncle Ken Walker, Gary Williams, Brother Steve Morelli, Anna Ash and the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative at Nambucca Heads for providing the Gumbaynggirr translations for the Report's title and chapter headings.

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The Hon. Dr Andrew Refshauge MP  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education and Training and  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs  
L/31, Governor Macquarie Tower  
1 Farrer Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that we present on behalf of the Department of Education and Training and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (Inc), the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education .

The Review has confirmed that while many Aboriginal students achieve outstanding results, it is also clear that average measures of performance indicate a significant gap between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal peers.

The partnership between the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc was instrumental in establishing a review process that was comprehensive and was respected by all stakeholders.

The contributions of the Review Team, Regional AECGs, the Aboriginal Programs Unit and the members of the Review Reference Group were invaluable in ensuring the involvement and participation of many Aboriginal communities across NSW, and those with particular interest, expertise and commitment to Aboriginal Education.

The Executive of the NSW AECG (Inc) has affirmed that *“the announcement of the Review of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales in challenging educational sectors to improve the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students was welcomed by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated.*

*The members of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated are fully aware of the existing gap in Literacy and Numeracy levels for Aboriginal students and see the review as a start of a continuing push to bridge that gap and move towards outcomes proportionate to that of the broader population.*

*In light of the review the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. is fully committed to ensuring that the Aboriginal community of New South Wales has a strong voice on the ground and in Parliament in relation to the implementation and delivery of recommendations, the establishment and support of the Task Force and of course the support of all Aboriginal children and students across the state.*

*We are looking forward to forging solid partnerships with all major stakeholders to develop key strategies to address pertinent recommendations of the report as well as making a major contribution to its implementation and delivery.*

*The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved for the invaluable contributions in the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated and NSW Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Education Review process.*

*We are committed to moving forward together.”*

We believe this review, built upon the united determination of the Aboriginal Community in NSW and the staff of the Department of Education and Training, provides unequivocal support for positive and constructive change and improvement.

Yours sincerely



Alan Laughlin  
Deputy Director-General  
**NSW Department of  
Education and Training**

30 November 2004



Dave Ella  
President  
**NSW Aboriginal  
Education Consultative Group**

30 November 2004

## Table of Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<b><u>Preface</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 1: The Review Context</u></b>	<b>9</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 2: Support for Aboriginal Education in New South Wales</u></b>	<b>33</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 3: Growing and Learning</u></b>	<b>49</b>
<u>Introduction</u>	<b>51</b>
<u>Section 1 Prior to School</u>	<b>53</b>
<u>Section 2 The Early Years of Primary Education</u>	<b>68</b>
<u>Section 3 The Middle and Upper Years of Primary Education</u>	<b>83</b>
<u>Section 4 Junior Secondary Schooling</u>	<b>108</b>
<u>Section 5 Education for 15 to 19-year-olds</u>	<b>138</b>
<u>Section 6 Vocational Education and Training and Employment</u>	<b>160</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 4: Recommendations</u></b>	<b>179</b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b>217</b>
<b><u>APPENDICES</u></b>	<b>229</b>
<u>A Membership of the Review Reference Group</u>	<b>231</b>
<u>B Membership of the Review Secretariat</u>	<b>234</b>
<u>C Review Reference Group Meetings</u>	<b>235</b>
<u>D Consultations with Key Groups</u>	<b>250</b>
<u>E List of Submission Contributors</u>	<b>253</b>
<u>F Schedule of Field Trips</u>	<b>260</b>
<u>G Writers and Researchers</u>	<b>274</b>



## Preface

How can it be that, in a country like Australia, there is a group of young people whose early years do not prepare them adequately with the skills and confidence to enjoy a meaningful role in society and a share in the country's wealth?

This question points to the concerns about disadvantages and disappointments that are at the heart of the Review of Aboriginal Education and which were often recalled in suggestions offered by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in field trips, submissions, research and the literature.

While it is true in terms of total numbers that the majority of disadvantaged young people are not Aboriginal, this Report will demonstrate that there is something “not right” about the unacceptable number of Aboriginal students who are “doing it tough” or “not making it” in schooling and training.

One of the dangers of focusing on valid concerns about disadvantages and disappointments is that it may give the impression that all Aboriginal students are failing. Such an impression is false as it ignores the achievements of those Aboriginal students who succeed at school and in vocational education, who are among the high achievers, gifted and talented in academic, artistic or sporting pursuits, and those who “get through” the years of schooling and training successfully enough to achieve the aspirations they, their families and communities desire for them.

This caution acknowledged, tackling the causes of disproportionate disadvantage among Aboriginal families (for example, dispossession, racism, poverty, ill health, poor housing, disrupted families, long-term unemployment) is the critical focus of the whole-of-government approach established in *Two Ways Together*: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003–2012.

Overcoming such underlying causes of disadvantage is the foundation of improvements for students in schools and TAFE campuses. The recommendations of this Report show the Department “gearing up” to better contribute to the target of eradicating the gaps between the participation and performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2012, as envisaged by *Two Ways Together*.

The material obtained during the Review of Aboriginal Education clearly shows, however, that should *Two Ways Together* fail to coordinate efforts to deliver fundamental improvements in the preconditions for learning that are developed in the years prior to starting preschool, the efforts of the partnership between the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated to overcome the symptoms of disadvantage among Aboriginal students in schools and TAFE campuses (for example, limited expectations, disrupted attendance, poor retention, non-compliant behaviour, inadequate literacy skills and under-achievement) will, as so often in the past, have only limited impact.

For this reason, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) is strongly committed to playing its part in the *Two Ways Together* enterprise and to work with other government agencies to achieve their complementary targets.





# **Review of Aboriginal Education**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Ngarrambi Nyaagaygamba**

#### **The Review Context**

The translation of *The Review Context* in the Gumbaynggirr language is:

*(Going) Around at what is seen*

## Background

In announcing a major Review of Aboriginal education in New South Wales in 2003, Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Dr Andrew Refshauge, challenged the schools and TAFE NSW sectors to dramatically improve the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students. He stated, “I want Aboriginal student outcomes to match or better outcomes of the broader population – this Review will help us to achieve that goal.”

“Despite the many education initiatives implemented by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments over the past 20 years, Aboriginal students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia.”<sup>1</sup>

Before the 2002 state election, the government announced its commitment to *Doing Business Together* with Aboriginal people and pledged a re-elected Carr Government would complete a major Review of Aboriginal education. It would include an examination of current approaches to attendance, retention rates and academic performance.

The Minister said that the Review would be undertaken by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) in partnership with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc). The Review would map current activity<sup>2</sup> and work with Aboriginal communities to guide the development of a comprehensive statewide approach to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Director-General’s Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Group was reconstituted as a Review Reference Group to provide regular advice on the Review process<sup>3</sup>. The membership of the advisory group was expanded to ensure appropriate representation from peak organisations.

The Review Reference Group was supported by a Review Secretariat. A Board of Management co-chaired by Mr Charles Davison, President, NSW AECG Inc, and Dr Alan Laughlin, Deputy Director-General, NSW DET, was established to monitor progress and provide direction to the Review.

### Aboriginal or Indigenous terminology

It is the policy of the NSW AECG Inc and the custom of government agencies in New South Wales to use the term “Aboriginal” rather than “Indigenous” when referring to programs, data collections and activities related to all Indigenous people resident in this state. Commonwealth agencies, however, use the term “Indigenous” in preference to “Aboriginal”. In this report, except where the context or a formal name specifically requires the use of the term “Indigenous”, “Aboriginal” is used to mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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<sup>1</sup> Media Release, 20 October 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Review scope, August 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Review scope, August 2003.

## Purpose of the Review

One of the most evaluated, reviewed and inquired about areas of education in Australia is Aboriginal education. Yet education systems around the nation have been unable to deliver the same levels of success for Aboriginal students as they do for other students. The gap persists despite the efforts of educators in schools and on TAFE campuses. There is reason to believe that what we are currently doing is not working. Put simply, it is time for a new approach.

*The 2001 National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* (Department of Education, Science and Training 2002b), while reporting better educational outcomes and progress against targets for schooling sectors across Australia, also identified gaps in attendance, literacy and numeracy skills. A major concern was that low achievement in the early years of schooling results in poor achievement and participation in secondary and further education.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Policy* identified Aboriginal students' social and economic disadvantage as key factors leading to their educational disadvantage. The report concluded that the relationships between the causal factors affecting educational outcomes for Aboriginal students are complex in scope, dynamic in nature and challenge existing power structures within schools, TAFE campuses and the bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup>

Similar issues are identified in international studies. According to Rothstein (2004), addressing the achievement gap requires no less than a significant transformation of social and labour policy along with extensive school reform. Rothstein contends that a few inspiring, dedicated teachers will not do the trick. Nor will higher expectations, in isolation, yield big payoffs. He asserts that school reform itself must be supplemented by comprehensive support programs starting in the early years of school.

In an executive summary of the literature search conducted by the Strategic Research Directorate of DET, the authors concluded that Aboriginal students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia, with consistently lower levels of academic achievement and higher rates of absenteeism and suspensions than among non-Aboriginal students.

These conditions persist despite initiatives that have been introduced by the Australian, State and Territory Governments in the last 20 years to improve participation in, and outcomes from, education among Aboriginal students.

At the broadest level, the poor outcomes that continue to disadvantage Aboriginal students in Australian schools have been too narrowly defined without sufficient regard for the broader social justice contexts within which these issues need to be viewed. Although there have been some absolute improvements in Aboriginal educational outcomes over the period 1986 to 1996, relative to the non-Aboriginal student

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<sup>4</sup> *National Report 1991*.

population there have been little if any real gains. The Aboriginal population remains severely disadvantaged<sup>5</sup>.

The executive summary also stated that “The literature search identified social, cultural, environmental, economic and health factors as contributing to Aboriginal students being alienated and not achieving”<sup>6</sup>.

### **Education outcomes and their relationship to other factors**

There are well-documented links between investment in education and training and improved returns for individuals and society in terms of economic, health and other social benefits.

Investments in education for Aboriginal people are particularly important as they impact directly or indirectly on key areas of disadvantage: unemployment, incomes, health and crime.

A number of studies show economic returns to be generated for every additional year of schooling completed and for further education. The consensus among international labour economists is that the private rate of return for a year’s extra schooling is typically between 5 percent and 15 percent (Temple, 2000).

Early intervention programs have also been shown to be particularly effective forms of investment for governments. Research shows returns on early intervention programs to be between \$4 and \$6 for every \$1 invested.

### **Relationship between education, employment and earnings**

Decades of data point to the clear links between educational attainment, qualifications and earnings. Research evidence in OECD countries shows that education is associated with an increased likelihood to participate in the labour market, better performance in the labour market in terms of employability, and higher earnings (OECD, 2002).

Evidence from Australia (MCEETYA, 2001) shows that there is a strong relationship between education and employment prospects for Aboriginal people:

- Completing Year 10 or 11 increases an Aboriginal person’s chance of employment by 40 percent.
- Completing Year 12 increases employment prospects by a further 13 percent.
- Having a post-secondary qualification increases employment prospects by between 13 percent and 23 percent.

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<sup>5</sup> NSW DET (2003) literature search.

<sup>6</sup> NSW DET (2003) literature search.

## **Socioeconomic status**

Interrelationships between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes are also generally acknowledged in international literature.

Poverty rates in Australia among those aged 15 years and over decline sharply as educational qualifications increase, with the risk among those with university education being less than half that for those with no post-secondary qualifications. The risk of poverty for those with no post-secondary qualifications increased steadily over the period 1990–2000 (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004).

Improvements in education reduce the risk of poverty and its associated negative impacts on health, social status and crime.

Improving economic circumstances through education also improves intergenerational outcomes through the impacts of increasing socioeconomic status on children's education. The Australian Council of Social Service (2003) reports that children from low socioeconomic status families exhibit:

- lower levels of literacy, numeracy and comprehension
- lower school retention rates
- lower participation rates in higher education
- higher levels of problematic school behaviour, eg truancy.

This effect flows on into labour market performance. In 2002 people in Australia who had not completed secondary school had an unemployment rate of 6.2 percent, compared to 2.4 percent for those with a bachelor's degree. Those unemployed who had failed to complete secondary education were far more likely to end up as long-term unemployed (Productivity Commission, 2004, p. B16).

## **Health**

The association between education levels and health is well observed in the literature and was recently summarised by Professor Tony Vinson in his report (2002) on public education in New South Wales. He notes the importance of education in increasing stocks of human capital and cites research findings on:

- the importance of completed years of schooling as a predictor of health – it is more important in this respect than occupation or income
- the link between education and lower infant mortality and the age-specific rates of morbidity, disability and mortality
- the positive association between education and children's nutrition and (in adults) exercise, moderate drinking, weight control and non-smoking
- the fact that child abuse and neglect are associated with incomplete high school education.

The evidence of positive associations between education and health is compelling, and the authors of one major review of the available literature conclude a causative relationship, that is, that more schooling does in fact cause better health, although the mechanisms have not been fully identified (Grossman & Kaestner, 1997).

There is a close relationship between health and education outcomes for Aboriginal Australian children. Improvements in education outcomes appear to result in improved health outcomes and the converse also applies.

The most significant and undisputed finding of *health transitions* research is that the education levels of parents, and in particular of mothers, appears to have a powerful effect on reducing infant and child mortality. Caldwell reports that any kind of modern schooling reduces infant mortality levels. This phenomenon occurs in all parts of the Third World and the change is linear – with a reduction of child mortality of 7 to 9 percent for each additional year of maternal education and regardless of whether there are good health care facilities available (Caldwell, 1999). This appears also to apply – in a more complex and less linear way – to Aboriginal Australian communities.

There is agreement in the literature that poor health hinders many Aboriginal children's school attendance and restricts their ability to learn. Two health issues are identified in the literature as having the most detrimental effect on the education of Aboriginal children. These are otitis media (inflammation or infection of the middle ear) and poor nutrition.

## **Crime**

There is clear evidence of a link between low levels of education and the probability of being involved in crime. Higher levels of education make a person less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours such as crime (partially by increasing income and reducing the incentive to commit crime).

Australian and international evidence shows the links between education and crime.

Feinstein (2002) reports some of the more substantial exercises in empirically testing the effect of education on crime. In the context of the United States of America, Lochner and Moretti's work (2001) allows an estimate that a 1 percent decrease in the school drop-out rate would produce a social benefit of between \$0.9 billion and \$1.9 billion (Feinstein, 2002). They contend that a 10 percentage point rise in the rate of high school graduation would cut the murder (arrest) rate by between 14 percent and 27 percent.

Research by Chapman et al (2002) and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows a very strong positive relationship between criminal activity and the extent of male youth long-term unemployment. They also produce evidence of a negative association between criminal activity and high school completions, and positive associations between criminal activity and unsuccessful senior high school participation. They conclude that:

... elimination of long term unemployment amongst males aged 15–24 by direct job creation would result in close to a 7 per cent reduction in property crime in NSW per annum. Better still, if these individuals continued in formal education to the end of senior high school (increasing school retention by an extra 7000 individuals) the reduction in break, enter and steal over the course of a year would amount to almost 15 per cent. The results highlight the potential societal benefits in terms of crime reduction that might follow from the institution of policies that are effective in the reduction of long-term

unemployment and promote young people's educational success (Chapman et al, 2002).

From studies such as these, it is clear that improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students would be of significant personal and societal benefit.

## Terms of Reference

To guide the Review, Terms of Reference were developed and refined over a series of meetings and workshops. The Terms of Reference endorsed for the Review were:

- a. to examine current approaches in the delivery of Aboriginal education addressing issues including:
  - attendance,
  - retention rates, and
  - academic performance.

To bring about improved outcomes in these areas through consultation with interest groups.

- b. to review and develop comprehensive system-wide approaches to improving Aboriginal Education and Training and achieving quality learning outcomes for Aboriginal students
- c. to assess the extent that the principles of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* are incorporated in the education of all students, staff and school communities
- d. to incorporate into this comprehensive state-wide approach the Action Plan for Aboriginal Education developed under the *Two Ways Together* process.

## Data collection processes

A range of qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies was used to gather information to inform the Review. A major component of the data collection phase was the consultation process. Consultation was regarded as an important and critical strategy in enabling the Review to hear the voices of Aboriginal people as well as those directly involved in Aboriginal education.

Fourteen field trips were organised across the state. Meetings were held at 407 sites to gather information from Aboriginal communities and organisations, educational leaders, teachers, parents and students. During this process 49 community and 7 AECG meetings were conducted. Meetings were also held with 33 community organisations, 26 School Education Area (formerly District) Office staff and the principals and selected staff of 260 schools and TAFE campuses. Overall, more than four thousand teachers, parents and students were interviewed.

Several sites were identified by Aboriginal education consultants as case studies. Visits to these sites were incorporated into the field trip itineraries wherever possible.



Consultations were also held with a range of key interest groups from the government and non-government sectors.<sup>7</sup>

A total of 200 oral and written submissions was received from individuals and organisations.<sup>8</sup>

Meetings were held with senior officers of TAFE NSW and DET having responsibility for Aboriginal education. Meetings and workshops were also organised with Aboriginal field staff employed by the Department of Education and Training and TAFE NSW.<sup>9</sup>

Surveys were designed to collect data on attendance and suspension. A systematic random sample of 200 schools drawn from each School Education Area (SEA) was used to collect data on attendance over a three-week period in March 2004. Similarly, a systematic random sample of 400 schools, 10 from each SEA, was used to collect data on suspension for the 2003 school year.

Working Groups established for Data, Early Childhood, Curriculum and Pedagogy, and Personnel provided reports to the Review Reference Group. The full report of each group will be published subsequently as a series of technical papers.

An Academic Reference Group was established under the leadership of Professor John Lester, University of Newcastle. Noted educationalists with experience in policy development and research in Aboriginal education were invited to prepare a number of position papers to promote discussion on innovative approaches to Aboriginal education. Six stimulus papers were developed outlining proposals designed to bring about fundamental changes to structures and programs impacting on the delivery of Aboriginal education.<sup>10</sup>

Professor Lester was also commissioned to review the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* (AEP). This independent review involved four SEAs and a sample of up to 40 schools. This report will be published as part of the technical papers.

A program review of the Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) was conducted by DET. As part of this process, the operation of the former District Aboriginal Educational Advisory Committees was reviewed.

The Strategic Research Directorate of DET provided contemporary research articles to the Review. In addition, a search was conducted of initiatives and reports from other Australian states.

DET's Educational Measurement Directorate provided retention and performance data for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students drawn from the six external tests sat by students in New South Wales government schools.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix E.

<sup>9</sup> Residential workshops were conducted with Consultants, Aboriginal Development Managers, ACLOs and ASLOs. AERTs and AEAs were also accessed during their residential conferences.

<sup>10</sup> Those papers were presented to the Review Reference Group.

## The Review context

The Review is part of a whole of New South Wales Government effort to improve education and social outcomes for Aboriginal students. The portfolios of Families and Young People, Education, Justice, Housing and Infrastructure, Health and Economic Development, and Heritage and Culture coordinated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs have established common priorities and action plans. It is intended that the outcomes of this Review will be incorporated in an Action Plan for Aboriginal Education developed under the *Two Ways Together: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003–2012*.

Major funding for initiatives to improve outcomes in Aboriginal education is provided by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training. In April 2004 changes to its funding priorities were announced. The *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program (IEDA)* assists education providers in partnership with parents of Aboriginal students to work together to improve learning outcomes. The main elements of IEDA are: the *Whole of School Partnership Intervention Strategy* and the *Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme*.

## Demographic information

Based on current trends in fertility and mortality, the ABS reports that Australia's Aboriginal population is projected to increase from 386 000 in 1996 to 469 000 in 2006 at an annual rate of 2 percent per year. The growth in the Aboriginal population in recent decades cannot be explained by natural increase alone. Much of the unexplained growth can be attributed to an increasing prevalence of persons identifying as Aboriginal on census forms.

The Aboriginal population is much younger than the rest of the state. Young people under 15 represent 40 percent of the total Aboriginal population compared to 20 percent in the total population (2001 Census). This has important implications for schooling. Education is the passport to improved life chances for Aboriginal people and the growing numbers alone make it imperative that we achieve better outcomes.

**Table 1.1: Enrolment in government primary schools: 1999–2003<sup>11</sup>**

Full-time Enrolments	Level	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Aboriginal	K–2	8,243	8,535	8,905	9,323	9,393
Non Aboriginal students	K–2	188,485	187,371	183,209	180,459	177,763
Aboriginal	3–6	10,233	10,771	11,256	11,810	12,234
Non Aboriginal students	3–6	248,047	249,237	249,256	247,890	245,464
Aboriginal	Total	18,476	19,306	20,161	21,133	21,627
Non Aboriginal students	Total	436,532	436,608	432,465	428,349	435,461

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education and Training 2003b. (Demographic data in Tables 1.1-1.5)

**Table 1.2: Enrolment in government secondary schools: 1999–2003**

Full-time Enrolments	Level	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Aboriginal	7–10	8,320	8,741	9,177	10,194	10,361
Non Aboriginal students	7–10	221,309	217,840	215,125	214,419	215,100
Aboriginal	11–12	1,312	1,359	1,448	1,513	1,631
Non Aboriginal students	11–12	77,220	75,769	76,870	78,092	77,934
Aboriginal	Total	9,632	10,100	10,625	11,707	11,992
Non Aboriginal students	Total	298,529	293,609	291,995	292,511	293,034

There has been a 25 percent increase in Aboriginal enrolments in government secondary schools in the last five years. This significant increase was recorded in a period of decline in the overall population attending government schools.

If the current issues of poor performance, high absenteeism and low retention rates are not promptly and successfully addressed, growing social and educational problems can be anticipated as the number of Aboriginal students continues to increase in our schools.

Tables 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 show how Aboriginal students are distributed across schools in terms of their concentration of numbers. Most Aboriginal students go to schools where there are relatively few other Aboriginal students.

**Table 1.3: Distribution of Aboriginal students across government primary schools: 2003**

Number of Aboriginal students per school	Number of primary schools	Total number of Aboriginal students	Proportion of all Aboriginal students in primary
0	400	0	0
1 to 10	755	3009	14.92%
11 to 20	204	2999	14.88%
21 to 30	111	2755	13.66%
31 to 50	88	3486	17.29%
51 to 100	73	5104	25.32%
More than 100	18	2808	13.93%

**Table 1.4: Distribution of Aboriginal students across government secondary schools: 2003**

Number of Aboriginal students per school	Number of secondary schools	Total number of Aboriginal students	Proportion of all Aboriginal students in secondary
0	23	0	0
1 to 10	126	608	5.68%
11 to 20	71	1115	10.42%
21 to 30	47	1207	11.28%
31 to 50	53	2038	19.04%
51 to 100	57	3839	35.87%
More than 100	16	1897	17.72%

**Table 1.5: Distribution of Aboriginal students across government central schools (K–12): 2003**

Number of Aboriginal students per school	Number of central schools	Total number of Aboriginal students	Proportion of all Aboriginal students
0	4	0	0
1 to 10	23	130	5.27%
11 to 20	6	89	3.62%
21 to 30	7	183	7.45%
31 to 50	9	373	15.17%
51 to 100	12	902	36.65%
More than 100	5	783	31.83%

In primary schools, nearly 30 percent of Aboriginal students are in schools with fewer than 20 Aboriginal students altogether (across all classes). In secondary schools, where total numbers are generally larger, there tends to be a greater concentration of Aboriginal students, with over 50 percent of Aboriginal students in schools with over 50 Aboriginal students.

### **Academic performance**

Students in government schools in New South Wales sit for statewide tests of academic skills including:

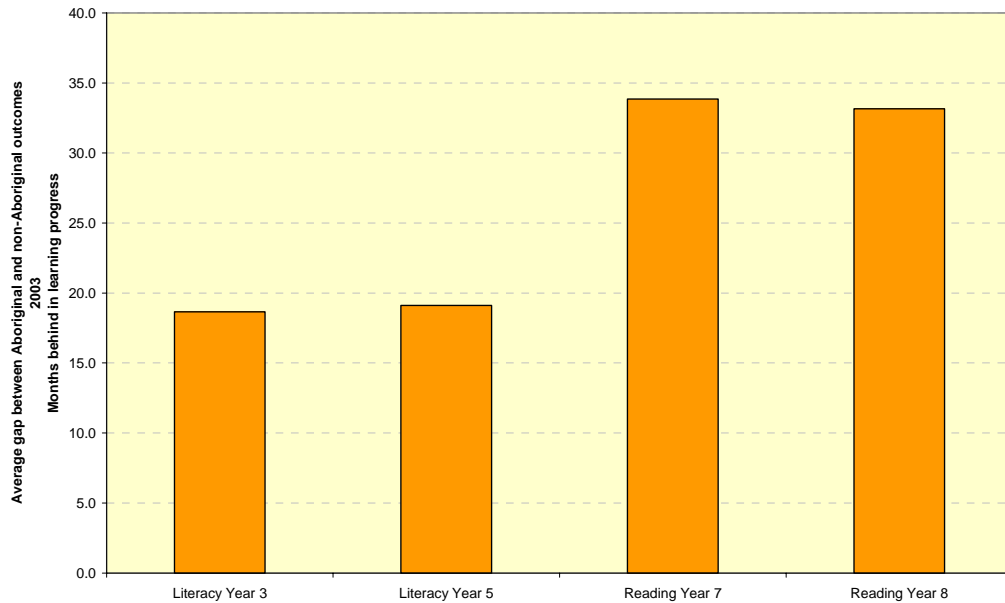
- Basic Skills Tests (BST) in literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5
- Primary Writing Assessment in Years 3 and 5
- English Literacy and Language Assessment (ELLA) in Years 7 and 8 (with sub-tests in reading, writing and language)
- Computer Skills Assessment (Year 6)
- Secondary Numeracy Assessment (SNAP) in Years 7 and 8
- the School Certificate in Year 10 (including tests of English Literacy and Mathematics)
- the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in Year 12, including examinations in English and Mathematics.

This array of tests, external to the school, can be used to describe and monitor the performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students across the years of schooling, and often across time (although some of these tests are more recently introduced than others).

A problem in monitoring student performance across time is to determine some measure that is reasonably valid and reliable across different tests and different years. That is not easily achieved. A solution is offered here that allows some comparison, at least from Year 3 through to Year 8.

With the 2003 Basic Skills Test (BST) literacy results at Year 3, the current gap in the average performance of Aboriginal students compared with that of non-Aboriginal students is approximately *5 marks* on the BST scale. This has been mostly the case for the years 1998 to 2003. *But what does a gap of 5 marks mean?*

An indication of the significance of this gap in educational terms can be inferred by comparing Year 3 BST and Year 5 BST results, as these have been developed to allow direct comparisons between them (they have what is called *a common scale*).



**Figure 1.1: The average gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes in literacy and reading expressed in terms of months behind in learning progress: 2003<sup>12</sup>**

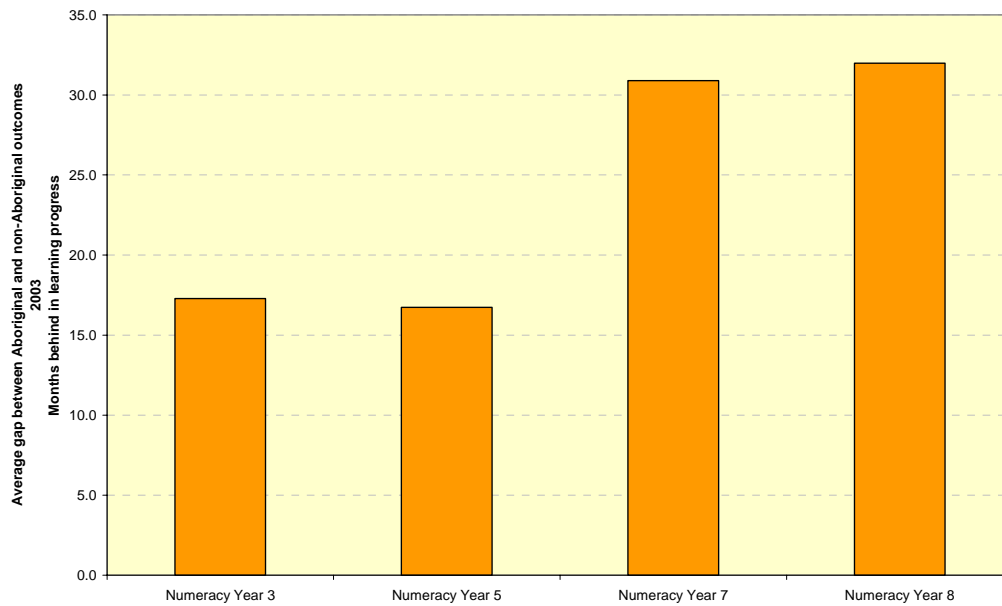
Across the years 1998 to 2003, the average change in literacy scores for all students between Year 3 and 5 is *6.7 marks*. This might be taken as representing average learning progress in literacy across *24 months*—from which it can be calculated that one mark corresponds to a little over three and a half months of learning. This correspondence can be used to reinterpret the gaps in BST performance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students into *months learning progress*. While some caution is needed, this serves a purpose of creating a measure that may be more meaningful to the average reader, better conveying a sense of the size of the problems revealed.

Using this information, it follows that, at Year 3, the 5 marks difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in 2003 might be thought of as roughly corresponding to 19 months of literacy learning: to catch up to where the non-Aboriginal students were in Year 3, Aboriginal students would need to improve their performance by an amount roughly equivalent to an average of 19 months worth of learning.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, of course, non-Aboriginal students will be further progressing. To equal those non-Aboriginal students by Year 5, Aboriginal students

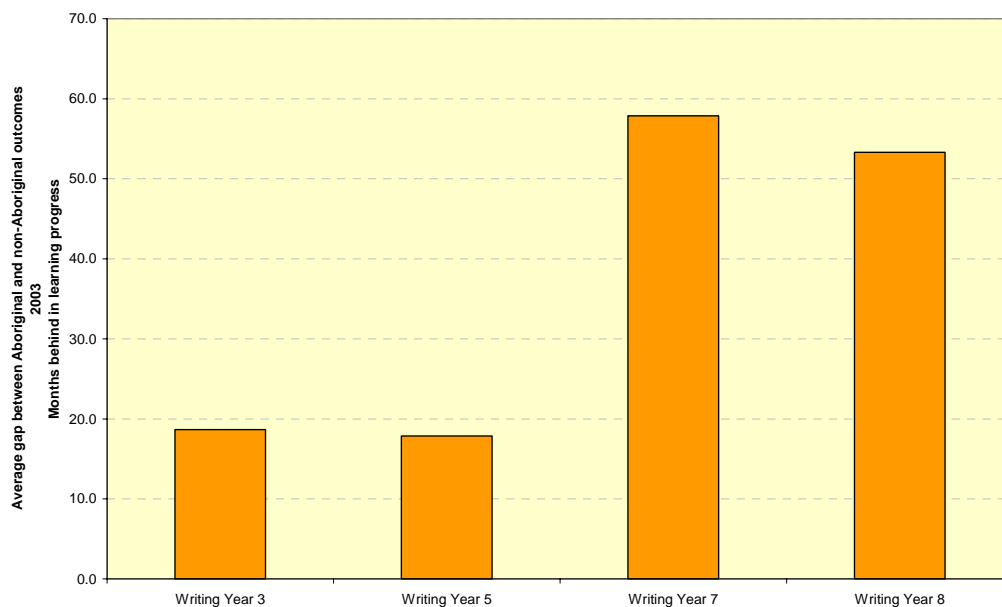
<sup>12</sup> Figure 1.1 combines information from assessments for Years 3 and 5 Basic Skills Tests in literacy with Years 7 and 8 ELLA results for reading, plotting the gaps in performance between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students in terms of months learning progress. There it can be seen that the gap of 19 months in the BST literacy assessment in Year 3 increases to a gap of over 30 months in Years 7 and 8 ELLA. Similar results can be seen for numeracy (in Figure 1.2).

<sup>13</sup> These estimates of months learning progress or difference have a technically calculated band of error around them, of approximately plus or minus one month of learning. However, they should only be used as indicative of performance “gaps” and their implications for Aboriginal education generally.

would have to catch up on the 19 months they are behind in Year 3 and then further complete the 24 months of learning otherwise expected between Years 3 and 5 – alternatively, to achieve in 24 months what might otherwise normally take 43 months.



**Figure 1.2: The average gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes in numeracy expressed in terms of months behind in learning progress: 2003**

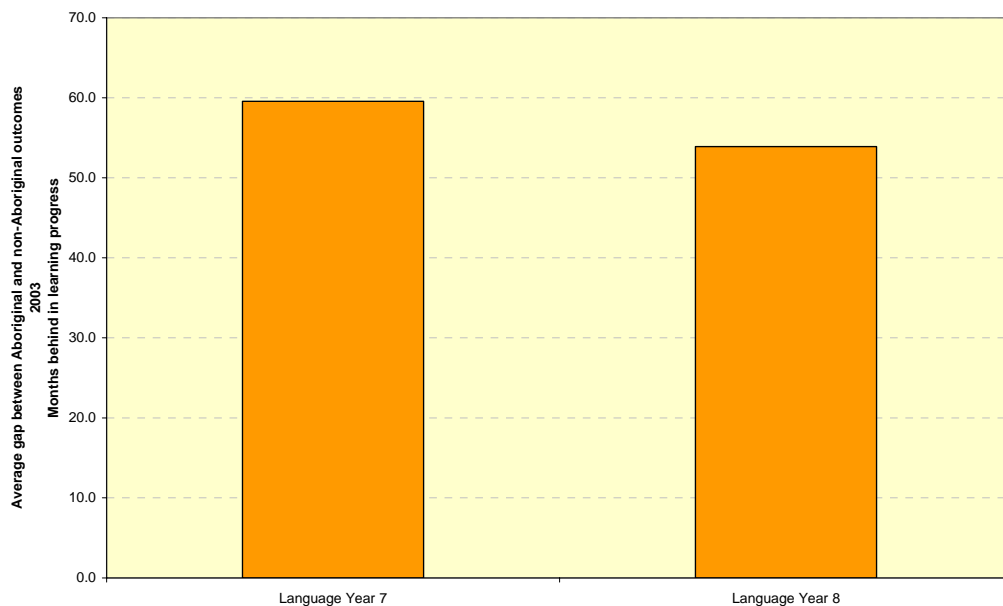


**Figure 1.3: The average gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes in writing expressed in terms of months behind in learning progress: 2003**

Because other tests used to assess student academic performance are also developed to allow comparisons between academic years, gaps in those results can also be

recalculated into corresponding *months learning progress*. This is true for Primary Writing Assessment (PWA) in Years 3 and 5, English Language and Literacy Assessments (ELLA) in Years 7 and 8, and Secondary Numeracy Assessment (SNAP) in Years 7 and 8.

The gaps in performance for writing and language are even more startling: at Year 7 the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is so great that it corresponds roughly to as much as 58 months and nearly 60 months behind in writing and language skills respectively.



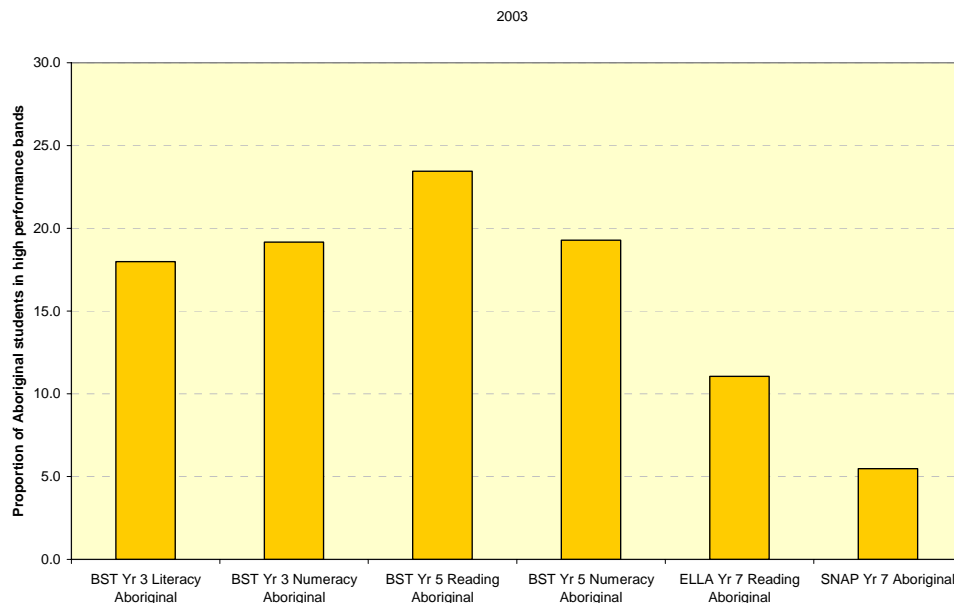
**Figure 1.4: The average gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes in language expressed in terms of months behind in learning progress: 2003**

This finding is of crucial importance in junior secondary education. Writing and language skills are particularly significant as they are the basis of instruction and assessment. The poor writing and language skills of many Aboriginal students must limit their ability to access the curriculum. When students are not experiencing success in their learning it is likely that they will disengage from learning, potentially exacerbating the problem.

While these results help develop a sense of the size and urgency of problems in Aboriginal education, it is important to recognise that Aboriginal students are fully capable of the highest levels of achievement, despite challenges they face that non-Aboriginal students do not.

In the 2003 BST for Year 3, approximately 18 percent of Aboriginal students achieved results placing them in the top two bands of literacy performance, and about 19 percent in the top two bands for numeracy. For Year 5, 23 percent of Aboriginal students were in the top two bands for reading and 19 percent in the top two bands for numeracy. For ELLA in 2003, 11 percent of Year 7 Aboriginal student results were in the band

designating high levels of proficiency, while for SNAP in 2003, 5.5 percent achieved at that level (see Figure 1.5).<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 1.5: The proportion of Aboriginal students taking a test who scored in the highest bands (the top two bands for the BST assessments and the top band for ELLA and SNAP): 2003**

While recognising that many Aboriginal students have been highly successful in their learning, the difference from the success of non-Aboriginal students is one of strong contrast. For example, in 2003, 46 percent of non-Aboriginal students achieved that high level of literacy in Year 3, and in Year 7 reading, 36 percent of non-Aboriginal students were graded in the highest level.

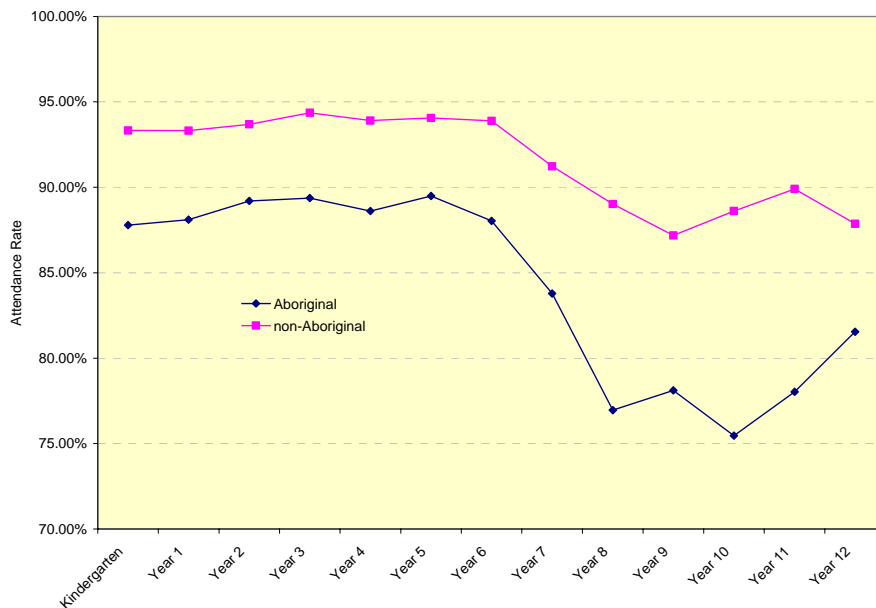
<sup>14</sup> What is identified as a high level of achievement is not directly comparable between the BST assessments and ELLA and SNAP, so the difference in the percentages between them should be regarded cautiously.



## Attendance

While attendance data are collected from schools annually, they are not routinely collected separately for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. As attendance is specified as one of three key outcome measures for the Review, data on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance rates had to be specially collected. That was achieved through a representative sample of 200 government schools.

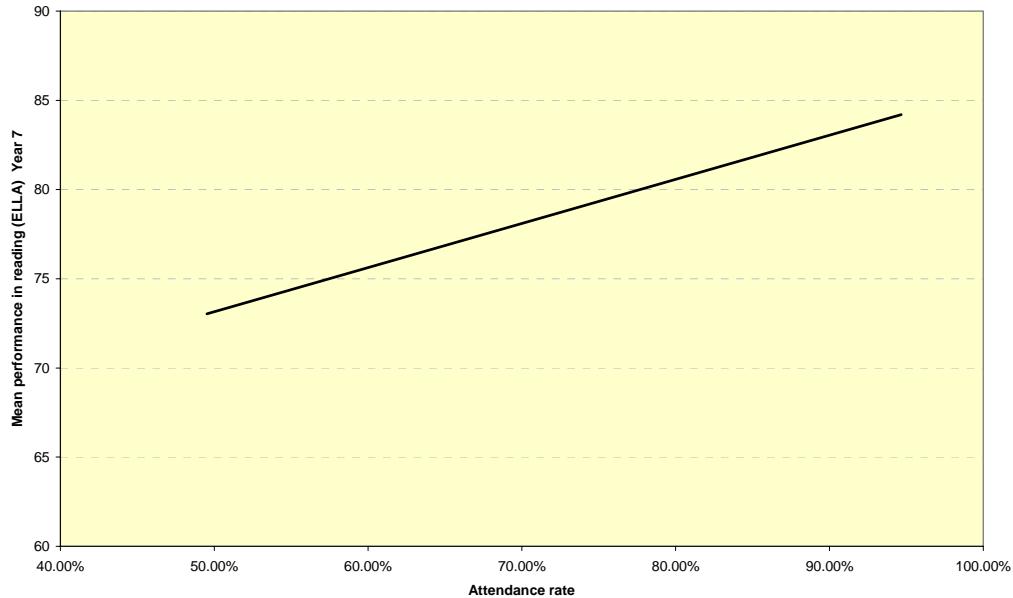
The results suggest that absenteeism for Aboriginal students is approximately twice the rate for non-Aboriginal students, and this is mostly true across all years of schooling. For both groups, attendance is fairly constant across the primary years but decreases substantially in junior secondary school.



**Figure 1.6: Attendance rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 12**

In high schools the absentee rates for Aboriginal boys vary between 18 percent (in Year 7) and 25 percent (in Year 8), while for Aboriginal girls it varies from 15 percent (in Year 7) and 27 percent (in Year 10). A rate of 15 percent is equivalent roughly to 30 days a year missed, and 27 percent roughly to 54 days of school missed each year. These figures are unacceptable given the gaps in knowledge that result from being absent from school.

Research evidence links attendance with academic success (Bourke et al, 2000). Figure 1.7 is derived from analysis of the Review's sample survey of attendance and shows that the higher the attendance rates in schools for Year 7, the better the average performance of Aboriginal students in the Year 7 ELLA test.



**Figure 1.7: The variation in reading performance in Year 7 compared with attendance: Aboriginal students only**

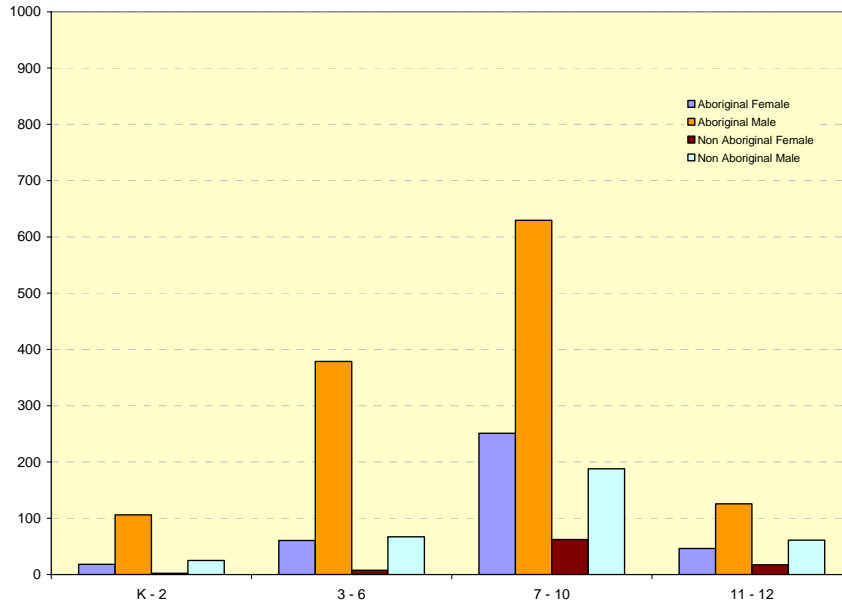
This graph could demonstrate a vicious cycle. Absenteeism results in poorer academic attainment. Poorer results lead to lowered student morale and self-esteem which results in even poorer attendance.

## Suspension

Information on suspensions is something else that has not been collected consistently to allow up-to-date statewide comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. To provide this information for the Review, a representative sample survey of 413 schools was conducted, collecting suspension information during 2003. The suspension data collected is for the number of short suspensions within a school, where a short suspension lasts between one and four school days, and the number of long suspensions within a school, where a long suspension is one lasting from 5 to 20 school days.

The sample results<sup>15</sup> suggest that suspension rates are still increasing. For all students, the average short suspension rate is 16 suspensions annually per 1000 students, compared with 12 suspensions in 2001, while the average long suspension rate is 3 per 1000 students, compared with 2.3 per 1000 in 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Figure 1.8 graphs the suspension rates for Aboriginal students compared with non-Aboriginal students by gender and stage of schooling. For example, for every 1000 Aboriginal males in Years 7 to 10 there are 629 short suspensions compared with 188 for every 1000 non-Aboriginal males.



**Figure 1.8: Short suspension rates (per 1000 students): 2003**

**Table 1.6: Suspension rates (annual number of suspensions per 1000 students)**

	K-2	3-6	7-10	11-12
<b>Short suspensions</b>				
Aboriginal female	18	60	251	46
Aboriginal male	106	378	629	126
Non-Aboriginal female	2	8	62	17
Non-Aboriginal male	25	67	188	61
<b>Long suspensions</b>				
Aboriginal female	1	3	37	3
Aboriginal male	5	47	168	33
Non-Aboriginal female	0	1	11	3
Non-Aboriginal male	3	11	43	9

Table 1.6 shows disturbing patterns in short-term suspension. Data collected during field trips flagged concerns about perceived increases in the use of suspensions, particularly in the early years of schooling. The survey results confirm those reports. From Kindergarten to Year 2, and then again for schooling Years 3 to 6, the rate of suspension for Aboriginal females is approximately nine to seven times the rate for non-Aboriginal females, while the rate for males is four to six times that for non-Aboriginal males. For long-term suspensions, the rate for Aboriginal females is six times the rate of non-Aboriginal females in Kindergarten to Year 2, and the rate for Aboriginal males nearly two times that of non-Aboriginal males.

Expulsion is relatively rare, but most apparent in the senior years of high school, a sorry outcome for students who have persisted with their learning for so long.

Suspension impacts on performance in much the same way as absenteeism. Unfortunately, many young Aboriginal people who are disaffected with school may perceive suspension as a reward – a day off school. Of great concern is the rate of suspension of students in the early years of schooling. If these young people develop negative attitudes to schooling, then their capacity for developing a positive self-image, self-respect and high expectations is severely limited.

## Apparent retention rates

Retention rates are *apparent* as they do not track individual students through schooling. What they measure is the ratio of the total number of full-time school students in a designated year to the total number of students in an earlier designated year, that is, Year 12, 2003 compared to Year 10, 2001.

**Table 1.7: The apparent retention rates for full-time students in New South Wales Government schools: 1999–2003 (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2003b<sup>16</sup>)**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Apparent retention (%)</b>					
<b>Years 7–10</b>					
All students	95.2	94.6	95.4	95.9	96.0
Aboriginal students	80.3	78.9	80.5	81.6	81.0
<b>Apparent retention (%)</b>					
<b>Years 10–12</b>					
All students	64.7	64.2	65.1	67.4	68.1
Aboriginal students	38.6	38.6	35.4	36.8	36.3
<b>Apparent retention (%)</b>					
<b>Years 7–12</b>					
All students	61.2	61.0	62.0	63.8	65.0
Aboriginal students	28.6	31.8	28.4	29.0	29.2

What these apparent retention figures do not include are students who have left government high schools in New South Wales but are either:

- continuing with their secondary education through TAFE NSW, which provides alternative ways of completing secondary education that might be preferable to some students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, or
- pursuing vocational education or training outside of school, which is recognised as equivalent to an education within school.

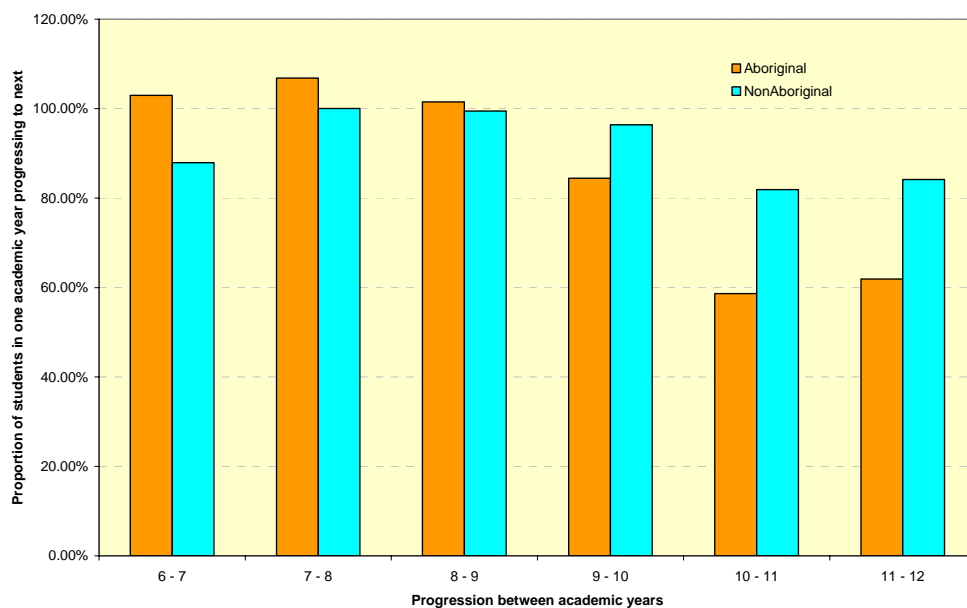
These alternatives might be particularly attractive to Aboriginal students.

Table 1.7 shows that apparent retention rates have not changed significantly over the last five years. Retention in schools to Year 12 is considerably lower for Aboriginal students than for all students. The Years 10 to 12 rate in 2003 was 36.3 percent for Aboriginal students compared to 68.1 percent for all students. Similarly, the Years 7 to 12 rate in 2003 was 29.2 percent for Aboriginal students, nearly 36 percentage points

<sup>16</sup> Figures for 1998 deleted and 2003 inserted.

lower than the rate of 65.0 percent for all students. This means that only three in ten Aboriginal students make it to Year 12.

Looking at the proportions of Aboriginal students that progress from any one academic year at school to the next sheds more light on retention. In Figure 1.9 the number of Aboriginal students moving from one year to the next is expressed as a percentage of the students in the earlier year. The percentages for the progressions from Years 6 to 7 and then Years 7 to 8 can be more than 100 percent as Aboriginal students move out of private schools and into public high schools. Particularly noticeable in the graph is that the first apparent drop in Aboriginal students is in the Years 9 to 10 progression—a full year before the first significant fall-off in non-Aboriginal numbers. Evidence presented elsewhere suggests that those leaving at the end of Year 8 may have been characterised with particularly high levels of absenteeism.



**Figure 1.9: Apparent progression rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students: 2001–2002.**  
(Recalculated from data in New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2003b.)

## Concluding comments for the schools sector

It is clear that, irrespective of the way performance is measured, Aboriginal outcomes continue to be at the lower end of the scale. Absenteeism and suspension have a significant effect on student performance. Gaps in knowledge resulting from high levels of absenteeism have a negative effect on student achievement and may lead to disruptive behaviour requiring remedial intervention. The low levels of literacy and numeracy skills possessed by many Aboriginal students, especially in secondary school, commit these students to failure. Their consequent disengagement with learning results in lower educational achievement which, along with low retention rates, translates to limited employment and life choices.

Given the growing Aboriginal population and the increased numbers of Aboriginal students in our schools, it is imperative that we redress these inequities effectively and

rapidly. Social dislocation, low self-esteem and negative attitudes are certain outcomes. Strong and urgent action is needed to redress these imbalances.

### **Aboriginal students in the Vocational Education and Training and TAFE NSW sector**

Over the past five years, Aboriginal enrolments in TAFE NSW have increased by 25 percent, from 15 715 in 1999 to 19 632 in 2003. This represents 3.6 percent of total enrolments. This compares to a 19 percent increase for total enrolments.

Eighty-four percent of enrolments of Aboriginal students are in regional and rural areas. Although the greatest concentration of Aboriginal people lives around Sydney, metropolitan Institutes currently provide less than 20 percent of enrolments.

Age breakdowns for enrolments over the five-year period show increases across a range of age groups, with an 80 percent increase over the period for 15–19-year-olds compared to 25 percent for all students. There was a 13 percent increase in enrolments over the 20 to 24 year age group.

Over one-third of Aboriginal enrolments in TAFE NSW are in the Access Division. The number of Aboriginal students under the age of 19 enrolled in preparatory courses is about 1500 – the equivalent of a large state high school. These students are spread across all TAFE NSW Institutes and colleges and in formal award courses ranging from Language, Literacy and Numeracy up to the Higher School Certificate.<sup>17</sup>

TAFE NSW industry areas with significant Aboriginal course enrolments include Information Technology, Arts and Media, Community Services, and Tourism and Hospitality.

The enrolment of Aboriginal students in higher level award courses (AQF Certificate III and above) has increased threefold over the period with a 35 percent increase in Aboriginal enrolments in Diploma/Advanced Diploma courses from 2000 to 2001.

The average module completion rate for Aboriginal students in TAFE NSW in 2003, at 64.1 percent, has improved by some 7.4 percentage points since 1999. However, this is still significantly below the module completion rate for all students, which is 78.8 percent.

Adult and Community Education (ACE) Colleges also provide both general and vocational programs for Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal enrolments has increased from 2053 in 1998 to 6047 in 2003. As well there are several independent Aboriginal adult education colleges that provide nationally accredited vocational education and training.

Just over 39 percent of the Aboriginal population are employed compared with 55 percent of the total population. The Aboriginal unemployment rate for 25 to 44-year-olds is much higher than that for the total population (21.9 percent compared with 6.5 percent). Young Aboriginal people (15 to 24 years) have an unemployment rate of 32.7

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<sup>17</sup> Refer to the *NSW Indigenous Profile for Education and Training* (NSW DET 2003b, Table 7, p. 76) for details of courses undertaken.

percent compared with 12.8 percent of the total population. There is no sign that the gaps between the Aboriginal population and the total population narrowed between 1996 and 2001.

The total number of Aboriginal apprentices and trainees is 2822 out of a total number of 137 654. This represents 2 percent of apprentices and trainees.

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, released in 1991, drew attention to the link between poor educational outcomes and high rates of imprisonment among Aboriginal Australians. Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission for more non-custodial sentences, Aboriginal people in New South Wales continue to be incarcerated at greater rates than non-Aboriginal people compared to their population share of 1.9 percent in New South Wales. As at May 2004 Aboriginal males represented 18 percent of male offenders and Aboriginal women represented 19 percent of female offenders.

In 2003 the average module completion rate for Aboriginal students in Correctional Centres was 76.1 percent, which is higher than the completion rate of other Aboriginal students. However, the course completion rate was very low at 17 percent.

### **Structure of the Report**

Chapter 2 of the Report outlines current organisation and major educational programs and initiatives within DET and TAFE NSW supporting the delivery of programs for Aboriginal learners.

The findings of the Review reveal that different factors have differential effects at different stages of an Aboriginal person's life. Chapter 3 organises these stages within a convenient framework or "life course", which Reviewers have called the process of "Growing and Learning".

In meeting the Review obligation to "map current activity"<sup>18</sup>, the writers of Chapter 3 of the Report outline a number of current approaches to the delivery of Aboriginal education during critical stages of an Aboriginal person's learning. Chapter 3 identifies approaches that appear to be successful and suggests where change is necessary.

The recurrent themes and Review recommendations are developed in Section 4 of the Report.

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<sup>18</sup> Review scope, August 2003.





# **Review of Aboriginal Education**

## **Chapter 2**

### **Ngalan-waru-maana Gurundi Miindalaygam NSW-a**

### **Support for Aboriginal Education in New South Wales**

The translation of *Support for Aboriginal Education in NSW* in the Gumbaynggir  
language is

*Together up-hold Goories' learning in NSW*

## Support for Aboriginal Education in New South Wales

This chapter outlines recent policy development in, and current systemic service provision for, Aboriginal education and training in New South Wales. Considerable effort and initiative have been expended in supporting Aboriginal education and there is little doubt this has helped improve student outcomes in a range of areas. The issue becomes one of how to raise these levels to equalise outcomes for Aboriginal students within the next 10 years.

### Aboriginal education policies

In 1982 the Aboriginal Education Unit of the (then) New South Wales Department of Education, developed the first New South Wales *Aboriginal Education Policy* (AEP) in partnership with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc). The *Aboriginal Education Policy* was aimed at educating Aboriginal students, involving Aboriginal communities and promoting culturally appropriate teaching.

The *Aboriginal Education Policy* did not become mandatory until 1987. A large number of schools expressed the view that the policy did not apply to them as they had few or no Aboriginal students and/or community. In 1996 the NSW AECG and the New South Wales Department of Education rewrote the *Aboriginal Education Policy* to focus on Aboriginal student outcomes, educating all students about Aboriginal Australia and implementing mandatory annual school reporting of progress. This policy was developed for all students, all staff and all schools in New South Wales.

*The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP) 1990 committed all Australian governments to work towards educational equity for Aboriginal Australians. Since 1993, in support of the NATSIEP, the Australian Government has provided supplementary funding for Aboriginal education to all states. The NATSIEP recognises the importance of Aboriginal community involvement and funding has been introduced to support programs for this purpose.

The NATSIEP was reviewed in 1995 and led to the development of the *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002*. In 1997 all State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers agreed on a national goal which stated that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level. The NATSIEP has 21 long-term goals and 4 major goals which include:

- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making
- equality of access to education services
- equity of education participation
- equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

## Partnership with the NSW AECG

Partnerships between Aboriginal people and organisations have become an accepted part of government policy and the preferred way to do business with Aboriginal people. Such partnerships acknowledge that the greater the involvement of Aboriginal people determining the nature, pace and objectives of change, the more likely it will be that the changes will be effective and sustainable.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) was established in 1976 with the mandate to provide Aboriginal community advice on Aboriginal education from early childhood through to schooling, to tertiary and community education, and to education providers at local, regional and state levels. Over more than 20 years, the NSW AECG and the Department of Education and Training have developed a close partnership. In 1999 the Department of Education and Training and the NSW AECG signed an agreement to formalise this partnership called *Securing a collaborative partnership into the future: Consolidating a 21-year working relationship*.

## Government commitments to Aboriginal education and training

In 1975 an Aboriginal Education Unit was established by the (then) Department of School Education, and in 1979 an Aboriginal Education Program was developed by the then Department of Technical and Further Education. In 1997, following the amalgamation of the Department of School Education and the Department of Technical and Further Education, the newly formed New South Wales Department of Education and Training established the Aboriginal Programs Unit.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit is responsible for providing advice on Aboriginal education and training in New South Wales. It is responsible for the provision of specialist support to schools and TAFE NSW Institutes. However, Aboriginal education is the responsibility of many sectors within the Department, systemically and through to the classroom level.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit is currently part of the Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs Directorate, under the leadership of the Director, Aboriginal Education and Equity Programs. The Unit's role is to:

- provide a strategic framework for the development of statewide policies for Aboriginal education and training
- provide leadership, advocacy and advice in relation to education and training for Aboriginal students and communities
- undertake and manage research projects as they relate to Aboriginal students and curriculum programs and resources
- develop culturally appropriate and relevant curriculum and resources to improve educational outcomes
- implement the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* and the *New South Wales Aboriginal Education Policies* for school education and Vocational Education and Training (VET)
- support the professional development of Aboriginal education workers and targeted Departmental staff

- promote services and programs for Aboriginal education within New South Wales.

### **Current funding arrangements**

Through separate agreements with the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Aboriginal Programs Unit negotiates, administers and monitors funding for Aboriginal education in New South Wales through the following funding programs:

- *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP)*: This program (through a quadrennial agreement from 2001 to 2004) is one of the Australian Government's major Aboriginal education programs under the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*. IESIP funds are provided to the Department of Education and Training based on the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in New South Wales Government preschools, schools and TAFE NSW Institutes and campuses. The initial 2003/2004 DET budget allocated \$16.6 million for the schooling sector and \$4.8 million for the TAFE NSW sector from IESIP supplementary recurrent funding.
- *National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS)*: This agreement has provided around \$3 million to the Department of Education and Training to implement initiatives for Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 12 to improve literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention from 2001 to 2004.
- *Vocational Education Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS)*: This scheme supports two major programs in New South Wales, the *Learning Works Program* and the *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program (ACAP)*. The Australian Government provided \$0.85 million from 2001 to 2003 to support the *Learning Works Program* and \$0.5 million from 2000 to 2002 to support ACAP. *Learning Works* is the largest vocational education and training program in Australia to improve education, training and employment outcomes of Aboriginal students in Years 9 to 12. It is also designed to re-engage young Aboriginal people who are currently outside of the education, training and employment sectors. The *Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program* aims to provide a smoother transition from Year 6 to Year 7 and a broader range of employment pathways through a school-delivered career educational program.
- *Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS)*: Through this scheme the Australian Government will provide approximately \$4.6 million in 2004 to employ tutors from Aboriginal communities in more than 100 schools to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students Kindergarten to Year 6.

The *NSW DET Aboriginal Education Initiatives Plan* contributes around \$3.1 million annually to the Aboriginal Programs Unit to support administration, teaching positions and some Aboriginal Education Assistant salaries. It also includes around \$1 million for state-level initiatives for programs such as School

Education Area support for Aboriginal field staff, personnel services employment programs and professional learning and curriculum development.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit, which comprises 31 positions, is led by a Manager (Chief Education Officer) and incorporates the following seven specialised teams:

- Executive Team (3)
- School Educational Programs Team (6)
- TAFE Educational Programs Team (4)
- Training and Promotions Team (3)
- Aboriginal Studies Team (4)
- Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Team (4)
- Administration (5) and Finance Team (2).

### **Schools sector**

The Department of Education and Training, in partnership with Aboriginal communities and through its Aboriginal Programs Unit, has made significant ground in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in New South Wales Government schools:

- While Aboriginal students' results in the Basic Skills Test for Year 3 and Year 5 Literacy and Numeracy have improved, they are still, on average, well below non-Aboriginal students' results.
- preschool Aboriginal enrolments have increased
- 11 Aboriginal preschools for Aboriginal students have been established in Aboriginal communities to provide culturally appropriate programs in consultation with their local Aboriginal community
- *Science in Context for Aboriginal Students* has developed teaching and learning programs specifically for Aboriginal students in partnership with the Australian National University that relate to skills, knowledge and experiences of the local Aboriginal community
- *Student Leadership is for Koori Kids* has developed the leadership skills of Aboriginal high school students
- local Aboriginal community members are involved in the delivery of Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Languages programs in schools.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit's School Education Programs Team, Aboriginal Studies Team and Training and Promotions Team coordinate statewide programs to improve learning outcomes for Aboriginal students from preschool to Year 12 and to educate all students and all staff about Aboriginal Australia and its history. The teams have also:

- developed program guidelines, culturally appropriate and relevant resources and training packages for schools, targeting all stages of development from preschool to Year 12 including Vocational Education and Training programs for high schools
- developed resources to support Aboriginal perspectives across all key learning areas including resources for Aboriginal Studies and Aboriginal Languages

- provided curriculum advice and training and development to Aboriginal staff, consultants, schools and community people at the school, region and state level
- liaised with the NSW AECG to ensure that Aboriginal communities are consulted in program development and delivery, and that Aboriginal people are involved in decision-making
- worked closely with the New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies, Primary Principals' Association, Secondary Principals' Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Services Advisory Group
- coordinated Aboriginal cultural awareness and anti-racism training across all levels of the Department
- assisted in the development of teaching and learning programs for Aboriginal school-aged young people in custody
- worked with regional staff to coordinate a statewide approach for training for Aboriginal tutors and Aboriginal education workers in schools
- developed training packages and resources for schools to provide training and workshops for Aboriginal parents and caregivers.

The executive staff of the Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) represent NSW DET on numerous national, state, regional and local area committees that have an Aboriginal educational focus and that require specialist participation and negotiation for schools and VET.

Aboriginal field staff are critical to the implementation of policies and practices at the local and regional level, and to the success of programs and services. The current Aboriginal field staff positions include:

- Consultant, Aboriginal Education (CAE – 11 positions): These consultants work across a school region providing advice and support to schools on the implementation of education, equity and anti-racism policies and programs and specialist support to schools with Aboriginal students. They assist in providing professional support for Aboriginal educators such as Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers.
- Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher (AERT – 23 positions): These are teaching positions. AERTs team-teach with teachers in the *Aboriginal Language Development Program* operating across 24 schools and support Aboriginal Education Assistants in the classroom (Kindergarten to Year 2 or Kindergarten to Year 6) focusing on literacy. They contribute to developing culturally relevant teaching programs including Aboriginal perspectives in each curriculum area.
- Resource Teacher, Aboriginal (RTA – 5 positions): RTAs promote and assist the development of language communication and literacy and numeracy skills of Aboriginal students. They provide advice on the selection of instructional teaching resources and promote positive educational attitudes for Aboriginal students through promoting regular study, attendance and involvement in sporting and leisure activities. Some RTAs also assist with the transition of Aboriginal students from preschool to Kindergarten, from Year 6 to Year 7, and from school to work, and liaise with agencies that provide services for Aboriginal students and families.

- Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO – 31 positions): ACLOs operate across the state to promote understanding between Aboriginal communities and schools. They promote community knowledge of and access to Departmental resources, facilities and personnel and inform Departmental field staff about the protocols and knowledge of local Aboriginal communities. ACLOs also maintain strong links between schools and local and regional AECGs.
- Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer (ASLO – 11 positions): ASLOs work with community and schools to support the regular attendance of Aboriginal students by visiting schools to monitor attendance and liaising with principals on non-attendance issues. They provide support to Aboriginal parents including home visits. They also liaise with Department of Community Services staff and representatives from other organisations relevant to communities, families and students.
- Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs): There are 320 Aboriginal Education Assistants (206 IESIP funded, 114 state funded) operating in schools across the state. The prime responsibilities of AEAs are to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students by working with teachers and to develop partnerships with students, Aboriginal parents, community and local AECGs.

This network of Aboriginal education support staff across New South Wales has supported Aboriginal education initiatives, programs and services at the local, regional and state level.

Examples of positive initiatives, services and programs impacting widely on schools include:

#### *Through IESIP funds*

- *Aboriginal Targeted Funding Program*, consisting of notional funding to School Education Areas (formerly Districts) from IESIP: More than 40 District Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees, using guidelines devised by the Aboriginal Programs Unit operate in New South Wales and comprise School Education Areas staff and Aboriginal community representatives who identify schools to receive Aboriginal targeted funding to support literacy and numeracy programs and attendance and retention initiatives from Kindergarten to Year 12 (\$3 440 900 was distributed in 2004.)
- Cultural funds of \$5000 are distributed to each School Education Area for all schools to gain Aboriginal cultural experiences.
- *Aboriginal Student Leadership Programs*: These include positive student leadership programs for Aboriginal high school students; the establishment of positions for Aboriginal students on the New South Wales Student Representative Council; and opportunities for Student Mentor Programs.



### *Through NIELNS funds*

- *Otitis Media Strategy*: This strategy is aimed at increasing teachers' and parents' understanding of otitis media and services to support students with otitis media. The strategy assists in providing processes to establish local working parties and partnerships between health and education workers, including Aboriginal community members, and to develop local resources.
- *Home to School Transition Program*: This is a program that is provided for Aboriginal students who do not have access to a preschool. The program supplements and expands existing preschool services. It has funded the employment of a teacher and an Aboriginal Education Worker at 10 locations across the state in areas of high need, in each year from 2001 to 2004, to operate an educational program that focuses on the further development of literacy, numeracy and social skills, while ensuring the students gain an understanding of the operation of schools. Parent awareness is also a major component of the program.
- *Bidialectal Approach to Teaching Standard Australian English*: This program is designed to increase teachers' understanding of Aboriginal English and to improve Aboriginal students' understanding of the use of language for specific purposes. Training for teachers and Aboriginal communities is provided and school/community resources are developed.
- *Numeracy Strategy*: The purpose of this strategy is to improve numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students through *Maths in Context for Aboriginal Students*, *Count Me In Too* and *Counting On* training for Aboriginal Education Assistants, a *Numeracy Awareness Training Package* for Aboriginal parents and community members, and the dissemination of good practice in programs, teaching and curriculum for numeracy.

### *Curriculum development*

- *Our Story, Telling IT*: This multimedia education program is designed to assist primary and secondary Aboriginal students, teachers and Aboriginal Education Assistants to collect, store, organise and publish information and images with the aim of producing a multimedia product such as a website or CD-ROM that tells stories about the local Aboriginal community.

### *Aboriginal teachers*

- *Employment and Career Development Programs*: This is a priority employment and transfer program for Aboriginal teachers. An *Aboriginal Mentor Program*, *Aboriginal Career Pathways Program* and the Bachelor of Education (Secondary) – Indigenous Studies component are also offered as part of this program.

### **Vocational education and training sector**

In recent years TAFE NSW has continually increased the overall Aboriginal student enrolment numbers, completion rates and award levels in vocational education and training. The number of enrolments by Aboriginal people in TAFE NSW has grown by 25 percent, from 15 715 in 1999 to 19 632 in 2003. TAFE

NSW has also developed accredited Vocational Education and Training in-school courses for Year 11 and 12 students that are aligned with the National Training Framework and provide dual qualification for the students.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit's TAFE Educational Programs Team is responsible for the coordination of statewide policies, programs, courses and resources to improve education and training outcomes for Aboriginal students in TAFE NSW. Its role is also to develop curriculum and teaching and learning resources to support TAFE NSW Institutes, Aboriginal field staff, teaching staff and Aboriginal students. This includes the identification of demands and trends in curriculum and resource development, including National Training Packages that impact on Aboriginal student learning needs.

The work of the Aboriginal Programs Unit is underpinned by several state and national strategies and plans; in particular, the state vocational education and training plan for Aboriginal communities, *New Partners, New Learning, New South Wales*. This state plan reflects the priorities of the national Aboriginal vocational education and training strategy, *Partners in a Learning Culture*. The introduction of the national strategy, *Shaping Our Future*, in 2004 has seen a heightened focus on economic development, resulting in a shift in the direction of the team. The TAFE Educational Programs Team also works in line with the Board of Vocational Education and Training's NSW Vocational Education and Training *Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* and TAFE NSW *Strategic Directions*.

The role and structure of the TAFE Educational Programs Team is determined by a number of priorities:

- increasing Australian Qualification Framework levels and improving the articulation between levels
- improving completion rates of Aboriginal students and improving pathways from education into employment
- forging new learning alliances with communities, industry and other sectors
- increasing culturally inclusive resources and curricula
- working together to improve social, economic, cultural and educational development for Aboriginal people and communities
- developing new modules that address gaps in existing training packages.

The TAFE Educational Programs Team relies on close working relationships with a range of Departmental stakeholders such as TAFE NSW Curriculum Centres through their Program Managers; TAFE NSW Institute Aboriginal Development Managers and Aboriginal Coordinators; other teaching staff; and Aboriginal students within TAFE NSW. The team also liaises with external stakeholders such as Industry Skills Councils (previously Industry Training Advisory Bodies); industry groups and representatives; community groups and representatives; government departments; and non-government organisations, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

In line with the New South Wales Government's commitment to partnerships and a holistic approach to improving outcomes, the TAFE Educational Programs Team

has secured partnership agreements with key organisations. These agreements include:

- Memorandum of Understanding between TAFE NSW Commission and the NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
- Memorandum of Understanding between TAFE NSW Commission and Department of Aboriginal Affairs
- Memorandum of Understanding between TAFE NSW Commission and NSW Aboriginal Housing Office
- *TAFE NSW Provision for Aboriginal Offenders Implementation Plan 2004–2005* (New South Wales Department of Education and Training and New South Wales Department of Corrective Services)
- NSW Department of Corrective Services and TAFE NSW Commission Memorandum of Understanding 2002–2005
- TAFE NSW Memorandum of Understanding 2000/2001, NSW Department of Corrective Services and the Department of Education and Training.

The team supports a network of Aboriginal officers operating across 10 regional areas. The current Aboriginal TAFE NSW staff include:

- Aboriginal Development Managers (ADMs – 11 positions): The ADM is responsible for strategically coordinating and promoting Aboriginal education and training initiatives across their Institute, as well as supervising their respective staff from the Aboriginal Education and Training Unit. ADMs monitor, lead and direct the agenda on Aboriginal education in TAFE NSW.
- Aboriginal Coordinators (ACs – 28 positions): The AC assists in the development and implementation of Aboriginal education policies and programs within their Institute and liaises with the local Aboriginal community, government departments and other community organisations to inform them of any new developments by their Institute.
- Aboriginal Student Support Officers (ASSOs – 19 positions): The ASSO is generally responsible for providing Aboriginal students in TAFE NSW with advice, support services and referrals to assist students with their studies.

The TAFE Educational Programs Unit has contributed to the development and implementation of such strategies and programs as:

- Murrin Bridge Wine Project
- *Australia Post Pre-employment Training Program*
- development of apprenticeships/traineeships for Aboriginal people across the state
- development and delivery of TAFE NSW programs and courses for Aboriginal people in correctional services
- educational centres of excellence within Institutes.

The TAFE Educational Programs Team has developed a number of accredited courses specifically for Aboriginal people in partnership with key Aboriginal

organisations such as Aboriginal Land Councils, local community organisations and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in the areas of Property Management, Community Night Patrols, Cultural Site Preservations, Families, Health and Indigenous Organisation Management. Twelve Statement of Attainment courses have been developed specifically for Aboriginal people along with three Certificate I level courses, seven Certificate II courses, ten Certificate III courses, five Certificate IV courses, four Diploma level courses, and one Advanced Diploma course. A number of accredited courses with Aboriginal content have also been developed by the TAFE Educational Programs Team.

Examples of current programs include:

### *Deadly Bay: Open for Work*

*Deadly Bay: Open for Work* is a multimedia learning resource for young Aboriginal people, consisting of a CD-ROM, workbook and teachers notes. The aim of the resource is to develop the language, literacy and numeracy skills required to demonstrate key competencies in the context of six industries – Business Services, Horticulture, Community Recreation, Seafood, Hospitality and Tourism. The resource is based on meaningful, activity-based learning approaches.

### *Information Technology for Aboriginal Women*

Two enrichment modules have been developed to be delivered with the national Certificate II in Information Technology, catering for Aboriginal women as learners. The modules provide a framework for contextualising delivery around Aboriginal perspectives on IT and include a strong focus on IT-related work opportunities available to Aboriginal women.

### *Indigenous Organisational Training*

The Indigenous Organisational Training is based on the delivery of Certificate IV and Diploma in Business (Governance) to the Board members and Management of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) organisations in New South Wales.

## **Interagency initiatives**

The Department of Education and Training is involved at the regional level in a number of key government strategies linking schools and families with health, welfare and family support programs at the regional level, such as:

- *Families First* is the New South Wales Government's prevention and early intervention strategy to help parents give their children a good start in life. It is delivered jointly by five government agencies – New South Wales Health and Area Health Services, Community Services, Education and Training, Housing and Ageing, Disability and Home Care – in partnership with parents, community organisations and local government.
- *Better Families Regional Strategy* has been developed and funded by the New South Wales Government in order to achieve better outcomes for

young people in New South Wales by improving how communities and services support young people and respond to their needs.

- *The Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy (ACYFS)* is an initiative of the New South Wales Government to support Aboriginal parents, families and communities who are raising children under 18 years of age. This strategy will be progressed within the *Families First* and *Better Futures* policy frameworks, while recognising the need to establish partnerships with Aboriginal communities to address a broad range of issues that impact on people's lives.

The NSW Department of Education and Training is represented on a number of state and national advisory bodies focusing on Aboriginal education and training, such as:

- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' Taskforce on Indigenous Education, Employment, Training and Youth: This advisory body provides policy advice on Aboriginal education and training issues including cross-sectoral matters with the aim of enhancing outcomes for Australia's Aboriginal people.
- Australian National Training Authority's Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council: This advisory body is the national council for quality assurance and partnership initiatives for Aboriginal education.

The Department of Education and Training also liaises with independent Aboriginal education and training providers in New South Wales that offer an alternative in education and training for Aboriginal people. Examples of Aboriginal providers include: Tranby College in Glebe; Booroongen Djugun in Kempsey; and the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association in Sydney. These organisations have developed localised practices, programs and services aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal people of all ages.

For a number of years the Department of Education and Training has convened an Aboriginal Education and Training Advisory Committee to provide specialist support and high-level policy advice to the Director-General. The advice covers the full range of Aboriginal education and training from preschool to higher education. The committee includes representatives from the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, NSW AECG, New South Wales Office of the Board of Studies, Primary Principals Association, Secondary Principals Council, senior Departmental representatives, New South Wales Teachers Federation and the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training is a lead agency involved in the development of the new Aboriginal Affairs Plan for New South Wales, *Two Ways Together*. The Department considers its involvement in the development of this landmark plan to be one of the highlights in Aboriginal education and training in recent years. The new Aboriginal Affairs Plan will guide the way in which the New South Wales Government does business with Aboriginal people over the next 10 years.

The Plan provides a framework for building stronger and more effective partnerships between the New South Wales Government and Aboriginal communities to address the social disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people.

As part of the *Two Ways Together* process, the Department of Education and Training has led a cluster working group of key government agencies to address priority areas, set targets and monitor progress on Aboriginal education and training. *Two Ways Together* will assist the Department in providing for a more coordinated response and flexible approach to delivering services to Aboriginal people and students at both a regional and local level, and for the participation of Aboriginal people in decisions about how services are delivered in Aboriginal education and training.

The State Government has provided DET with around \$1.4 million in 2004/2005 to support the Youth Excel and Scholarships components of *Two Ways Together*.

### **Murdi Paaki COAG Trial**

In April 2002 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to trial working together with Aboriginal communities in up to 10 selected regions in Australia to provide more flexible programs and services based on priorities agreed with communities. In August 2003 a Shared Responsibility Agreement for the New South Wales Trial was signed.

The trial is taking place in the Murdi Paaki ATSIC region. This region includes the following 16 communities: Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia. A Shared Responsibility Agreement will be made between each of the 16 communities and Australian and State Governments. These agreements will:

- provide a basis for cooperation and partnership
- focus on priorities identified by communities based on the New South Wales Agreement
- identify outcomes agreed between communities and governments.

The Steering Committee formed for the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial consists of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and the New South Wales Departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Education and Training (DET). While DEST and DET play a coordinating role, relevant agencies will be required to participate in the development and implementation of Shared Responsibility Agreements across the 16 communities.

The New South Wales Agreement focuses on improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people; improving educational attainment and school retention; helping families to raise healthy children; and strengthening community and regional governance structures.

A team of officers from DEST, DET and the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council has commenced negotiations with some Community Working Parties and government agencies based on community plans and identified priority areas.

Local agreements will be developed with all 16 Community Working Parties to address issues at an individual community level. These agreements will outline the basis for service delivery in the 16 sites.

## **Future developments**

The Australian Government through DEST is currently negotiating quadrennial agreements across all states and territories with regard to Commonwealth Indigenous Education Funding for the period from 2005 to 2008.

Of the \$2100 million to be provided nationally over four years:

- \$641.6 million is for *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives (IESIP)*
- \$280.9 million is for *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA)*
- \$905.3 million is for *ABSTUDY*
- \$110.1 million is for *Away From Base (AWB) Assistance*
- \$121.3 million is for *Indigenous Support Funding (ISF)*.

The precise impact on New South Wales Government schools and TAFE NSW funding from the Australian Government has not been identified at this stage and will be subject to the Principles of Reform that will underpin the forthcoming agreement.

## **Principles of Reform**

The Principles of Reform that accompany the Australian Government's funding provision over the 2005 to 2008 quadrennial include:

- *Redirection of Existing Resources to Initiatives that Work.*
  - The proposal to include IESIP and IEDA funding under the *Indigenous Education (Targeted) Assistance* legislation should:
    - Formalise IESIP and IEDA funding provision for the quadrennial.
    - Commit DEST to long term funding provision.
    - Give long term funding expectation to schools.
    - Enable the interchange of IESIP and IEDA funding to give more emphasis to IEDA programs such as In Class Tuition.
- *Greater Weighting of Resources to Students of Greatest Disadvantage – Those in Remote Areas.*
  - Students in newly designated Remote, Rural/Provincial Areas and Metropolitan preschools will attract increased per capita funding based on escalation to reflect the Wage Cost Index following the application of the 2001 ABS Census.
  - Other student per capita rates will remain at the relevant 2004 level thus releasing IESIP funds for other initiatives.

- *Commitment to Improve Mainstream Service Provision to Indigenous Education.*
  - New performance measures will be tied to funding through the range of Indigenous Education Agreements.
  - Annual *Indigenous Education Statements (IES)* will be required from States/territories.
  - Systems will be required to report on how mainstream funding is expected to improve Indigenous education outcomes.
  
- *Strengthened Monitoring, Reporting and Accountability Framework.*
  - Systems will be required to agree to performance indicators and targets on Indigenous education outcomes and attendance.
  - Systems must agree to the monitoring of their performance and expenditure, and to report against the agreed performance indicators and targets.
  - States/territories must transparently report:
    - Their expected and actual expenditure on Indigenous education from their own resources; and
    - Provide for Australian Government intervention in the case of underperformance against agreed indicators or for failure to report.



# **Review of Aboriginal Education**

## ***Chapter 3***

**Barrwayaygam, Miindalaygam**

***“Growing and Learning”:  
The Life Course***

The translation of *Growing and Learning* in the Gumbaynggir language is

*Growing (and) learning*

## Introduction to “Growing and Learning”

A significant feature of the Review methodology was the extent of consultation undertaken with Aboriginal communities, schools, TAFE campuses and community organisations.

Members of the Review Secretariat facilitated 14 field trips during which Review panel members met with more than four thousand teachers, parents, students and community members.<sup>19</sup> Field trip teams comprised members of the Review Reference Group, Review Secretariat, members of the AECG, employees of DET, both school and TAFE-based, and on several occasions, members of the NSW Teachers Federation.

In all field trips, the composition of the Review teams included both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The Secretariat member assigned to the field trip was responsible for the compilation of a field trip report.

The field trips provided an opportunity for the team to share the experiences and hopes of the many students, their parents and teachers who contributed to the Review.

As the field trips unfolded, the writing team was challenged by the wealth of data collected in the consultative process and considered a range of strategies to effectively analyse the findings.

The writers of this chapter have elected to capture the richness of the data by detailing the opportunities and challenges presented to Aboriginal learners throughout their journey of “life-long learning” as a narrative addressing the nature of the educational process of Aboriginal learners. The writers have described this journey as one of “Growing and Learning”.

Through its six sections, this chapter of the Report attempts to:

- describe the range of educational opportunities and programs relevant to learners of different ages and stages
- identify issues inhibiting improved student participation, retention and performance
- identify policies and programs that have resulted in improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal students
- suggest possible initiatives that will “narrow the gap” in the achievement of Aboriginal students when compared with other learners.

While the responsibility for writing each of the six sections was assigned to one or two members of the Secretariat, each of the sections was drafted as a series of group workshops reflecting the input from a wide range of field trips, submissions and broader consultation.

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<sup>19</sup> The itineraries of the major field trips are provided in Appendix F.

The Review Team members who assembled and contributed much of the material in this chapter were:

- Sharon Grose                      Sections 1 and 2
- Louise Bye                         Section 3
- Cindy Berwick                    Section 4
- Peter Wilson                      Section 4
- Rosemary Livingstone         Section 5
- Sue Hanley                        Sections 5 and 6
- Gillian Goozee                    Section 6.

Many of the observations made in this chapter are further developed in Chapter 4 of the Report, which details recommendations.

## Section 1: Prior to School

The Aboriginal population is the fastest-growing and youngest population in New South Wales, with over 50 percent of Aboriginal people under the age of 25 years. This presents a challenge for government agencies and Aboriginal communities to provide for the diverse needs of Aboriginal people, which may not be met through traditional mainstream models.

As at the 2001 Census, the proportion of the Indigenous population of New South Wales 15 years of age was 40.1%, compared to 20.8% of the total New South Wales population (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003b).

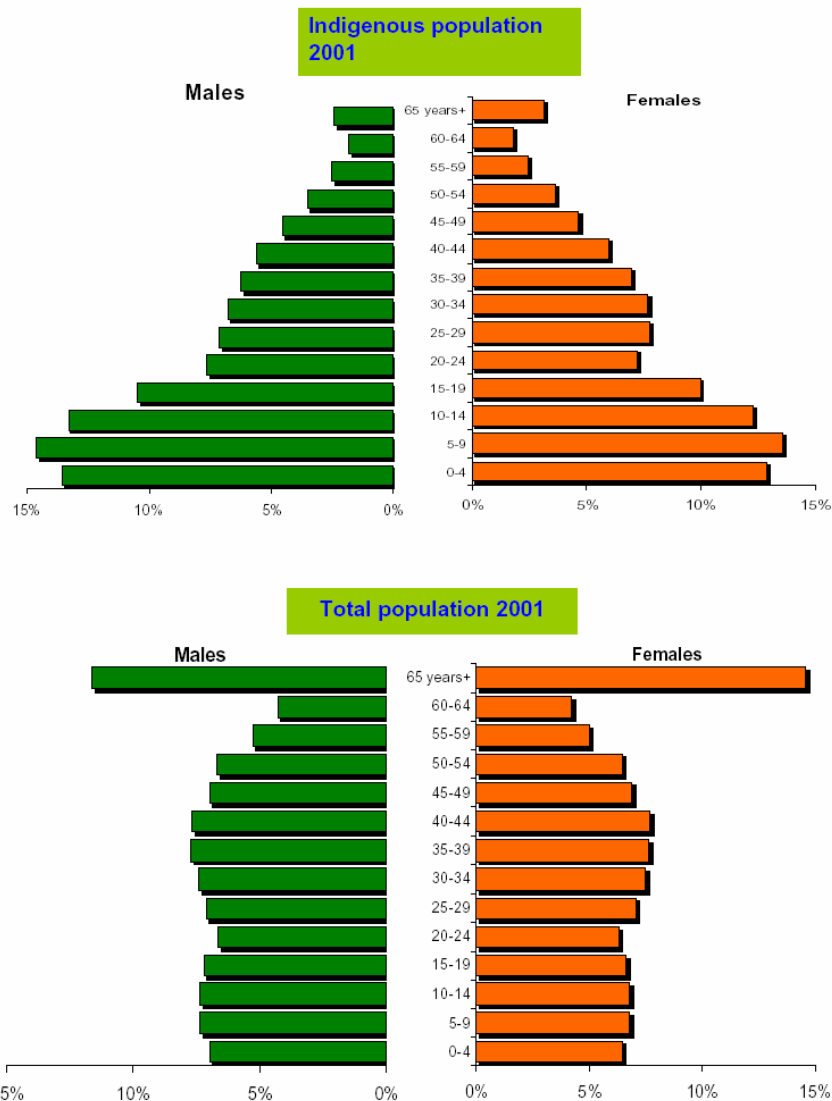


Figure 3.1.1: Aboriginal population and total population of New South Wales in 2001, by age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003)

In common with many other Western nations, the non-Aboriginal population of Australia is rapidly ageing, whereas the Aboriginal population is experiencing increased growth in young age groups.

The focus of governments in Australia, however, has begun to place greater emphasis on addressing the impact of an ageing population. Policies and programs will need to be focused on addressing the unique structure of the Indigenous population, and hence will need to be focussed on young Indigenous people and families if they are to make any headway in addressing the inequality experienced by Indigenous families and children (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2003)

## **Aboriginal life experiences**

An Aboriginal child born in New South Wales in 2004 will be born into any one of a diverse range of communities across the state. These communities may differ in geographical location, population size and density, socioeconomic and social cohesion levels, though what these estimated 2465 Aboriginal babies<sup>20</sup> will have in common is that they are more likely to:<sup>21</sup>

- live in poverty

The unemployment rate for Aborigines is over three times the non-Aboriginal rate (23 percent compared to 7.2 percent).

- be of low birth weight

While births to Aboriginal women in New South Wales represent only 2.4 percent of all births, low birth weight occurs in 12.6 percent of Aboriginal babies as compared to the non-Aboriginal rate of 6.3 percent.

- have substantially worse health than other Australians

The death rate for Aboriginal people in New South Wales was over twice that for all Australians in 2000 (12 compared to 5.8 per 1000 respectively).

Aboriginal Australians had considerably lower life expectancies than non-Aboriginal Australians (ABS experimental estimates). Average life expectancy for Aboriginal males at birth was 56.3 years and for Aboriginal females at birth was 63.6 years in New South Wales in 2000.

- experience hearing problems (otitis media)

Approximately 80 percent of Aboriginal children tested under the ATSI ECSAG NIELNS<sup>22</sup> project had some form of hearing problem.

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<sup>20</sup> Calculated from ABS Experimental Projections of the Indigenous Population, Australia, Cat. No. 3231.0.

<sup>21</sup> Derived from NSW DET submission to the Review.

<sup>22</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group, National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

- experience domestic violence and neglect

Aboriginal children are four times more likely to be on a care and protection order than non-Aboriginal children (Stanley, 2003).

- not access prior-to-school services.

The *2001 Census* shows that in New South Wales, of the 15 860 Aboriginal children aged 0 to 4 years, only 2319 accessed prior-to-school services at that time. While the number of Aboriginal children aged 0 to 5 years is increasing, the number of preschool places is not growing in commensurate proportion.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of the above items are indicators of health and wellbeing. Aboriginal people are over-represented in all the significant health outcomes including an over-representation of Aboriginal babies with low birth weight. Low birth weight is one of the most important predictors of a baby's life chances of health and wellbeing (Stanley, 2003).

The importance of Aboriginal children's early life experiences on their future development and the short and long-term impact of health and wellbeing indicators on children's life chances, including their ability to attend and engage in educational programs throughout their life, was identified by all stakeholders throughout the Review.

Parents, grandparents, Elders and community workers repeatedly commented about the need for Aboriginal communities to support Aboriginal parents and families as well as highlighting the urgent work that needs to be done in collaboration with government and non-government agencies to make strong and resilient families.

### **The first three years**

The first three years of a child's life are more critical to their lifelong development and chances than previously recognised. Nurturing and supportive relationships established from birth positively affect brain development and, equally, stress (as experienced in domestic violence situations) and lack of bonding and attachment to parents and caregivers can adversely affect babies' brain development. These experiences can affect the neurons in the brain that are responsible for learning and emotional development and have a lifetime impact (Fish, 2002).

In New South Wales the Department of Health is responsible for health outcomes, the Department of Community Services is responsible for the care and protection of children and the majority of preschools across the state. So what is the role of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training in the lives of Aboriginal children prior to school?

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<sup>23</sup> "Early Childhood Working Group Paper" for presentation to the Review Reference Group meeting, 2 March 2004.

*Education is a lifelong process and knowledge is not learned at one particular time or in one particular place.*

– Aboriginal Elder, interview

The Review teams attended many community meetings across the state where community members and Aboriginal staff from a range of agencies were present. At these meetings, there was strong acknowledgement that Aboriginal parents play a critical role in providing positive experiences for their children from birth and that the first educators for Aboriginal students are their immediate and extended family. The Aboriginal community, especially and most importantly the Elders, are perceived to play the next most important role.

There was an equally strong acknowledgement of the issues related to some Aboriginal parents' difficulty in providing support and assistance to their children.

There is concern that many young Aboriginal parents need support in parenting. For many Aboriginal parents, their own negative experience of school resulted in low levels of attainment and negative attitudes towards formal education. Parents' attitudes to education and the value of school are critical factors linked to successful student outcomes. For those Aboriginal parents with low levels of literacy and numeracy, school may be yet another confronting and overwhelming place, one to be avoided.

These issues and strategies to address the indicators of health and wellbeing are not the domain of a single agency but concern a number of government departments, including education, health and community services. All are important targets in reforming Aboriginal education.

### **What is the whole of government approach?**

The Review team recognises and acknowledges that the values, circumstances, priorities and needs of Aboriginal families differ markedly across the state. The degree to which any or all of these factors will impact on the health, wellbeing and development of young Aboriginal children will also depend on the health, wellbeing and social cohesion of the broader community and the level, sustainability and coordination of government and non-government support to the broader community.

Community meetings were resoundingly critical in their approach to service provision by government and non-government agencies:

*They [government departments] need to get their act together, start working as one, or at the very least start talking to one another.*

– Aboriginal community member, community meeting

Community opinion stated that the Review presents an opportunity to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to address the legacies of previous government policies, most notably colonisation, assimilation and the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.



It is imperative that the intervention and service provision for Aboriginal families is a planned and coordinated holistic approach.

This is also known as “joined up service delivery”; that is, instead of each department or agency working in isolation, a collaborative approach is what Aboriginal communities espouse and government has adopted in order to improve service delivery.

It is also the basis for *Two Ways Together*: the New South Wales Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003–2012 which aims to develop committed partnerships between Aboriginal people and government and to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people across a range of indicators, including health, education, housing and infrastructure, families and young people, culture and heritage, and economic development.

*Two Ways Together* was mentioned in discussions and submissions as a positive way to implement long-awaited change for service delivery to Aboriginal communities.

The New South Wales Government has developed an integrated framework of programs and initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people and their families and communities including *Families First*, *Better Futures* and the *Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy*, which in its first year is focusing on developing partnerships between government agencies and Aboriginal people.

*Families First* supports families to raise healthy children and build their skills and confidence in parenting. *Better Futures* is designed to improve government and community supports and services for young people aged 9 to 18 years (New South Wales Government, Cabinet Office 2004).

### **Schools as Community Centres**

An initiative that received enthusiastic support from a range of sources is the *Schools as Community Centres* program.

A number of the schools visited on field trips were sites for the *Schools as Community Centres* program. Principals, parents, teachers, school education directors, interagency workers and many submissions support and endorse the program because it promotes an interagency, collaborative approach to the issues parents face in the early years of their children's lives.

A facilitator, located at each site, works with local communities, families and service providers in developing and implementing initiatives for a clearly identified target group of families with children 0–8 years, with a particular focus on the years prior to school entry.

Enjoying widespread interest and support, the program is a working example of how NSW DET can work in cooperation with the Departments of Health, Housing

and Community Services to overcome the many difficulties parents across the state face when attempting to locate appropriate services and support.

Many people interviewed pointed out that it is not the role of schools to address these issues in isolation from other government agencies and support services. However, the alignment of agencies and services at the school site allowed schools to be an active partner in addressing issues of educational disadvantage and forging positive relationships with families, prior to their children attending Kindergarten.

On the field trips, many people commented that they saw schools and education as the lead agency. It was a source of pride and recognition for many schools that they were an integral part of the community. Principals at a state *Dare to Lead* workshop in Kings Cross (28–29 June 2004) commented that they would like to take a more active role in building interagency processes at the school site.

The program enhances the opportunities for engaging parents and family members in the life of the school, promoting the benefits of education to Aboriginal parents and re-engaging Aboriginal parents in learning. It also promotes interagency partners' understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.

The *Schools as Community Centres* success is due to the centre being located within a school, using a community development model to work with families with children from birth to eight years, with a focus on the years prior to school entry, and developing appropriate activities in partnership with the community.

A number of the *Schools as Community Centres* visited highlighted successful programs for Aboriginal parents and children including:

- extensive transition from home to school activities including strong links with local childcare providers and supported through playgroups, parent groups and connections with Aboriginal Child Services
- mothers groups and sisters groups providing opportunities to learn new skills and providing opportunities for social interaction and parenting in a supportive environment
- Aboriginal trainee child carers participating in supported playgroups
- parent education opportunities including literacy and computer classes
- healthy mums, healthy babies groups promoting positive maternal and infant health
- *Feed the Family* initiative providing opportunities to develop skills in purchasing and preparing nutritious foods
- morning bus run contributing to increased school attendance and stronger links with the community
- support for Aboriginal participation in community networks
- *Art in the Park* supported playgroups offering participation of Aboriginal families in early childhood activities in a relaxed informal setting. Other services are involved in this initiative including the Early Childhood Nurse.
- school holiday activities in partnership with the local neighbourhood centre providing safe activities for families during school holidays

- otitis media project in partnership with the Health Service raising awareness of nutrition, hygiene, listening and nose blowing.

The Review team reported that, for many communities, *Schools as Community Centres* projects have contributed to the development of stronger interagency networks and improved coordination and implementation of services for young Aboriginal children and their families.

### **Interagency collaboration**

One of the most prevalent health issues affecting Aboriginal children is otitis media. Otitis media is the general medical term for inflammation or infection of the middle ear. It may often be difficult to detect without examination.

Aboriginal babies as young as six to eight weeks of age can suffer from eardrum perforations and hearing loss as a result of otitis media and this can continue through developmental years.

Normal hearing relies on the middle ear being full of air. Otitis media stops air entering the middle ear and fluid builds up in the middle ear cavity, preventing effective vibration of the eardrum. There is reduction of the transmission of sound waves through the middle ear resulting in a conductive hearing loss. The hearing loss can fluctuate creating difficulties in identifying chronic otitis media.

Normal brain development in babies and children relies on stimulation and input from their senses. A hearing loss, even if only present for a short time and especially in the first three years of life, can affect learning development. This is the time children are most at risk of developing otitis media.

Children experiencing chronic otitis media in infancy can show up to two years' delay in reading and communication skills development, and this delay can continue well into their educational years. The high numbers of Aboriginal children in need of specialised educational support reflects this fact.

As part of the *Two Ways Together*: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003–2012, there is a program to extend cross-agency strategies on otitis media.

### **Is the student ready for school?**

*It is important that Aboriginal children start school positively. Their early experience of success, or otherwise, affects future success at school and feelings of competence and self-esteem.*

– ACLO (Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer)

As discussed previously, some Aboriginal parents have had negative experiences of schooling, limited exposure to school and limited success in literacy and numeracy. An essential part of preparing young Aboriginal children for school is providing “school ready” experiences for caregivers and parents.

Such programs provide parents with strategies for preparing and supporting their children for school by understanding the way things are done, before they reach the school gate. Such proactive strategies address parents' negative experiences of schooling; strengthen communication between the school and community; and encourage Aboriginal parents' engagement with the school.

#### **The HIPPY program**

The *Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters* (HIPPY) program is an early intervention initiative funded through the Australian Government's *Stronger Families and Communities strategy*. HIPPY involves parents in their children's education the year prior to starting school and concludes at the end of the first year of school, Kindergarten. Aboriginal home tutors are employed to work with their own children and assist other parents through weekly activities.

The tutors are role models for the other parents, simultaneously developing their skills and confidence as educators. There are group meetings for parents and caregivers and regular sessions for tutors, facilitated by the program coordinator. Initial reporting of the success of the program indicates that the first group of students to graduate from the program at one school is now well settled in their second year of school (School report, field trip).

#### **Parents as Teachers program**

The *Parents as Teachers* program, part of the New South Wales *Families First* strategy, is for families with children from birth to five. It is an early childhood parenting education family support program. Parents are supported through parent education programs, regular home visits, group meetings and printed information. The program aims to promote children's cognitive, language, social and motor development as these are recognised as being critical to future positive learning and development (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003a).

Prior-to-school services encompass a range of activities and services including long day care, playgroups and occasional care, many of which are available to children aged from birth to six years.

### **Preschools**

During the year prior to Kindergarten many children in New South Wales attend what is commonly known as preschool. It may in fact be long day care provision or preschool, which is generally a preparatory program for school.

Preschool attendance is generally believed to be beneficial for young children starting school, both in terms of attitudes to learning and development of social skills. Although it is difficult to isolate the effects of preschool education on subsequent literacy development, there is evidence that children who experience quality preschool programs find the transition to school a much easier process than children who do not (Gullo & Burton, 1993).

This impression was also reported to the Review Team by schools with preschools attached, although few schools formally tracked the learning outcomes of students who had been “preschoolers”. This is an area that requires further research.

Aboriginal children are poorly represented in the preschool sector at local, state and national levels. In 2003, of the Aboriginal children aged from 0 to 4 years in New South Wales, 348 Aboriginal children attended a government-funded preschool, representing approximately 10 percent of the 3784 children enrolled.

**Table 3.1.1: New South Wales preschool census (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004b)**

	2000	2001	2002	2003			Total
	Total	Total	Total	Urban	Rural	Remote	
In govt preschools	244	261	361	215	88	45	348
In non-govt preschools	2142	2176	2315	428	1596	337	2361
Males	1251	1292	1396	332	890	205	1427
Females	1135	1145	1278	311	794	172	1277
Gender unknown			2			5	5
Age ≤3 yrs	804	878	888	165	623	132	920
Age 4 yrs	1271	1272	1441	386	817	203	1406
Age ≥5 yrs	274	287	345	90	235	42	367
Age unknown	37		2	2	9	5	16
Participation age 3 yrs	21.5%	22.3%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Participation age 4 yrs	33.6%	32.5%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Participation age 5 yrs	7.3%	7.2%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
≤5 sessions per week	1524	1509	1812	377	1207	275	1859
>5 sessions per week	862	928	862	266	477	102	845
Sessions unknown			2			5	5
Percentage >5 sessions	36.1%	38.1%	32.2%	41.4%	28.3%	26.7%	31.2%
Total Aboriginal Children	2386	2437	2676	643	1684	382	2709

The *2003 National Indigenous Preschool Census: Summary report* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004b) indicates that 52 percent of Aboriginal children enrolled in preschool in New South Wales were four years of age, 87 percent were enrolled in non-government preschools and there was a slightly higher number of Aboriginal boys than girls enrolled.

In New South Wales the majority of preschools are the responsibility of the Department of Community Services. DET currently operates 79 preschools attached to government schools, which provide quality preschool education programs for children in the year before entry into Kindergarten. Approximately 4000 children attend departmental preschools each year (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003a).

The New South Wales Government is expanding the DET preschool provision with an additional 21 new preschools to be established within government schools

by 2005. The new services will all be located in identified areas of greatest need and will provide programs for children who are unable to access preschool education. A majority of these new preschools will service Aboriginal communities (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003a).

### **DET preschools in Aboriginal communities**

DET provides funds for 11 preschools in Aboriginal communities using *Indigenous Educations Strategic Initiatives Programme* (IESIP) funding. The funding covers the employment of a full-time teacher and full-time Aboriginal Education Assistant. Each preschool has an advisory committee with school and Aboriginal community representation.

The preschools aim to increase access to formal early childhood education experiences for Aboriginal children and encourage a smooth transition from home to school. The preschools provide culturally appropriate programs in consultation with their local Aboriginal communities. Skills and understandings in literacy and numeracy are developed through a structured play environment which values home experiences and incorporates Aboriginal English (NSW Department of Education and Training Annual Report, 2003).

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funds a number of preschools in New South Wales, which are managed by a preschool advisory committee. The majority of Aboriginal students attending these preschools go on to enrol in New South Wales Government schools.

Perhaps the most significant finding to emerge from 2002 reporting is that for IESIP-funded independent preschools, the literacy and numeracy levels for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children are similar, with around 90 percent of students displaying readiness for school (Australia, Parliament 2002).

During field trips, many primary and secondary principals commented that the key to better attendance and retention rates and improved academic performance for Aboriginal school students is improved access and participation in preschool for Aboriginal students.

*Support for Aboriginal students needs to start early, the earlier the better.*  
– Principal, interview

The field trips included visits to a range of preschools across the state, and submissions and interviews with parents, teachers and principals reinforced the importance of quality preschool experiences for Aboriginal children, involvement of Aboriginal families and community, and providing opportunities for Aboriginal preschoolers to learn about Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal history.

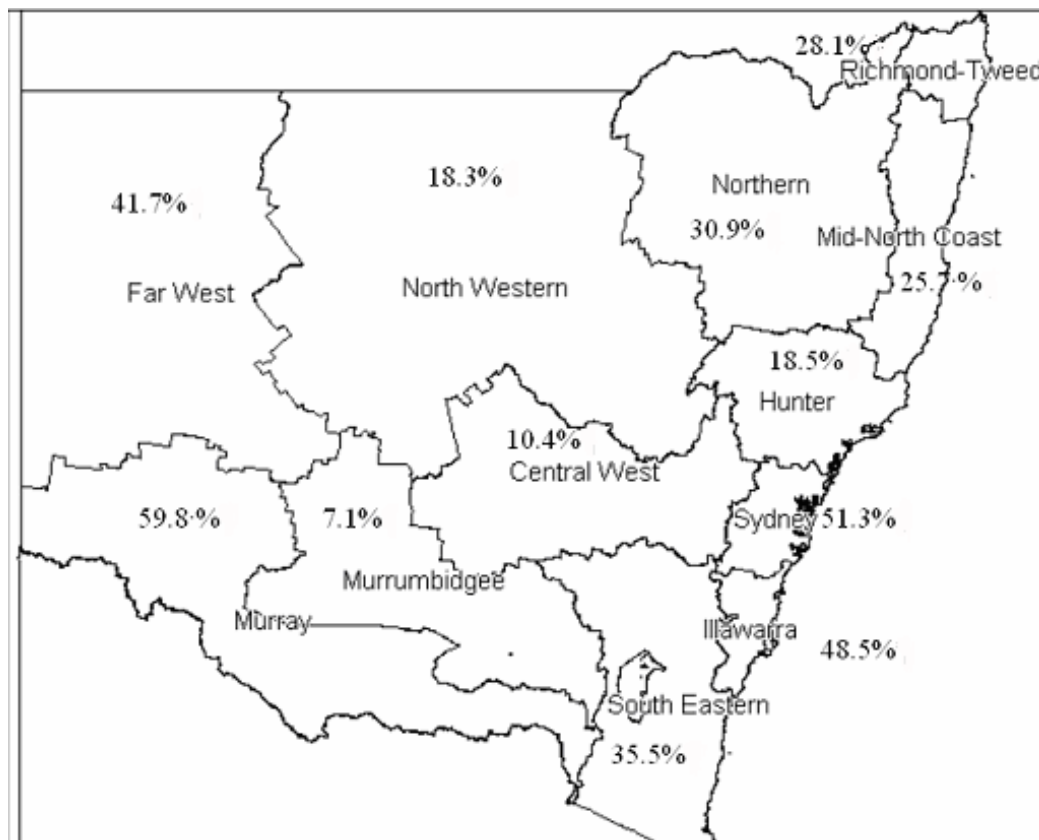
The importance of strong links between preschool and primary school was a key feature of most consultations. In many cases where the preschool is on site with the primary school the collaboration is easier and the preschools are an integral part of the whole school. For example, a mid-North Coast primary school is a *Schools as*

*Community Centre*, has an Aboriginal preschool, and has developed an authentic collaborative interagency approach to supporting Aboriginal families and children from birth to eight years.

A number of submissions and interviewees recommended that preschools be attached to primary schools and managed by DET as a way of overcoming the difficulties of working across departments with different structures and providing a seamless progression for children from preschool to primary school.

Allied to this are strong recommendations about including preschools in educational planning and professional development as the preparatory year is vital for Aboriginal children’s literacy and numeracy development and needs to provide explicit opportunities for Aboriginal children to use their home language and be taught the concepts and conventions of Standard Australian English. It would offer an effective means of sharing information and tracking Aboriginal children from one setting to another, especially children with support needs.

The 2003 *National Indigenous Preschool Census: Summary report* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004b) identifies the number of preschool sessions attended by Aboriginal children, by districts across the state as shown in Figure 3.1.2.



**Figure 3.1.2: The percentage of Aboriginal children participating in six to ten half-day preschool sessions per week by district across New South Wales.**

It is only in the Murray and Sydney districts that the majority of Aboriginal children participated in six to ten half-day sessions per week (59.8 percent and 51.3 percent respectively) in 2003. In all other districts most Aboriginal children participated in five or fewer half-day sessions per week. Only 31.2 percent of all Aboriginal children accessed preschool for more than five sessions per week. So within the small cohort of Aboriginal children who access preschool, there is an even smaller cohort who attend preschool for more than half the week.

The numbers of Aboriginal students accessing mainstream prior-to-school services is low, resulting in many Aboriginal children having difficulties in making the transition to formal schooling.

A great deal of work which has been done in studying children's transitions to school, focuses on children being "ready for school" rather than on the school being made "ready for children" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2001b).

The notion of "school ready" does not apply only to students. Teachers and school leaders are responsible for establishing positive prior-to-school relationships and supporting Aboriginal parents and students through the critical transition from home to school or from one world to another, by creating welcoming, family-oriented and parent friendly schools.

### **Transition to school programs**

The Review found that one of the most effective ways to support Aboriginal children into the formal school setting is through transition programs which prepare children for Kindergarten.

Transition to school programs provide an opportunity for Aboriginal children to participate in early childhood activities and gain a more positive start to school. Successful transition programs are dependent on the integration of the following factors:

- involvement of Aboriginal families and key Aboriginal groups in decision-making
- positive relationships and genuine collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services, key community groups and local service providers
- a learning community that promotes the sharing of information, cultural insights and expertise by all parties concerned with children's transition to school
- a holistic approach to addressing the specific health, development and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children in the context of strengthening the capacity of families and communities to meet those needs
- a dual focus on providing information and support for parents as well as quality early learning experiences for children.

Parents and teachers were enthusiastically supportive of effective transition programs as they help children and parents feel comfortable, valued and successful



in school and avoid negative outcomes. The advice from parents and teachers is that there is still a serious need to develop strategies to support transition to school for all Aboriginal children, including children attending Aboriginal preschools, DET preschools, other early childhood services and particularly children who do not access any prior-to-school services.

The *Successful Transition from Home to School Program* (funded under the NIELNS strategy) is designed to provide a smooth transition to school for Aboriginal students who do not have access to a preschool service. The program fosters effective partnerships between school staff and Aboriginal families, offering parents an increased understanding of the educational needs of their children.

A Central School in the far west has established positive links to the Commonwealth-funded preschool through the *Kindy Go* transition to school program. Aboriginal students at the end of their first year of formal schooling demonstrated overall improvement in the achievement of Early Stage 1 English and Mathematics syllabus outcomes. This success was attributed to the transition program in assisting Aboriginal students to make a confident start at school.

According to the discussion paper *Education of Teachers of Indigenous Students in Early Childhood Services and Schools* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2001b), enrolment and attendance rates of Aboriginal children in early childhood services are decreasing and the trend does not seem to be changing.

The Review identified a number of barriers that prevent Aboriginal children from accessing prior-to-school services including the following:

- A major disparity exists in the availability and quality of prior-to-school services in smaller, remote and isolated communities. In other communities, there are waiting lists with insufficient places for children.
- A lack of transport options hinders many Aboriginal families from accessing preschool and other services in metropolitan, regional and remote areas of the state. In the past, the Australian Government funded buses for independent Aboriginal preschools and this was frequently the only means of accessing services for Aboriginal families. Many preschool and primary teachers, parents and principals noted the importance and benefits of having a bus to service Aboriginal communities.
- High levels of unemployment, low-income and single-parent families and lack of education about entitlements and subsidies create affordability issues for Aboriginal families in their efforts to access prior-to-school services. The level of access to preschool education across Australia varies, where fees are charged in some states and not in others and where universal access is provided only in some jurisdictions. It is worth noting that in New South Wales preschool education is not universal and fees are charged.
- Aboriginal families are less comfortable in using services that are not inclusive of the language and cultural practices of their specific communities.

The review also found that the lack of qualified early childhood teachers and Aboriginal early childhood teachers impacts on the quality and number of prior-to-school programs, particularly preschool provision. The lack of cultural awareness and cultural knowledge among teachers affects the quality of preschool programs for Aboriginal children.

A recent independent inquiry into the provision of universal access to high quality preschool education across Australia, the National Preschool Education Inquiry (Walker, 2004b), identified similar issues and found that significant barriers currently exist across Australia, which prevent universal access to preschool education.

Other issues that are relevant to Aboriginal families who move between states include differences in terminology for preschool and the first year of school and differences in entry age to preschool and the first year of school, all serving to add to the confusion and lack of coordination of early childhood services (Australian Education Union, 2004). Steps are currently being taken to address these matters at a national level.

The development of community-controlled Aboriginal preschools through DEST and IESIP funding has resulted in a high number of successful preschool centres. These centres are characterised by:

- the high level of Aboriginal people involved: aunts, uncles, Elders, parents, childcare workers
- an advisory committee that recommends on the educational programs, operational processes and administrative functions
- a curriculum that is child-centred and culturally inclusive
- an understanding and acceptance of Aboriginal English and early identification, detection and strategies to address otitis media
- strong links to interagency support and Aboriginal community knowledge.

There is anecdotal evidence that some of the Aboriginal children who thrive in this environment meet a totally unfamiliar environment when they arrive at school and the benefits of their preschool experiences are not recognised by their teachers and so are negated.

The years before school play a vital role in preparing Aboriginal students, Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal communities for schooling.

*For Aboriginal children to experience a successful engagement with lifelong learning then early childhood education and care is where that begins.*

– Gary Moore, Director, Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS)  
submission to Aboriginal Education Review, March 2004, WM092

Better coordination and integration of prior-to-school service delivery to Aboriginal communities by government, non-government and Aboriginal community organisations will have little impact unless there is an equal and parallel effort by schools to ensure Aboriginal students establish themselves as learners within the context of school.

There is a need for sustained effort and commitment by all the key players to listen and respond to the voices of Aboriginal parents, caregivers, Elders and Aboriginal community members and to bring to the table expertise, funding and a concerted effort to develop a strong interagency framework and support for Aboriginal children, their parents and their communities.

As stated by Perry and Dockett in their submission to the Review:

*Effective [transition] programs don't just occur: they are the product of much collaboration, planning, evaluation and revision.*

– Bob Perry and Sue Dockett, Starting School Research Project, University of Western Sydney, submission to Aboriginal Education Review, March 2004, EM035

## Section 2: The Early Years of Primary Education

Schools are an integral part of mainstream Australian society. When children enter school, they are progressively provided with the skills, knowledge and understandings to participate in the wider society through a body of knowledge that aligns closely to the mainstream.

Aboriginal communities hold a body of skills, knowledge and understandings that define and represent them as Aboriginal or First Peoples. Aboriginal people seek an education that leads to self-determination and equal participation in society.

The role of the primary school is to build upon Aboriginal children's cultural, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical potential to allow them to engage fully in learning and to make positive choices about their future direction and their further education.

For centuries, education has been used as a tool of assimilation, and this has been the Indigenous experience of western education (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

In interviews conducted on the field trips, Aboriginal parents and community members strongly stated that they want their children to be successful in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds and contribute positively to both.

We fail our Aboriginal students if we do not ensure that they develop the necessary skills for success in non-Aboriginal contexts ... Classrooms and learning environments need to provide the conditions in which students learn the skills necessary to operate in different contexts (Nakata, 2003).

Primary schools and most importantly teachers have an integral role in partnership with Aboriginal parents and community members in accepting and valuing this difference rather than devaluing and reinforcing this difference.

In New South Wales, children may begin formal schooling at 4½ years of age and it is compulsory to enrol them by their sixth birthday. The first year of formal schooling in the primary years is Kindergarten.

The curriculum in the primary years consists of six key learning areas (KLAs):

- Creative and Practical Arts
- English
- Human Society and Its Environment
- Mathematics
- Personal Development, Health, Physical Education
- Science and Technology.

Teaching and learning in primary years, as well as assessing and reporting student achievement, are based on the learning outcomes and curriculum content specified for each KLA.

Teachers design learning experiences to help students achieve syllabus outcomes, which are described in stages that relate to years of primary schooling:

- Early Stage 1: Kindergarten
- Stage 1: Years 1 and 2
- Stage 2: Years 3 and 4
- Stage 3: Years 5 and 6.

### **Aboriginal students in the early primary years**

There is great diversity among Aboriginal students in terms of academic achievement, socioeconomic status, geographical location, cultural knowledge and family structures.

The number of Aboriginal students in the years of early primary, Kindergarten to Year 2, is increasing. In 2003 there were 9393 Aboriginal students, an increase of 2271 students since 1996.

These students are enrolled in 1094 primary schools and 51 central schools, and 14.8 percent of these Aboriginal students are enrolled in a school with an Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA).

In 2003 the majority of Aboriginal primary school students, 59.8 percent, were in non-metropolitan districts, and 40.2 percent were in metropolitan districts.

### **The role of education in overcoming social and economic disadvantage**

A strong theme present in research material, submissions and data from field trips is that education plays a vital role in understanding and addressing a student's or community's level of social disadvantage or poverty.

Aboriginal communities, a number of school leaders and school staff indicated that the impact of educational disadvantage on Aboriginal students is made more complex by dispossession, disempowerment and racism experienced by Aboriginal communities.

Beresford and Partington (2003) point out that a "deficit" view relating to Aboriginal students (although discredited by informed educationalists) persists and that while this may remove blame, it does not provide educators with the knowledge and understanding to "remedy the situation".

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) paper *A Case for Change: A Review of Contemporary Research on Indigenous Education Outcomes* outlines the need for a new approach to both research and policy on Aboriginal outcomes.

Research must be more holistic, broader-based, forward looking and proactive, aiming to resolve issues, to achieve and support educational equality for Indigenous people (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, p. 45)

## **The importance of the first year at school**

Anecdotal evidence from primary school staff indicates that a high proportion of Aboriginal students begin school before they turn five, many without the benefits of prior-to-school educational experiences.

The importance of a positive relationship between staff and Aboriginal parents and caregivers from the first day of school is critical.

A principal in the Riverina area spoke about his approach to welcoming Aboriginal parents into the school. He meets each child's parents to spend time talking and getting to know each other. He takes the parents around the school and into their child's classroom. It is his policy that he is available to talk to parents whenever there is a need or a complaint. In his experience the time he takes to make the connections benefits not only parents and caregivers but also the children, the school and his relationships with Aboriginal parents.

## **Aboriginal English**

It became evident in discussions with teachers, principals and parents that Aboriginal English is the home language of many Aboriginal children starting school. Many parents and Aboriginal community members believe that Aboriginal English is not well understood by teachers. Discussions with teachers showed that this is often the case.

Aboriginal English is a dialect of Australian English. It varies between different Aboriginal communities throughout Australia and is an important feature of Aboriginal culture. It is not incorrect or poorly spoken English.

*Aboriginal English is the starting point for learning for our students; it is a legitimate form of communication. Aboriginal English is their home language and it needs to be accepted and respected by us at school, for the kids, especially the little ones, to feel comfortable in our school environment.*

*So at this school there is an acceptance and valuing of Aboriginal English, using it as the basis for language and literacy development.*

– Primary Principal, interview

While it was heartening to visit this school and record the principal's comments, these views were not often repeated throughout the Review.

Many teachers reported limited understanding of Aboriginal English. They had not had access to training and support for developing an awareness of Aboriginal English, its importance in the classroom, or how to incorporate it into classroom practice.

A strong theme throughout the Review, from parents, teachers and community workers and members, is that a positive start to school is important for all Aboriginal students. The first year of school represents a major indicator to future success and every Aboriginal child needs the opportunities and encouragement to

develop to the full extent of their ability. Their early experience of success, or otherwise, affects their future success at school and their feelings of competence and self-esteem.

### ***The Bidialectal Pilot Project***

The Bidialectal approach provides opportunities for Aboriginal parents and community members to work in classrooms with teachers to help them understand Aboriginal English.

The initiative recognises that Aboriginal students in New South Wales come to school speaking Aboriginal English which, although not a second language, is a second dialect of English and as such has its own structure.

The pilot is developing approaches to teaching that ensure all Aboriginal students maintain the use of Aboriginal English while at the same time learn how to use Standard Australian English in appropriate contexts.

The progress of Aboriginal students relies on Aboriginal parents, the community and teachers working together to understand the different language patterns.

Teachers work with Aboriginal Research Assistants (ARAs) to develop and trial effective teaching strategies which cultivate Aboriginal ways of making meaning as well as explicitly teaching Standard Australian English.

Working together develops understanding and understanding makes a difference.

A teacher involved in the Bidialectal pilot project summarised his learning as:

*We [teachers] make too many assumptions about Aboriginal students ... and the assumptions we make are wrong.*

The ARA working with this teacher stated:

*Since the Cultural Understanding training his [the teacher's] approach to teaching is different, everything is different ... It's great. The kids love it and they are responding.*

Another teacher reflected:

*I always thought that it was the kids who didn't get it, I now know that it was me who just didn't get it ... now I'm searching for a way [of teaching] that works.*

Aboriginal children during the early primary years have a need to be understood as individuals and should be provided with flexible and innovative responses to meet their needs. Valuing Aboriginal cultural knowledge and protocols will support the development and delivery of innovative programs.

*Most important for Aboriginal students is the need for case-management rather than a one-size fits all model.*

– Regional Director, DET

## Hearing loss

In submissions and field trips parents, principals and teachers discussed the difficulty of addressing health, parenting and social issues while maintaining an equal focus on providing quality education experiences.

A significant health issue raised throughout the Review that impacts on Aboriginal children in the classroom is otitis media. The impact of this condition in the preschool years has been described and it is also a significant issue in the years of primary education.

Aboriginal children can be disadvantaged in the classroom either through a current hearing loss, or through the impact of an earlier hearing loss on the development of their language and listening skills. Most classroom learning relies on the ability to listen effectively and to use Standard Australian English, particularly when learning to read and write.

However, hearing loss can affect speech and language development, and listening skills through the inability to distinguish the soft sounds of speech. The development of literacy and numeracy skills depends on the ability to follow instructions, vocabulary development and hearing contextual clues for meaning. Because of communication difficulties, frustration and anger can lead to inappropriate behaviour.

As this list of problems attests, hearing loss can profoundly affect Aboriginal students' classroom ability and school performance. Successful strategies include initial screening and regular follow-up visits; training for teachers in how to give explicit instructions and feedback, how to check for understanding, and how to talk with clear visual cues; and training for parents and students. (New South Wales Health Department, 2000).

### **“School ready” applies to interagency partners too**

“School ready” relates to children’s preparedness to start school and covers health, physical, social and emotional wellbeing, language and literacy development, and general knowledge about their world.

The Review teams heard numerous examples of the frustration and difficulty of parents, teachers and principals trying to locate appropriate screening, referral or support services for children and families. Many highlighted the long waiting lists for assistance, the cut-backs in or closure of services or the infrequent visits of teams to rural and remote areas of New South Wales.

It is unrealistic and often inappropriate for schools to address these issues in isolation from other government agencies and support services.

*Education does not exist in a vacuum.*

– Gary Moore, NCOSS submission



Whether students are “school ready” is also dependent on the alignment of government agencies, Aboriginal community organisations, community and parents with schools.

Across the state there is widespread interest and support for the alignment of agencies and services to occur at the school, as detailed in the *Schools as Community Centres* model outlined in Section 1: Prior to School.

### **Achieving equitable outcomes at Year 3**

The discussions held and the information gathered during the Review outlined the challenges facing parents, teachers, principals, educational support staff and community members in redressing the inequalities faced by Aboriginal students and their families in order to meet the educational needs of the students.

Many schools visited through the field trips had developed innovative programs to meet these challenges and these had benefited the whole school and the whole community.

The major points of discussion identified in field trips, submissions and consultations for the early years of primary education, Kindergarten to Year 2, in addition to prior-to-school programs and transition to school programs (discussed in Section 1: Prior to School), were:

- classroom teaching practice
- teachers’ knowledge and understanding of their Aboriginal students
- the importance of working with Aboriginal people
- the nature of the relationship between school and home.

### **Classroom teaching practice**

During many field trips, the question “What makes a difference in classrooms?” initiated thoughtful and insightful discussion. These responses are characteristic of comments made across the state and evident in submissions:

*Effective pedagogical practice means that teachers have a deep knowledge of curriculum and syllabus and a focus on achieving syllabus outcomes through quality teaching – that’s what makes the difference.*

– School Education Director

*Success is about what happens in classrooms. It is systematic and explicit teaching, knowing what the kids can do and working from there.*

– Classroom teacher

*Quality teaching in classrooms happens when teachers are supported. For example, [with] the new maths syllabus, a teacher was released to work as a mentor with other staff.*

– Principal

*Working in the classrooms, with the teachers, you see how much is involved in teaching and how much it has changed since I was at school. I've learned so much about helping kids with their work.*

– Aboriginal tutor

One of the main issues raised in submissions and field trips by teachers and parents is Aboriginal students' level of basic skills attainment.

Throughout the Review process, improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students was a major discussion point for teachers, parents and community members. In many discussions, it was seen as the single most important and urgent issue to be resolved. Associated themes were the need for early assessment and intervention and parent involvement in supporting Aboriginal students.

The message from teachers and parents is that the answer is not in applying more of the same interventions for Aboriginal students who are not reaching the required levels of literacy and numeracy proficiency.

Many early-years teachers raised the concern that they are keen to cater for the individual needs of their Aboriginal students in the classroom but unsure of how to do so and are looking to the Review to provide a systemic response to this issue.

Data and evidence-based research must drive the development and implementation of explicit literacy and numeracy programs for Aboriginal students. Integral to the development of these programs is the identification of what we know already works in the classroom.

The field trips, case studies and submissions provide overwhelming evidence of the positive difference schools and classrooms can make to Aboriginal students' learning outcomes.

The Review teams across the state heard numerous positive stories about how principals, teachers and Aboriginal parents and communities are focusing on what it is that makes a difference. Many of the discussions centre on identifying and understanding what happens in classrooms that best meets the needs of Aboriginal learners before embarking on an intervention program.

Literacy programs designed to assist lower primary students in need of additional support, *Reading Recovery* and the *Early Literacy Initiative* (ELI), featured strongly throughout the Review.

The *Early Literacy and Numeracy Initiative* focuses on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for students attending schools in low socioeconomic areas of the state. The literacy component, the *Early Literacy Initiative*, provides intensive professional development and support to teachers from Kindergarten to Year 3.

The ELI implements the *Starting with Assessment* program to collect outcomes data which enables teachers to make informed judgements about their students' literacy achievements. They are able to identify students in need of further support.

The consistency of data collection also assists school-wide monitoring and tracking of students.

Some School Education Areas visited are making wide use of *Starting with Assessment* to screen Kindergarten students. One school education director commented:

*The last thing we want or need is a “baby BST [Basic Skills Test]”, however we do want to know where our students are and what they can do when they first come to school and start from there.*

*Reading Recovery* is a literacy intervention strategy for students identified as most in need of support in their second year of school. *Reading Recovery* teachers provide students with 30 minutes of intensive daily instruction, which can improve students’ literacy to average classroom levels within 12 to 20 weeks.

In 2003, 719 Aboriginal students participated in the program (9.18 percent of total student numbers in the program). Where available, Aboriginal support personnel (Aboriginal Education Resource Teachers – AERTs – or Aboriginal Education Aides – AEAs) support Aboriginal students on the program (Perkins, 2004).

While the benefits of these programs have been widely recognised, the success has not translated into significantly improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal students, as evidenced by BST results and reiterated in the *State Literacy Strategy* evaluation, which identifies that:

Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students have improved but not at a comparable rate or to the level achieved by other sub-groups as reflected in statewide averages.

Another program established to support primary schools with a significant Aboriginal student enrolment to develop the literacy skills of Aboriginal students and to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal students in support classes for children with a mild disability is the *Aboriginal Early Language Development Program* (AELDP).

The program provides an Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher to 24 schools across NSW, with two schools sharing a position. In addition, there are five Resource Teacher – Aboriginal positions with a similar role to AERTs.

The role of the AERT is to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students (K–2) through team teaching, working with particular groups of students and through the development of appropriate resources in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

An unpublished DET review undertaken in 1998 identified that the AELDP had been successful in reducing the number of Aboriginal students in IM classes (support classes) but a study of the schools’ BST results from 1996 to 1999 did not indicate any significant improvement.

The following strategies were identified by schools as having potential to improve the skills of Aboriginal students:

- talking and listening activities, especially in Kindergarten to build on Aboriginal students' home language
- literacy and numeracy workshops for parents, supported by the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and involving Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs), Consultants Aboriginal Education and Literacy consultants, ensuring that parents and Aboriginal communities are provided with the knowledge, resources and skills to enable all Aboriginal students to achieve quality outcomes in literacy and numeracy
- training and support to develop teachers' understanding of how Aboriginal English, language development and otitis media impact on learning for Aboriginal students
- programs and strategies to enable Aboriginal students to hear, understand and engage in classrooms and to be able to code switch between Aboriginal English (home language) and Standard Australian English (school language)
- specific support in developing literacy and numeracy skills, in both Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English, to accomplish a range of learning outcomes for students who speak Aboriginal English
- culturally inclusive texts written in Aboriginal English, for emergent readers to make meaning from print by matching it to their own experience and knowledge of language
- mainstream programs incorporating an understanding of the needs of Aboriginal students and how this translates into effective classroom practice
- Quality Teaching professional development for teachers and accompanying research by academic mentors
- accessing and using a range of measures to assess student progress and inform teaching practice.

Throughout the field trips, consultancy staff, teachers and parents enthusiastically discussed their involvement in the *Scaffolding Literacy* program.

The *Scaffolding Literacy* teaching program was designed to accelerate literacy skills. While the program is suitable for all learners, it is especially appropriate for those who have failed to make the appropriate literacy gains and those in danger of falling behind. The program has been evaluated as an effective means for improving Aboriginal students' literacy skills (Creswell, Underwood & Withers, 2002).

Teachers involved with the program believe that the major elements of its success are the age-appropriate texts used in the classroom, the professional development provided by the program personnel and the applicability of the program across stages and key learning areas.

Teachers reported that the systematic and explicit pedagogy, which involves teachers interacting with students in such a way that students become literate, is a major component of the program's success.

The ACER Research Monograph No. 57 (Frigo et al, 2003), *Supporting English Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Indigenous Students in the Early Years*, found a correlation between students' achievement in literacy and achievement in numeracy.

Nakata (2003) believes the link is the use of language, both in literacy and numeracy. In discussing Aboriginal students' apparent lack of certain mathematical concepts he identifies the following difficulty:

The difficulty lies not in the concept but the language that expresses it. This is the difficulty of teaching mathematics to any child. The issue is how to teach them a standardised language through which to express certain relations which are evident in their world and the world beyond them. The problem in teaching these concepts is more a literacy issue.

This view found support in the field visits. Many teachers are of the opinion that numeracy problems are often more about literacy and language than mathematical concepts.

In one School Education Area where all Kindergarten students are screened and assessed on entry to school there was found to be an over-representation of Aboriginal students with numeracy difficulties. Further investigation revealed that the Aboriginal students' results were related to problems with auditory discrimination not numeracy concepts.

Throughout the Review, *Count Me in Too (CMIT)* was identified as an excellent example of a program that provides primary teachers with professional development focused on students' thinking in mathematics. It operated in over 1400 schools last year and was supported by the 40 district mathematics consultants. More than 70 000 students took part in individual interviews to determine their most efficient methods of solving mathematical problems. This was followed by a detailed analysis of the results by teachers, carried out with the assistance of the district mathematics consultant. The results of the analysis were used as the basis for designing teaching activities.

An evaluation of the program, carried out by Sydney University in 2003 and reported in the *NSW Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2003*, found that:

... the majority of teachers indicated that:

- their understanding of how children learn mathematics (71.6 percent) and
- the way they taught mathematics (77.9 percent)

had changed the most as a result of their involvement in CMIT.

This view was echoed on field trips and in submissions. An analysis of Year 3 BST Numeracy results shows that the percentage of Aboriginal students in Band 2 or above has increased from 75 percent in 1999 to 79 percent in 2003.

*Count Me in Too Indigenous (CMITI)* is a numeracy research project that aims to investigate teaching features that support effective numeracy learning for Aboriginal students from Preschool to Year 2. The project focuses on the professional development of teachers in their teaching of numeracy to Aboriginal students.

The CMIT program was identified as a very good example of how Aboriginal community knowledge can add value to a mainstream program.

### **Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their Aboriginal students**

Over and over again, in submissions, consultations and field trips, the issue of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and identity was raised.

*A teacher's relationship with their Aboriginal students is really important and it must be built on the foundation that the teacher understands and acknowledges the Aboriginal student, their life experience and their language.*

– Aboriginal parent, community meeting

Effective curriculum and pedagogy for Aboriginal students is dependent on teachers having a deep knowledge and understanding of the syllabus outcomes and syllabus requirements as well as:

- knowing who their Aboriginal students are and knowing their families
- having deep knowledge and understanding of their Aboriginal students
- knowing their local Aboriginal community's relationships
- making links with Aboriginal community people and working with Aboriginal education workers
- forming authentic partnerships with Aboriginal workers and parents.

### **The importance of working with Aboriginal people**

Throughout all facets of this Review, in research, submissions, field trip meetings and interviews, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have spoken consistently about the importance of having Aboriginal people in schools actively involved in the education of Aboriginal students, most importantly in the early years, and especially in Kindergarten classrooms.

*Aboriginal students need the people involved in their education to understand the importance of the Aboriginal family and community as their first educators.*

– Community member

*Aboriginal education is about having Aboriginal role models in the school, working with the Aboriginal community and providing opportunities for the*

*Aboriginal community to be trained in supporting what is happening in the school.*

– Aboriginal principal

An overwhelming number of submissions, field trips and consultations identified the positive benefits of Aboriginal people in classrooms. Aboriginal students benefit, as do non-Aboriginal students and staff. The benefits do not stop there: the involvement of Aboriginal people in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring of programs, predominantly literacy and numeracy programs, was a constant theme throughout the Review.

Schools making a difference, showing improvements in literacy and numeracy, which were visited on field trips, highlighted in submissions and identified in research, indicated the importance of Consultants Aboriginal Education, Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) and literacy and numeracy tutors in the success of their programs.

Successful strategies identified through the field trips and submissions involving Aboriginal people in schools included:

- parents as tutors in classrooms
- parents, community members and Elders as mentors
- “community solutions”, that is, parents helping to determine how to best meet student needs
- parent workshops on a range of issues, for example, attendance – how important it is and how parents can be involved in supporting students to attend school
- Aboriginal teachers teaching all students in the school
- Aboriginal teachers aides and teachers aides (special)
- programs that involve the community in a positive way: visits to local sites, *Community Development Employment Projects* (CDEPs) in the community and cultural centres
- community panel involvement in addressing problems with student behaviour, as an alternative to suspension.

### **The nature of the relationship between school and home**

A number of issues and concerns identified by parents and teachers during the field trips and in submissions relate to home and classroom links, including:

- the importance of quality literacy programs in the early years of schooling
- the important role of parents in literacy development both at home and at school
- the role of the school and the local AECG in supporting parents’ role in their children’s literacy development
- the significance of teachers establishing a relationship and communicating regularly with parents and caregivers
- the importance Aboriginal parents place on having access to and fully understanding reporting about student outcomes and student progress

- tracking students within and across schools to ensure there is consistency in data gathering and common understandings and expectations about information shared
- the need to ensure that students at greatest risk are assessed, identified and given support as early as possible
- the need for parents to be kept informed and involved in intervention programs for their children

A key message from Aboriginal parents is that they want to be involved in all aspects of their children's education, not just when something is wrong at school.

The important role that parents play in their children's development both at home and at school and the need to more fully support parents' participation in their children's education are keys to improving the home–classroom link and achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students throughout the early years.

### **Attendance patterns and absenteeism**

As indicated in Section 1, Aboriginal students in Kindergarten to Year 2 are absent from school nearly twice as much as non-Aboriginal students. This is particularly noticeable in Kindergarten.

The finding that absenteeism begins in Kindergarten and sets the pattern for future years suggests that tackling this problem must begin very early in the child's school life to be successful (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

Teachers and school leaders reported that many high school Aboriginal students, particularly boys, with poor attendance and high suspension rates had commenced school before they turned five and were young for their cohort.

One of the many benefits attributed to quality transition to school programs is their role in establishing regular attendance patterns. Many schools visited during the field trips reported that Aboriginal students engaged in transition programs attended school more regularly and arrived at school on time. Many of the programs included parent information sessions where the importance and benefits of regular attendance and arriving at school on time were discussion topics. Teachers reported similar patterns for students who had attended preschools.

Schools were also keen to talk about their approaches to addressing the issue of on time arrival and student attendance.

Examples of encouraging attendance and on time arrival at school were breakfast programs available before the formal part of the school day, or the *fitness and fruit* program which starts the school day. Teachers report improved student attendance since the introduction of the programs.

The themes that emerged throughout the field trips when discussing student attendance were the importance of monitoring student attendance and intervening early. Also important is personal contact with families to address any absenteeism



issues. Many schools use a collaborative approach with school personnel, including the AEA following up with parents and explaining the importance of regular attendance and explanations for student absences.

Many schools visited on the field trips examined their attendance data and reported that the attendance patterns for the majority of Aboriginal students were consistent with, or similar to, the school average.

In a number of schools, the significant absences of a minority of Aboriginal students were due to extenuating circumstances of which the school was aware and did not reflect the Aboriginal student population as a whole.

## **Suspensions**

The NSW AECG Inc has raised the issue of the number of Aboriginal students being suspended in New South Wales government schools and is particularly concerned about the number of Kindergarten students being suspended (2004, p 32)

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group, which provides policy advice to Aboriginal preschools in NSW, knows of no preschool with a suspension policy or cases where Aboriginal students are suspended from Aboriginal preschools. Yet Aboriginal students in Kindergarten were suspended in 2003.

Suspension rates for Aboriginal students in Kindergarten to Year 2 show that:

- The suspension rate for Aboriginal boys for short suspensions (from one to four days) is 106 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 25 suspensions per 1000 students for non-Aboriginal boys.
- For short suspensions Aboriginal boys are being suspended at a rate that is four times greater than that for non-Aboriginal boys.
- The suspension rate for Aboriginal girls for short suspensions is 18 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 2 suspensions per 1000 students for non-Aboriginal girls.
- For short suspensions Aboriginal girls are being suspended at a rate that is eight times greater than that for non-Aboriginal girls.

## **The final word ... supporting classroom teachers**

Of all the themes identified throughout the Review of Aboriginal education, one factor with particular relevance to the early years of schooling that directly affects the ability of Aboriginal students to achieve equitable outcomes is the classroom teacher.

Parents, community members and executive staff in schools were strong in their recognition, respect and praise for classroom teachers, the substantial amount of work undertaken by them on a daily basis and their efforts beyond the classroom in meeting the learning needs of their students.

John Hattie's research findings (2003) indicate that focus on improving student learning outcomes should be aimed at the greatest source of variance that can make a difference – the teacher.

There is widespread acknowledgement that schools can and do make a difference, and effective teachers adapt and adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of their Aboriginal students. However, a strong message from the field is that teachers cannot undertake their role in the classroom without good organisational management and leadership at both the school and regional level. Strategic and innovative approaches to teaching and learning and accompanying support and expertise, including regional and state office support, need to be provided in a coherent, strategic and ongoing fashion.

The findings from field trips and submissions and research evidence are additional justification for a coordinated approach to investigating and researching what it is that effective teachers do and providing answers to the questions they still have about quality teaching, especially effective literacy teaching in the early years of primary education.

### **Section 3: The Middle and Upper Years of Primary Education**

The number of Aboriginal students in Year 3 to Year 6, as in junior primary grades, is growing. In 2003 there was a total of 11 585 Aboriginal students enrolled in those Years, an increase of 3496 students from 1996.

The number of Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6 increased between 4 and 7 percent for each year from 1996 to 2003. In 2003 Aboriginal students represented 4.6 percent of all students enrolled in Years 3 to 6.

Grade progression rates show that Aboriginal students are being retained from Kindergarten to Year 6. The apparent increase in Aboriginal student enrolment figures from Year 3 to Year 6 may be partly due to increased levels of identification by Aboriginal students or due to the high mobility of a number of Aboriginal students, who are either entering or moving between state schools.

Attendance rates for Aboriginal students in the middle and upper primary years show that they are twice as likely to be absent as non-Aboriginal students. A study of Aboriginal K–12 student absences in March 2004 indicated that on average they are not attending for up to three days every month (20 school days).

Suspension rates for Aboriginal students in the middle and upper primary years show that:

- the suspension rate for Aboriginal boys for short suspensions (from one to four days) is 378 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 67 suspensions per 1000 students for non-Aboriginal boys
- for short suspensions, Aboriginal boys are being suspended at a rate that is over four times greater than that for non-Aboriginal boys
- the suspension rate for Aboriginal girls for short suspensions is 60 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 8 suspensions per 1000 students for non-Aboriginal girls
- for short suspensions, Aboriginal girls are being suspended at a rate that is over eight times greater than that for non-Aboriginal girls.

Approximately 58 percent of Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6 are attending schools in a non-metropolitan area. A total of 42 percent of Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6 attend a school where there are 30 or fewer Aboriginal students (2003 enrolment data).

#### **How are Aboriginal students performing in the upper primary years?**

One of the Review's terms of reference was to identify factors contributing to the low levels of achievement for many Aboriginal students.

The Review acknowledges that many Aboriginal students are engaged and achieving at school, that they are highly involved in their local Aboriginal community and are participating in opportunities within the wider community.

Field trips and consultations identified that many average performing or “invisible” Aboriginal students are not being extended or provided with opportunities to achieve at a higher level. Several schools identified Aboriginal students as successful students or their “success stories”, but a deeper examination of outcomes for these students showed that many of them are performing well in relation to the state average for Aboriginal students but they are still below the state average for all students.

Data would suggest that it is during the middle and primary years of education, from Year 3 to Year 6, that many Aboriginal students are locked out of future success in education. It is also during these years that Aboriginal students need to be supported to make important decisions about themselves, their family, their community and their future learning.

### **Year 3 Basic Skills Test**

The Basic Skills Test (BST) reports a student's achievement and progress in comparison to other students. Students sit the BST in Year 3 and Year 5 when their literacy and numeracy skills are assessed.

For the Year 3 BST, students are ranked into five skill bands, with Band 1 representing lowest-achieving students and Band 5 representing highest-achieving students.

Year 3 BST results since 1998 indicate that the gap between the mean scores for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in literacy is approximately 5 points lower for Aboriginal students and for numeracy is approximately 6 points lower.

At Year 3, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is substantial and has not been reduced despite a multitude of mainstream and targeted Aboriginal literacy and numeracy programs. BST results show that the education system is meeting the needs of a large number of students but is clearly not meeting the specific educational needs of many Aboriginal students.

As was indicated in Chapter 1, the size of the gap in literacy performance in Year 3 in 2003 was equivalent to 19 months of literacy learning (compared with all students) while the gap in numeracy performance was 17 months.

Not only are Year 3 Aboriginal students achieving at a level significantly lower than all other students, but they also are particularly over-represented in the lowest skill bands.

In 2003, 32 percent of Aboriginal students were unable to demonstrate minimal competency in literacy compared to 11 percent of non-Aboriginal students. For numeracy, 22 percent of Aboriginal students were unable to demonstrate minimal competency compared to 7 percent of non-Aboriginal students.

One of the most important messages from the field trips, submissions and consultants was that the reasons for the unacceptable performance of Aboriginal students in Year 3 and Year 5 BST results need to be addressed before these students enter the primary years of schooling. Aboriginal students entering Year 3 without essential skills, knowledge and understandings have little opportunity in the upper primary years to “catch up” and gain required skills or to access higher-level courses in English, mathematics and science in high school.

Many Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal community people, when interviewed on Review field trips, made strong statements that schools were pushing our kids through with little or no support and that low expectations by teachers resulted in low achievements for their children.

### **Year 5 Basic Skills Test**

In the Year 5 BST, students are ranked into six skill bands with Band 1 representing the lowest-achieving students and Band 6 representing the highest-achieving students.

At Year 5, the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in literacy and numeracy are about the same as in Year 3, suggesting that Aboriginal students are learning at the same rate as non-Aboriginal students from Year 3 to Year 5, but given that they were so far behind to begin with, they remain behind by approximately the same amount. To catch up, the Aboriginal students would have to learn consistently at a much faster rate than the non-Aboriginal students.

In 2003, 81 percent of Aboriginal students in Year 5 were able to demonstrate minimal competencies in both reading and numeracy. This compared with 94 percent of non-Aboriginal students in both reading and numeracy.

Principals and teachers spoke about low levels of achievement by some Aboriginal students as having a major impact in classrooms. Some teachers cater better for the wide range of student achievement in their class. Teachers with limited teaching experience are particularly challenged when meeting the needs of students who are disengaged and/or disruptive due to their inability to participate in classroom teaching and learning tasks.

Many teachers commented on the demands of covering all areas of the K–6 curriculum and talked about an “overcrowded curriculum”. In some schools Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs) and tutors working in primary classrooms commented that teachers were rushing students through each lesson and there didn’t seem to be enough time for teachers, particularly in the upper primary, to spend quality time with all students.

### **What do the BST results mean for parents and teachers?**

The results of the BST provide valuable information about what students know and what they can do with language and numbers.

BST parent reports provide parents/caregivers with information about their child's results. The field trips identified that many Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal caregivers felt they did not receive adequate information to allow them to be knowledgeable about their child's progress at school. Many parents commented that they did not have a good understanding of what their child's BST report meant and did not feel comfortable or confident enough to approach the school or their child's teacher to gain further information.

BST school reports provide teachers with information on identifying groups of students who need additional support. It became evident through the field trip visits to schools that the diagnostic aspect of the BST is not fully understood by some teachers and that a number of schools are not effectively using BST data to plan and implement programs to meet the learning needs of their Aboriginal students.

Students who are identified in Band 1 in Year 3 BST results and Band 1 and Band 2 in Year 5 BST results are provided with additional support. Effective schools analyse BST results to identify trends. These trends provide useful information in determining strategies to support student learning and in determining priorities for professional development. The *Support Teacher Learner Assistance* (STLA) works with teachers through focused individual assessments for students who are identified as needing follow-up from the BST.

### **School Education Area BST results**

In 2004 the Department organised schools into 43 School Education Areas (SEAs). SEAs range from 11 (0.09 percent) Aboriginal students to 950 (8.2 percent) Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6.

It is important that Aboriginal student performance be measured in relation to the performance of all students. Comparing Aboriginal students to the state or SEA average for Aboriginal students can encourage the setting of targets for Aboriginal students that will remain below the benchmark for all students. Unless the current gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is identified and understood, low expectations for Aboriginal student achievement will continue unchallenged.

The 2003 BST results at SEA level indicate that the mean score for Aboriginal students was below the state mean score for all students in a large majority of SEAs.

Statewide supplementary programs to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and Regional and SEA consultancy support for Aboriginal students will be discussed at a later stage in this section.

### **School BST results**

It should be acknowledged that a number of schools have been successful in improving outcomes for Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Educational research has endeavoured to identify characteristics thought to be important for successful schools. Masters (2004), among others, has identified the following features:

- strong, effective school leaders whose primary focus is on establishing a culture of learning throughout the school
- learning being seen as the central purpose of school and taking precedence over everything else
- teachers with a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and a deep understanding of how students learn particular subjects
- students with a sense of belonging and pride
- well-developed systems for evaluating and monitoring student performance
- high levels of parent and community involvement.

Schools identified through the field trips as having made progress in improving Aboriginal student achievement had high levels of the features mentioned above.

In addition, these schools demonstrated many of the following characteristics:

- a high priority for and whole school approach to Aboriginal education
- a principal and executive team committed to meeting the needs of students, teachers and parents
- Aboriginal community involvement in the planning and implementation of programs
- Aboriginal people employed as part of whole school literacy, numeracy, attendance or retention programs
- high expectations for Aboriginal student achievement
- teaching and learning programs and support programs that were well structured, highly organised and properly resourced
- teachers who knew their Aboriginal students and could make connections between school knowledge and the lived experiences of all their students
- explicit and rigorous teaching and learning programs that ensure engaged learning time for all Aboriginal students
- focused teaching that included a range of classroom practices and strategies in response to the needs of Aboriginal students
- positive whole school/whole community student welfare programs.

Schools that are making a difference for Aboriginal students identified their priority as student achievement by focusing on effective teaching and learning rather than student welfare programs and program funding. These schools typically demonstrated real partnerships with their local Aboriginal community based on shared responsibilities and positive relationships.

## School leadership

Submissions and field trips identified that principals and school executive staff play a vital role in ensuring Aboriginal students are provided with equitably resourced and quality teaching and learning programs; providing professional development for all staff in Aboriginal education; developing and maintaining positive relationships with the local Aboriginal community; and ensuring all Aboriginal students have the opportunity to achieve.

*Lack of community consultation in schools at an executive level is systemic racism.*

- Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA), submission WM059

Chris Sarra, the principal of Cherbourg State School, Queensland, outlined the changes he made between 1999 and 2002 as the first Aboriginal principal appointed to the school as:

- believing it could be done
- consolidating a school vision
- changing the culture of the school
- expecting improved attendance
- expecting improved student behaviour
- expecting improved academic performance
- focusing on role models
- valuing and utilising Indigenous staff within the school
- developing a whole-of-school Aboriginal studies program
- generating a sense of solidarity (school song, school uniform and school tidy zones)

(Sarra, 2003).

Heitmeyer and Craven in their 2004 paper *Re-visioning Schooling* identify the need to re-vision schools through the goals of mutual respect and understanding to enhance Aboriginal student identity, academic self-concept, knowledge and skills. The paper calls for schools to provide “accelerated learning” to ensure no Aboriginal student is left behind. The paper also identifies the need for special fitness appointment of executive staff to high Aboriginal enrolment schools.

Field trips and submissions (ATSIC and Primary Principals Association [PPA]) identified the *Dare to Lead* and *What Works* programs as exemplary programs and called for their continued support.

## Cultural programs and a culturally inclusive curriculum

There was an identified need expressed through submissions and field trips for Aboriginal students to participate in Aboriginal cultural programs that allowed them to make connections with their local Aboriginal culture and to other Indigenous cultures. This included the need for schools to provide Aboriginal cultural programs as well as providing all students with a curriculum that



understands and takes account of local, national and international Indigenous culture, heritage and history.

**Case study: *Maths in Context* for Aboriginal students**

*Maths in Context* for Aboriginal students (MiC) is a strategic response to the identified need for teachers to use appropriate teaching strategies for Aboriginal students in Mathematics. The MiC program provides a framework for schools to develop Stage 2 and Stage 3 Mathematics units in consultation with their local Aboriginal community.

MiC recognises that Aboriginal students need to be immersed in an Aboriginal view of mathematics to strengthen and maintain their identity and culture. The initiative relies on schools and teachers valuing and drawing on the knowledge and understandings within the local Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal parents and community members work with the school to identify a context of cultural significance that provides an opportunity for the skills, knowledge and understandings of the *Mathematics K–6 Syllabus* to be taught.

One Aboriginal Education Assistant commented that as a result of the MiC program:

*Parents just come through the gates now. They know they can help. They want their kids to do well at school and this program gives them a way of working with the teachers.*

Submissions and field trips identified strong support for primary school programs such as Aboriginal Language Programs and culturally relevant curricula such as *Count Me In Too Indigenous*, *Maths in Context* for Aboriginal students (MiC), *Mathematics in Indigenous Contexts*, the *Bidialectal approach to teaching Standard Australian English* pilot program and the Australian Government *Quality Teaching Program (AQTP) Literacy in Aboriginal Languages Program*.

Recent research and literature (Bourke et al, 2000; McRae et al, 2000) highlight recognition of culture as being fundamental to achieving Aboriginal student engagement. Cultural recognition and understanding will be encouraged through the formation of partnerships and strong personal relationships between school educators and Aboriginal Elders, families and community members.

Effective schools visited as part of the field trips spoke about developing a strong dialogue with Elders and the Aboriginal community, in providing opportunities for school staff to listen and reflect upon the experiences of the Aboriginal community and in recognising and valuing the knowledge, skills and experiences that are held by Elders and Aboriginal people. The resources and knowledge within the Aboriginal community, when used in the classroom and throughout the school, became a sustainable way of forming meaningful partnerships and developing a curriculum that is engaging and culturally appropriate.

The field trips and submissions also identified that Aboriginal cultural education programs need to be provided in an ongoing and focused manner to school leaders and staff in schools, SEAs, regions and the state office.

### **Aboriginal Studies, Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal languages**

Field trip visits acknowledged that many primary schools are incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the Key Learning Areas, most often in Human Society and its Environment (HSIE).

Embedded within the mandatory *Human Society and its Environment K–6 Syllabus* is Aboriginal Studies content. All students learn about Aboriginal society and history including the impact of the stolen generation, Aboriginal democratic practices before colonisation, Aboriginal resilience and perspectives on British invasion.

Feedback from Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal students highlights the need for schools to develop a continuum of learning for Aboriginal Studies in consultation with Elders and Aboriginal community members so that all students are presented with new information and concepts as they move from Kindergarten to Year 10. Many students commented that they learnt the same things each time they did work in Aboriginal Studies.

There is also a need to embed Aboriginal perspectives across all KLAs from Kindergarten to Year 6 to engage Aboriginal students and to validate Aboriginal cultural knowledge in syllabus content.

#### **Australian Government Quality Teaching Program *Literacy in Aboriginal Languages***

The AGQTP *Literacy in Aboriginal Languages* project is a strategic response to the identified need to support teachers of Aboriginal languages in planning and teaching the new Board of Studies NSW 2003 *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus*. It recognises that students need to engage in the learning of Aboriginal languages to strengthen and maintain Aboriginal identity and culture. The AGQTP *Literacy in Aboriginal Languages* project is incumbent on schools valuing and drawing upon the knowledge and understandings within their local Aboriginal community.

Nine schools were selected to participate in this project. These schools covered four different language groups across NSW including Bundjalung, Gamilaraay, Gumbaygir and Thunghutti/Dunghutti.

Each of the schools formed school-based action learning teams to assess and evaluate their learning needs in relation to the teaching of the *Aboriginal Languages K–10 Syllabus*. Teachers of Aboriginal languages discussed and collaborated with Elders and Aboriginal community members to design and trial units that reflect local Aboriginal cultural perspectives with specific reference to the syllabus. Units of work were developed for each stage of the K–10 spectrum.

Chris Sarra, the Aboriginal principal of Cherbourg State School, implemented a whole-of-school Aboriginal Studies P–7 program where each student participates in an Aboriginal Studies lesson for two hours each week as part of the school’s curriculum framework. The program was developed in consultation with Cherbourg Elders and community members and Sarra believes that the program is a key factor in the school’s improved attendance and, in turn, achievement levels.

Any school that is serious about delivering an Aboriginal Studies program must present it in a credible format and not just as an add-on activity, or something to do during NAIDOC [National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee] week.

– Chris Sarra

The teaching of Aboriginal languages in the primary school was viewed as positive by school staff and Aboriginal community people. A number of primary schools have been successfully teaching Aboriginal languages for a number of years and there is an increasing number of primary schools and Aboriginal communities interested in establishing an Aboriginal Language program.

### **Conditions for learning**

In order to achieve academic success, Aboriginal students must be taught well.

Research has consistently shown that, of all the things that schools can control, it is the quality of the pedagogy that most directly and most powerfully affects the quality of learning outcomes that students demonstrate (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2003c).

Field trips, research, submissions and the Curriculum and Pedagogy Working Party report that effective teaching and learning for Aboriginal students is considered to be dependent on:

- pre-service teacher training in Aboriginal history, Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal students
- on-going professional development in Aboriginal education
- teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal history and culture
- teachers’ deep knowledge of curriculum and syllabuses
- a whole school focus on the achievement of syllabus outcomes
- quality teaching in all classrooms
- professional conversations that identify and critique strategic and innovative approaches
- authentic partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

A number of submissions called for an investigation into the area of “Aboriginal learning styles”. All students learn differently. Aboriginal students may approach learning through different methods from non-Aboriginal students or have a preferred way for acquiring new knowledge.

Many teachers interviewed as part of the Review expressed a belief that Aboriginal students learn differently from other students. Teachers' lack of awareness and understanding of Aboriginal students' Aboriginality, culture and language may impact on their relationships and interactions with Aboriginal students, which may in turn impact on the way Aboriginal students respond or behave.

Throughout the Review field trips and workshops, Aboriginal educators, Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal community members did not identify an "Aboriginal learning style" that is applicable to all Aboriginal students in New South Wales.

A much more useful discussion needs to focus on what *conditions for learning* engage and connect Aboriginal students to the curriculum. The Academic Reference Group has called for more research around *teacher understandings of difference* to challenge current assumptions, knowledge and justifications.

As highlighted by the Indigenous Education Taskforce in its paper *Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous Children Aged 0–8 Years*:

The emphasis is not on how individual children learn, but on why and how people learn through their culture and how participation in culture shapes identity ... Rather than aim for a curriculum that avoids discussions of cultural identity, the goal should be to facilitate the process by which students are permitted to discover and explore their cultural connections ... Every child has their own learning style and the Taskforce is of the view that these learning styles are not dependent on whether a child is Indigenous or non-Indigenous (MCEETYA, 2001, p. 31).

Teachers need to be provided with professional development, information and resources that acknowledge, respect and affirm both Aboriginal and school cultures to identify conditions for learning for Aboriginal students and to draw on Aboriginal cultural knowledge to develop school-based learning experiences.

### **Case management**

The field trips and consultations identified a need to better support Aboriginal students during the middle and upper primary years. Many Aboriginal students, particularly boys, have disengaged from schooling by Year 5. The number of short suspensions for Aboriginal students in Years 3 to Year 6, particularly for boys, indicates the need for alternative approaches to re-engaging students who are not connected to school. Many primary school principals and executive staff commented on the need for more male teachers on staff.

A recurring theme present in field trips and submissions was the need for early intervention: to provide support when a student needed it, rather than after the issue has escalated.

There was a consistent message from Aboriginal community people that Aboriginal students are not all the same and that Aboriginal parents wanted to

be informed about and involved in decisions relating to their children. This included issues that ranged from suspension, through to representing the school and attendance on excursions. Many parents commented that schools made decisions without appropriately informing parents.

School principals and school staff including Aboriginal education workers identified the need for better access to a range of coordinated programs that drew together the expertise within government, non-government, Aboriginal community organisations and Aboriginal community knowledge. Elements of successful programs included the identification of needs of Aboriginal families, access to culturally appropriate services, and continued support and sustainability.

The need for the alignment of government and non-government programs to address social, economic and educational disadvantage was identified through the 2004 Legislative Council Inquiry into issues relating to Redfern/Waterloo.

However, there is poor or non-existent coordination, inadequate accountability across the service system, duplication of services, under-resourced, under-trained and non-viable services. This, combined with the policies of past governments, provides further challenges. Services and agencies need to change if the issues are to be resolved ... To conclude, there is no quick fix to the long term issues being faced by the Redfern/Waterloo communities. The problems are entrenched, complex and multi-faceted. Whilst many well-intentioned people have put forward solutions ... experience has shown that adhoc and poorly designed solutions only exacerbate the situation (Gellatly, 2004).

School staff and community people identified the positive aspects of Aboriginal people acting as mentors for Aboriginal students, especially for those Aboriginal students who did not have a positive view of school.

School staff repeatedly commented on the value of an Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) who has had a deep knowledge of the student and a close relationship with the student's family and extended family when case managing Aboriginal students. However, the presence of AEAs in schools should not be seen as a substitute for or a reason not to have meaningful conversations with members of the Aboriginal community.

### **Counselling programs and school counsellors**

Aboriginal students are entitled to counselling support that provides them with culturally appropriate knowledge and expertise to deal with the complex issues they face on a daily basis.

Students consulted during field trip visits to schools stated that they would like more Aboriginal teachers to become counsellors and they would feel more comfortable talking to an Aboriginal counsellor.

The NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) State Council submission (18 May 2004) recommended that every Aboriginal student have free and easy access to an Aboriginal counsellor.

A submission from school counsellors identified their lack of knowledge about Aboriginal contemporary culture and the need for more counsellors with a deep knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal students. The group calls for more work to be done to develop culturally appropriate assessment tools.

## Drug education

The instance of drug, alcohol and/or substance abuse is high in some families. Children from families where the parents or caregivers are living with violence, drugs and alcohol need to be provided with care and protection to ensure that they are safe from neglect and abuse. Schools play a role in providing support for these students and ensuring that the effects of their family life do not affect their participation and engagement in school and classroom activities.

### Case study: *Healing Time*

The *Healing Time* resources (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2002) support the drug education needs of Aboriginal students with low literacy levels by using good practices in drug education within an Aboriginal framework. The resources include activities to engage students, teachers, parents and the local community in the Healing Time program.

Stages 2 and 3 of *Healing Time* support drug education for students in Years 3 to 6. Using narratives, students explore the effects of smoking, decision-making, rules and consequences through the eyes of Aboriginal children and their families.

Where *Healing Time* has been implemented:

- Aboriginal students have better rapport with teachers
- Aboriginal students are engaged in lessons
- Aboriginal students are effective class leaders
- Aboriginal students express pride in their culture
- Aboriginal students discuss issues that are often not discussed at home
- non-Aboriginal students have greater exposure to Aboriginal culture
- non-Aboriginal students have recognised shared experiences, eg family break-up, bullying
- non-Aboriginal students have benefited from learning from Aboriginal peers.

## Cultural programs

The provision of cultural programs such as boys' and girls' Aboriginal dance groups, the involvement of Elders groups in school activities, cultural excursions, and linking students with Aboriginal artists, musicians, dancers, sportsmen, sportswomen and role models were identified as having a positive effect on Aboriginal students' cultural identity and sense of belonging at school.

Many schools commented that school assemblies and official gatherings commenced with a *Welcome to Country* and *Acknowledgment of Country*.

Aboriginal community people commented on the importance of Elders being acknowledged and invited to significant school functions.

The value of Aboriginal Language programs for Aboriginal students was also highlighted as well as the importance of a curriculum that educated all students about Aboriginal history, culture and communities.

School staff raised a number of issues involved in providing cultural programs for Aboriginal students. These included difficulties in accessing expertise within their local Aboriginal communities, in becoming familiar with local protocols and making contact with the wider Aboriginal community, in becoming aware of factions within communities and the reluctance of Aboriginal community people to become involved in school programs.

It must be acknowledged that a number of non-Aboriginal people working in education and training are apprehensive of working with Aboriginal people. This “fear factor” is related to not wanting to say or do something that is inappropriate or culturally offensive, a lack of knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal people and lack of opportunities to have meaningful conversations and interact socially with Aboriginal people.

Cultural knowledge will differ greatly among schools and their Aboriginal communities. The differences in Aboriginal cultures from a state and national perspective are vast. There is no one answer to what defines “culturally appropriate” or how programs can reflect cultural knowledge.

This is a challenge to be negotiated at a local level, with Elders and local Aboriginal communities. School staff commented that their local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and SEA Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer were important points of contact for schools when accessing the skills, knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal communities.

Factions are formed along kinship lines and have kept Aboriginal communities strong since time immemorial. Schools that have developed strong partnerships with their local Aboriginal communities are able to identify Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are able to work within and across factions.

Submissions highlighted the Board of Studies NSW document *Working with Aboriginal Communities* (2001) for providing advice to schools on protocols when working with Aboriginal communities.

### **Student engagement**

A high number of submissions and comments from the field trips raised the critical issue of Aboriginal students being engaged in education. Comments included:

*Failure to engage and connect with Aboriginal students is more critical than attendance.*

– Submission WM128

*There is a tendency to respond to student disengagement with special programs rather than addressing the core problem of mainstream schooling.*

– Submission WM096

The Review has found that the majority of Aboriginal students are attending school but it is their level of engagement in schooling that is the critical issue.

Disengagement as discussed throughout field trip interviews, community meetings and submissions was attributed to:

- poor teacher–student relationships
- curriculum content not being relevant or stimulating
- inappropriate teaching styles
- low literacy and numeracy skills of some Aboriginal students
- high suspension rates
- lack of parental support or encouragement.

AEAs, AEWs, Aboriginal tutors, Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal students and Aboriginal community members identified that many Aboriginal students were bored at school.

The issues of student engagement and case management for Aboriginal students are fundamental to the Review recommendations. The number of Aboriginal students of all ages in behaviour classes, suspension centers and Juvenile Justice Centres is increasing. The percentage of Aboriginal students of all ages in Behaviour Disorder (BD) and Emotional Disturbance (ED) classes rose from 18.4 percent (71) in 1996 to 30.7 percent (201) in 2003.

School principals, school staff and Aboriginal education workers identified the need to access expertise to provide support for Aboriginal students at risk of disengaging with schooling during the middle and upper primary years.

School staff also expressed the view that many Aboriginal students were engaged at school but lacked the essential follow-up at home such as limited or non-existent access to resources and computers, community and family responsibilities, difficulties in completing homework due to not having one-to-one parent support, and living or staying at different homes.

The Heitmeyer and Craven paper (2004) and the NSW ATSI Council submission (2004) called for access to after-school academic coaching community centres where Aboriginal students are provided with tutorial support and access to technology such as computer programs, web-based learning programs and the Internet.

Positive self-identity has been suggested as one of the most important factors related to attachment to school and positive school outcomes for Aboriginal students. For this to be achieved, students need to feel valued as Aboriginal people. Aboriginal students who stay on at school have strong Aboriginal and



personal identities, self-reliance and confidence. Their goals include a determination and desire to succeed at school and to access mainstream school knowledge.

A study (McInerney, 2003) that compared “Aboriginal, Navajo and Anglo” responses to motivation, engagement and further study found that:

- 40 percent of Aboriginal students’ responses cited negative peer influences (bullies, drugs, fights, distractions, disruptions) as the major thing that made it difficult for them to do well at school. Anglo responses were 34 percent and Navajo were 29 percent
- 43 percent of Aboriginal student responses cited school alienation (want to get out, don’t like school, school is boring and/or irrelevant) as the reason why Aboriginal students leave school before Year 10 (38 percent for Anglo and 36 percent for Navajo)
- 16 percent of Aboriginal student responses were related to future orientation (money, career, further education). Anglo responses were 31 percent and 23 percent for Navajo.

### **Mobility and tracking student achievement**

The *Tracking Mobility Rates* (TMR) project was funded by the Australian Government to develop and implement a student tracking system and information exchange about transferring Aboriginal students in New South Wales. An intensive reading support program was developed for the targeted mobile students. The program included the use of multimedia software to develop student portfolios.

The electronic student portfolios held a collection of student work that indicated student achievement in literacy against syllabus outcomes. Portfolios were electronically transferred to the new school or the disk was taken by the student or mailed to the new school.

The TMR project for the 1999 school year identified that:

- 164 schools participated in the program (across five districts)
- 123 schools returned data
- 1430 Aboriginal students were tracked
- 961 Aboriginal students enrolled in the 123 schools that provided data
- 866 Aboriginal students exited the 123 schools that provided data.

In the TMR pilot schools, there were more enrolments than exits.

The report notes that of particular concern is the number of mobile students in classes for students with mild intellectual disability (IM classes). The TMR database indicated that at least 1 out of every 50 Aboriginal students involved in the TMR project was placed in an IM class.

School staff identified that there was need for schools to better meet the needs of mobile Aboriginal students and for planning and programs to take into account

issues such as year cohorts changing by up to 30 percent each year due to the high mobility of some Aboriginal students.

The NSW Primary Principals' Association Equity Programs Reference Group submission stated that tracking procedures should be strengthened to monitor and respond to the movement of Aboriginal families.

The Review has identified that there is a need to improve the tracking of Aboriginal student achievement, particularly in relation to matching enrolment data and BST data. The number of students identified as Aboriginal in the BST datasets can differ from the number of Aboriginal students in Years 3 and 5 as identified in the respective mid-year census collections (eg for Year 5 in 2003, total numbers of government school students taking the literacy tests were 4.3 percent less than the mid-year census numbers, while the number of Aboriginal students was over 14 percent more).

### **Student leadership**

A positive theme that developed from field visits, community consultations and submissions was identified as the development of student leadership programs for Aboriginal students and the belief that leadership programs (both within the school and community) can support the increased retention of Aboriginal students.

It was found that leadership programs develop Aboriginal school leaders who act as role models for other Aboriginal students. These leaders have strong cultural and personal identities; self-reliance and confidence; and a determination to succeed at school to achieve long-term career goals.

Consultations identified that many Aboriginal students in the upper years of primary have an identified leadership role in their family and their community that needs to be acknowledged and developed through opportunities in primary school. Successful programs for secondary students such as Aboriginal Student Councils or junior AECGs may be useful models for middle and upper primary students.

### **Transition to Year 7 and career and work education**

The Review has identified the need for additional support for Aboriginal students at transition points (transition to school; Year 2 to Year 3; Year 6 to Year 7; and Year 10 to Year 11).

The major transition point is from home to school but the move from primary school to high school is an area where many Aboriginal students with positive experiences at primary school lose their sense of identity and belonging and feel isolated.

Successful transition to high school programs for Aboriginal students need to be more structured and meaningful than one or two visits to the high school and an exchange of information between the primary school AEA and the high school

AEA to ensure that Aboriginal students are not “lost” in their first year of high school.

A South Australian program that provides up to five weeks case management and mentoring support for Aboriginal students returning to school after the December/January vacation has been successful in improving the transition from year to year and improving Aboriginal students’ preparedness and readiness for school.

Aboriginal community consultations raised the need for career education to be made more meaningful for Aboriginal students and for future goals to be explored and supported in primary school.

Schools identified the success of the *Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program* (ACAP) as a model for preparing Aboriginal students for high school and for the world of work but were concerned that the program was no longer being funded.

### **Providing support for the gifted and talented**

There is little literature or evidence from the field trips and submissions about the identification of or programs developed to meet the learning needs of gifted and talented Aboriginal students.

Between 1997 and 2003 there were between three and five Aboriginal students in primary Opportunity Class (OC) classes as compared to 3240 non-Aboriginal students in 2003 (Source: National Schools Statistics Collection).

Community consultations raised the issue of increasing the number of Aboriginal students in primary OC classes by targeting places for Aboriginal students and through the development of culturally appropriate assessment.

The major work around gifted and talented Aboriginal students in New South Wales is represented by Dr Graham Chaffey, who undertook a number of case studies of Aboriginal students from Year 3 to Year 6 as part of his thesis. Dr Chaffey developed a testing method called the Coolabah Dynamic Testing Method (2003) to identify high academic potential in “invisible underachievers”. Dr Chaffey claims that the test is relatively culturally fair as it is based on pattern-recognition rather than linguistic skills. The Coolabah Dynamic assessment has been successful in identifying previously unrecognised high academic potential in young Aboriginal children.

In 2003 the theory behind the Chaffey model was used to fill places reserved for Aboriginal students in an opportunity class at a metropolitan New South Wales Government school. Schools were not asked to provide information about the student’s achievement or comments on the student’s suitability. Chaffey found that consistently teachers had lower expectations of their students’ ability than evidenced by his tests.

A total of four Aboriginal students applied and were tested using a modified version of Chaffey’s program. None of these students had applied through the

original statewide selection process. After testing, places in the Opportunity Class were offered to three of the students.

### **Implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy***

Numerous community visits, field trips and submissions strongly highlighted the need for the Department to be accountable for the full implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* (AEP) across all New South Wales Government schools and that the current unacceptable achievement levels for Aboriginal students could be directly related to the AEP not being implemented in schools in a holistic or significant way.

The implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* (AEP) 1996 is mandatory for all New South Wales Government schools. The successful implementation of this policy should ensure Aboriginal students are able to participate in learning environments unencumbered by the negative effects of racism.

Aboriginal community members commented that supportive schools identify and resolve issues of racism and welcome the process of reconciliation.

Submissions identified that incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum and teaching Aboriginal Studies will support the process of sharing cultural knowledge by Aboriginal people. This knowledge then becomes accessible to all students through the curriculum.

Aboriginal community members expressed the belief that incorporating the issues of racism, prejudice and reconciliation in school planning and policies was crucial to effective, ongoing social support for Aboriginal students and their families.

A number of submissions called for mandatory reporting of the AEP in every school's Annual Report.

### **Aboriginal education support programs to improve outcomes**

A number of programs operating in New South Wales Government schools aim at improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students by meeting their specific educational needs.

Programs developed to achieve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students must be:

- strategic and planned
- rigorous and explicit
- achievable and successful
- sustainable and accountable.

A substantial number of submissions highlighted the need for the Commonwealth and state funding cycle to be aligned, for program funding to be

allocated for at least a three-year period and for flexibility to allow schools to select programs that best meet the needs of their Aboriginal students.

Field trips also highlighted the need for support programs for Aboriginal students to start early in Term 1 rather than later in the year. As well, the competitive process of submissions does not always result in programs being offered to the most appropriate schools.

A submission from an Aboriginal health organisation suggested providing additional funding to schools that can demonstrate effective community engagement (Submission EM004).

### ***Priority Schools Funding Program***

The *Priority Schools Funding Program* (PSFP) provides schools with additional funding, resources and consultancy support to meet the educational needs of students from low socioeconomic families. PSFP schools include 81 secondary, 406 primary, 19 central and 35 Schools for Specific Purposes.

In 2002, 48.3 percent or 5593 Aboriginal students in Years 3 to 6 were in PSFP schools. As many Aboriginal students come from families with low incomes, the PSFP is one of the major equity programs seeking to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students from K–12.

Greenwood, Frigo and Hughes (2002), in examining the recent OECD *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), found that Australian Aboriginal students (15 years) from a high socioeconomic status are not necessarily more likely to achieve better results. They believe there may be other factors operating in relation to the achievement of Aboriginal students.

Field trip visits to PSFP schools identified their focus areas as literacy, numeracy and participation. Schools worked with their PSFP consultant and Community Development Officer to identify, plan and implement school-based activities to improve educational outcomes for all students. The 2002 PSFP accountability report identified that 83 percent of PSFP students reached a stage-appropriate level.

The field trips found that schools working to address social and economic disadvantage for Aboriginal students were much more effective when planning, programs and staff recognised and valued the critical issue of cultural identity: the student's Aboriginality and Aboriginal community knowledge.

A number of schools highlighted the need for a closer alignment of all support programs to ensure connectedness rather than duplication. Schools were concerned about the ability of short-term programs and short-term funding to address the high needs of a number of Aboriginal students.

## ***Priority Action Schools Program***

The *Priority Action Schools Program* (PAS) provides resources to 74 PSFP schools to maximise educational outcomes and improve student performance.

Funding under the *Priority Action Schools Program* supports schools to improve student engagement in learning and educational outcomes, and improve attendance and retention. The program fosters cooperation between schools, TAFE NSW and other agencies and community organisations.

Some features of PAS schools include high staff and student mobility, high concentrations of beginning teachers or end career teachers (depending on location) and inexperienced school executive staff in promotion positions.

A number of PAS schools were visited during the field trips. As participants in the PAS program, schools developed a plan that:

- provided local solutions to problems affecting schools
- focused on strengthening interagency collaborations
- developed community and school capacity building
- identified innovative early intervention and prevention strategies
- incorporated context-based solutions and partnerships
- identified an academic partner to support their action research and evaluation.

PAS schools reported that the ability to plan and think differently meant they were better placed to meet the identified needs of their Aboriginal students through effective teaching and learning. The availability of resources to support the employment of additional staff to implement strategies and flexible staffing arrangements for school communities to select and employ officers with specific skills, abilities and interests were identified as beneficial.

Additional support to enhance professional learning in schools such as mentoring of beginning teachers, in-built relief for classroom observations and post-class reflection time, executive release for shared school leadership and the implementation of an action enquiry model of program evaluation were seen as critical to the program's success.

### **Targeted funding**

In 2004 approximately 498 schools were provided with targeted funding to implement literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention programs for Aboriginal students K–12. The amount of funds allocated to schools for projects is determined by local Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees.

Schools are required to develop programs based on the educational needs of their Aboriginal students through focused and educationally rigorous programs that have direct links to syllabus documents. Programs need to be developed in close consultation with Aboriginal parents and the local Aboriginal community.

The Consultant (Aboriginal Education) provides consultancy support to these schools to ensure the effective implementation of the targeted project.

In the evaluations for 2003 projects, schools have indicated that targeted funding projects have been extremely successful and that they have had a direct and positive impact on the achievements of targeted Aboriginal students, but this is not reflected in Basic Skills Test results at an SEA or statewide level.

An analysis of targeted funding evaluations for 2003 by the Aboriginal Programs Unit found that in reporting on Aboriginal student achievement, schools are rarely reporting on the achievement of syllabus outcomes. A reliance on results that are not linked to syllabus content or syllabus outcomes may be providing some schools with a false sense of educational achievement and, as a result, Aboriginal students are still performing at levels lower than their non-Aboriginal peers according to Basic Skills Test results.

School performance of Aboriginal students in the Basic Skills Test is also commonly compared to state averages for Aboriginal students in the Basic Skills Test. This comparison leads schools to conclude that their Aboriginal students are performing in line with, or above, state averages. In these cases, schools may have developed an acceptance that the state average for Aboriginal students is well below the state average for all students.

The most common strategy employed by schools for providing additional support to targeted Aboriginal students is the employment of Aboriginal community members as tutors, usually supporting students within classrooms. This strategy appears to be sound as the IESIP performance indicators identify the employment of Aboriginal people at all levels of the Department as a priority. However, the use of Aboriginal community tutors working with students generally means the target students receive less time with the classroom teacher when, in fact, more access to classroom teacher time is probably required by these students.

### ***In-class Tuition***

In 2002 and 2003, approximately 75 primary and central schools were provided with *In-class Tuition* (ICT) funding to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Years K–6 Aboriginal students in the lowest 20 percent of literacy and numeracy assessment.

Funding was provided to employ tutors to work with students in the classroom during literacy and numeracy lessons. A majority of schools employed Aboriginal community members as tutors and had a focus on literacy.

An analysis of the BST results for the participating schools in 2002 and 2003 indicated:

- In 22 of the 75 schools Aboriginal students improved their results in literacy by more than the average improvement for all students between Years 3 and 5.

- For Year 3, 46 schools showed a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students in Band 1 literacy results.
- For Year 5, 22 schools showed a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal students in Bands 1 and 2 literacy results.

Schools, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal education workers identified the *In-class Tuition* program as one of the most successful programs in primary schools.

As part of the 2003 In-class Tuition Evaluation survey, schools identified the benefits of the ICT program as:

- improved learning outcomes particularly in literacy achievements
- more consistent Aboriginal student attendance
- increased engagement and improved work habits for Aboriginal students
- reduced suspensions for Aboriginal students
- increased self-esteem and confidence for both Aboriginal students and Aboriginal tutors.

Schools identified that the positive impact of employing Aboriginal people who demonstrate that education is important by their involvement in the school could not be underestimated.

The program also built important links between the home and the school. Aboriginal parents employed as tutors developed an understanding of the complex nature of schools. This knowledge led them to act as advocates for the school and its students in the community.

## **Attendance**

Current suspension, attendance and retention rates for Aboriginal students clearly demonstrate that students will reject mainstream education if it does not affirm, value and respect their identity as Aboriginal people.

Addressing the issues of attendance, retention and suspension is dependent on shifting the negative perceptions and attitudes about schooling held by some Aboriginal parents, caregivers and Aboriginal community members about schools. Many Aboriginal parents who were and still are excluded from schooling encourage their children to attend school. Primary students interviewed as part of the field trips identified parental support for their attendance and achievement at school as important.

Teachers and school leaders report that many high school Aboriginal students, particularly boys, with poor attendance and high suspension rates had commenced school before they turned five and were young for their cohort.

Schools identified that poor attendance patterns established in the early years of primary were difficult to address in the middle and upper years of primary. The ability to access an Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer to case manage Aboriginal students with poor attendance was identified as positive.



Aboriginal community people and Aboriginal education workers identified that kinship ties and extended family responsibilities impacted on Aboriginal student attendance and that it was a challenge for schools to respect these responsibilities when it meant that a student was missing vital classroom time or that Aboriginal students were spending time with older students who no longer attended school.

A number of schools reported the current OASIS system for monitoring attendance cannot identify Aboriginal students and that the system cannot access attendance data from previous years. A number of parents were supportive when schools contacted parents in regard to unexplained absences, particularly when the absences were high.

## **Suspension**

A number of parents identified that suspension provides Aboriginal students with an avenue to 'escape' school by pushing the boundaries to get a few days off school. This is a no-win situation for students, families and the school. Many Aboriginal parents saw suspension as the school not caring for or valuing the student, which impacts on Aboriginal students' self-esteem.

*I feel that Koori kids are behind the eight ball from the start due to social-economic status in some areas. Suspending kids will just lower the bar of expectations. Schools should adapt to the kids' strengths, rather than the kids adapting to schools.*

– Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer

Sanderson (2002), citing research by Cunneen, believes that the progression to criminal activity starts long before students leave school or hit the streets. It is of critical importance that Aboriginal students are not excluded or marginalised in the primary school.

A number of submissions addressed the need for schools to change the way they operate to bring about a cultural shift to address overt and covert racism and that a whole school and whole community focus to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students can reduce the number of suspensions.

The role of AEAs in the suspension of Aboriginal students was often raised at field trip visits to school and Aboriginal community meetings. Strong concerns were expressed that in some schools AEAs were not involved in the suspension process and had no knowledge of the suspension when contacted by parents. On another level the AEA was directed by principals or executive staff to look after the student until the suspension process was finalised or to undertake a home visit to inform parents of the suspension. There were also different understandings about the role of the AEA when the student returned to school from suspension.

An Aboriginal Principals' workshop identified the need for providing professional development for teachers in behaviour management and the need to

identify behaviour patterns and provide additional support before there is a need to suspend. The principals identified the need for schools to work closely with Aboriginal parents, Elders and the Aboriginal community to develop a code of conduct, that schools need additional support for students with severe emotional or behavioural problems and that short suspensions should be negotiated and school-based.

Principals interviewed during field trips commented that the involvement of Aboriginal community people in educational decision-making, the employment of Aboriginal people in educational programs and the implementing of cultural and mentoring programs are critical to forming strong partnerships between students, teachers and parents.

Community people commented that, as school leader, principals have a role in involving the local Aboriginal community and that an empowered community results in engaged Aboriginal students. The return from suspension was a vital time to put in place strategies to ensure that there was not a “next time”.

The principal of a large primary school in a coastal regional town believes there are two main reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal students in suspension data: the majority of teachers and principals are not aware of the cultural needs of Aboriginal students; and that a lot of Aboriginal students have challenging behaviours.

Field trip participants and submission writers commented on the need to look at options other than suspension, when there is recognition that suspension doesn't always work as a behaviour modification strategy. School communities need to look for more effective ways of working with students to change behaviour.

One principal commented:

*If I get family support for a suspension, then I move towards it; if not, the student stays at school.*

Principals also suggested a range of programs to address the underlying causes of student misbehaviour.

One strategy is to ensure that teachers and staff know the Aboriginal families in their school and that Aboriginal students and parents are familiar with who is who at the school. Another strategy is to buddy a new Aboriginal student to the school with a teacher, not necessarily the classroom teacher, who is a mentor and advocate for the student and family as they settle in and become more relaxed and confident with the school. One principal stressed the importance of supporting the work of the AEA in working with Aboriginal students and families, knowing students and their families and sharing relevant information with staff.

*Strategies are not the issue; it is the enthusiasm, dedication, commitment and genuine belief that we are in a partnership. It is back to the AEP being properly implemented.*

– Principal interview

**Circle of Friends**  
**A 2004 Nowra Community of Schools Aboriginal Student Welfare Initiative**

This initiative was successfully trialled in a South Coast primary school. The purpose of the *Circle of Friends* program is to involve students, parents, Elders and Aboriginal community people in a cultural approach as an alternative to suspension in determining the consequences of inappropriate behaviour.

The trial was based on the successful restorative justice process known as *Circle Sentencing*, which allows for the offender, after pleading guilty or being found guilty, to apply to the court for a circle sentence. If the offender can show community support and the application is granted, the offender sits in a circle with the judge, police, prosecutor, family members, the victim and Elders to discuss the offence, any extenuating circumstances, the consequences of the offence and an appropriate sentence. The program incorporates the principles of self-determination and empowerment for Aboriginal communities.

The *Circle of Friends* is based on a level of trust that encourages and welcomes Aboriginal families into the school. The principal and the school staff must have a culturally sensitive approach to Aboriginal issues and believe in the appropriateness of Aboriginal kinship in supporting student identity, student behaviour and student choices.

*Given that the school has demonstrated this belief, then Aboriginal people will trust the management of the school and have faith in the Circle of Friends process.*

– Principal's statement

There is a need to “re-vision” primary schools, to make a strong claim for the future of Aboriginal students and the future of Aboriginal communities; where all primary schools will know and succeed with their Aboriginal students, where schools will make strong connections with Aboriginal communities and where schools will make a difference to the lives of young Aboriginal people.

*Inflexibility of school structures at present does not meet the diverse circumstances of Aboriginal communities.*

– Secondary Principals' Council, submission EM033

This future will need to be characterised by strong Aboriginal parent and community engagement in their children's education and genuine partnerships that describe what teachers can and will do and how Aboriginal parents and community members can provide their support.

*Schools will continue to fail Aboriginal people if they view knowledge and skills as the possession of individuals, to be developed in individual minds when Aboriginal communities frequently appear to view knowledge as a collective capacity of the community, to be developed (and distributed through) the community as a shared capacity ... a teacher might therefore consider their work in terms of teaching communities in Aboriginal settings rather than teaching individual students who happen to come from or be in a community.*

– Professor S Kemmis, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, submission EM015

## Section 4: Junior Secondary Schooling

This section of the report deals with the junior secondary school Years 7 to 10 and matters related to education for Aboriginal students in this age range.

In New South Wales, junior secondary schooling caters for students between the ages of 12 and 16 years. New South Wales students must attend school until the age of 14 years and 9 months. Secondary schooling in New South Wales commences with Year 7 and students work towards gaining a School Certificate at the end of Year 10, after which they leave school or continue to the Higher School Certificate in Year 12.

The Board of Studies in New South Wales determines the junior secondary curriculum requirements and develops syllabus documents for each subject in the key learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science, Human Society and its Environment, Personal Development/Health/Physical Education, Technological and Applied Studies, Creative Arts and Languages.

In 2003 there were 9523 (4.4 percent of a total of 216 206) junior secondary Aboriginal students enrolled in mainstream courses in 370 of the 393 government high schools and in 62 of the 66 central schools. In addition, there were 838 Aboriginal students enrolled in specialist classes and units.

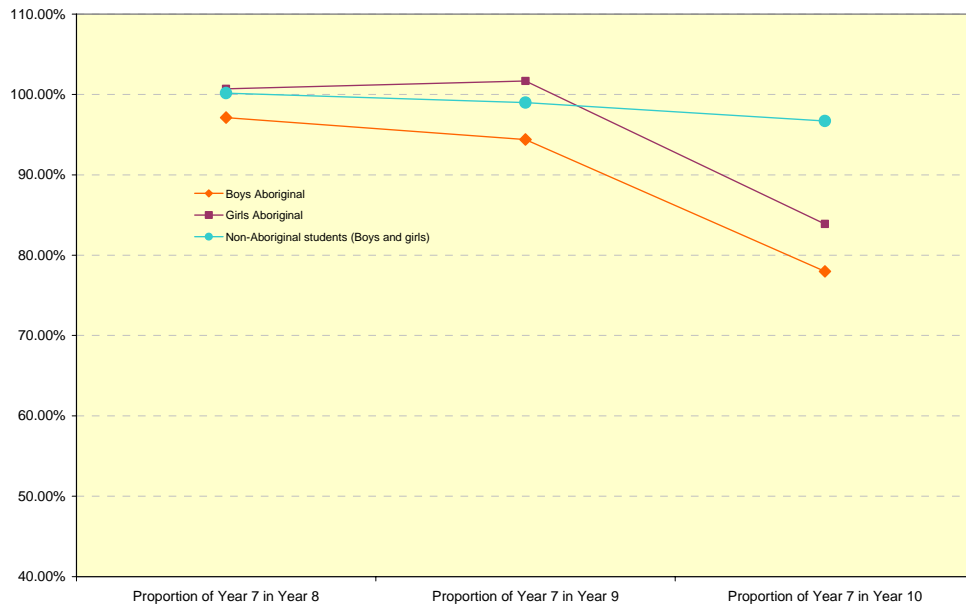
**Table 3.4.1: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal enrolments across Years 7–10 and support classes: 2003**

		Central Schools	Secondary Schools	Schools for Specific Purposes
Year 7	Aboriginal	216	2,474	0
	Non-Aboriginal	1,543	51,292	0
Year 8	Aboriginal	203	2,392	0
	Non-Aboriginal	1,613	50,891	0
Year 9	Aboriginal	209	2,165	0
	Non-Aboriginal	1,502	49,792	0
Year 10	Aboriginal	160	1,704	0
	Non-Aboriginal	1,381	48,669	0
Support classes	Aboriginal	58	532	248
	Non-Aboriginal	144	6,814	2,297

Schools that educate students from the lowest socioeconomic communities are given additional support under the *Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP)*. In 2003, 30 percent of Aboriginal students (2550 students) were enrolled in a PSFP high school and 54 percent of the Aboriginal students (429 students) enrolled in a central school were supported by PSFP. Therefore, 2979 Aboriginal students out of a total of 9523 Aboriginal students were given the opportunity for additional support under PSFP. This indicates that two-thirds of Aboriginal students enrolled in secondary education do not attend the schools that are provided with additional assistance through PSFP.

Aboriginal enrolments within each school range from 1 to 198 so that any intervention to bring about equal outcomes for Aboriginal students in junior

secondary education will require strategic support across the majority of secondary and central schools.



**Figure 3.4.1: Proportion of Year 7 students progressing to subsequent academic years, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by gender: 2003**

Figure 3.4.1 graphs the number of students in Years 8, 9 and 10 as a proportion of the number of students enrolled in Year 7.

For Aboriginal girls, numbers appeared to increase in Years 8 and 9 relative to when those students were in Year 7, but then decrease substantially in Year 10. Numbers of Aboriginal boys consistently decrease, at a substantially greater rate than for all other students, with their departures starting much earlier than for all other students.

For some Aboriginal students, the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 is a greater change than faced by the majority of students. This change may also involve a transition from non-government, mainly Catholic systemic schooling, to public schooling, affecting students in rural areas where Catholic systemic schools cater to mostly primary students.

That shift explains the increase in numbers of Aboriginal students in Year 7 over their numbers in Year 6 in the public education system.

### **Attendance, retention and academic performance**

Data collected by the Review process confirms that strategies, policies and funding need to be directed towards increasing the levels of attendance and retention and bringing about improvement in the educational performance of Aboriginal students. These are directed at each of the following areas as each is interdependent on the others in achieving the required level of success.

## **Student identity, self-esteem and self-concept**

A recurring theme from the field trips indicated that the success of Aboriginal students in junior secondary school, as in other phases of schooling, will only improve if schools can support and strengthen the self-esteem of their students through further developing understanding of and respect for Aboriginal culture in the school's local community. This community must also feel welcome in, and part of, the school. Therefore, teachers who are expected to work in Aboriginal communities should acquire an in-depth knowledge of that community.

Children undergoing the transition through puberty to adolescence may experience more problems involving their identity and may need ongoing positive support to bolster their self-esteem. Cultural programs with extensive Aboriginal involvement are crucial to this process.

Critically, if students in secondary education are to succeed, their parents/caregivers need a high level of support. If children's domestic and family situations are negative, then it is much more difficult for schools to perform their educative function.

## **Positive role models and peer group pressure**

The peer group and out-of-school communities of Aboriginal students exert an extremely significant social influence on their lives. People repeatedly asserted during the field trips and in submissions that peer groups exerted a huge influence on Aboriginal students from as young as 10 years to 16 and over.

These peer groups are almost always across-age groups and may involve brothers, sisters, cousins and friends in significant support networks. In fact, these extended kinship and friendship networks are the strengths of Aboriginal culture. However, in increasing numbers of communities, parents and caregivers expressed concern that the role models of younger children and adolescents were admired because of their experience with the police and the Juvenile Justice System rather than because they succeeded at school.

Mentorship programs run by schools that trained students to be leaders and mentors to other students were seen as effective. Programs that cooperated with TAFE NSW and other government agencies (Department of Sport and Recreation, NSW Health) to enable older group leaders who were positive role models to gain access to educational programs were also considered effective.

Schools and communities complained that many successful programs providing "positive role models" and attempting to link them with secondary Aboriginal students were implemented sporadically and then stopped because of short-term funding, staff turnover and lack of support by the system. These communities felt that long-term funded and resourced programs that systematically created links between Aboriginal students and positive role models were essential.

Feedback at both community meetings and from teachers suggested that positive role models for Aboriginal students are reinforced by a number of means such as

the work of Aboriginal workers and teachers, student mentoring and leadership programs, and building active community links. Most Aboriginal workers spoken to in schools felt they were currently undervalued and were often treated in a tokenistic way. They felt that they received little or no recognition for their work and did not have a positive work experience.

## **Racism**

All Aboriginal people experience racism at some points in their lives. Young Aboriginal adolescents need to be given strategies for coping and dealing with racism so that negative experiences do not lead to non-attendance and ultimately the non-completion of secondary schooling. This also means that school staff must possess a significant level of cultural awareness of and sensitivity to racial discrimination. Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal studies has a positive effect on identity and reduces racism in the classroom.

Secondary schools must deal with acts of racism as a serious breach of discipline and establish properly developed and supported anti-racist programs that assist students in anger management. Parents should also be informed of their rights so that they may ensure that acts of racism are dealt with in a just manner. While schools are expected to identify an Anti Racism Contact Officer (ARCO), often students and parents/caregivers were not aware of the existence and responsibilities of the position. For the ARCO position to be effective, strong leadership from the principal and/or executive staff is critical in dealing with racism and supporting the ARCO's role and responsibilities.

During field visits a number of students complained that their school did not discipline other students for racist behaviour. Some schools advised Aboriginal students not to react to racist taunts but to report them to a teacher, but no disciplinary action was taken. It was reported that in some schools teachers disciplined Aboriginal students for reacting to other students who persistently made racist comments rather than disciplining the other students.

In discussions with Aboriginal students, most acknowledged that it was not acceptable for them to respond to racism with violence but strongly argued that they felt the school did not deal with racism seriously.

## **Schools and curriculum**

Life during puberty and adolescence is a crucial time for the determination of personal identity. The identity and self-esteem of Aboriginal adolescents is undermined if the secondary school environment gives minimal or no recognition to Aboriginal culture.

- Literacy and numeracy

Many Aboriginal adolescent students have very low levels of literacy as they enter high school. This means that their learning experience in most secondary subjects can be one of incomprehension, lack of achievement and failure. This further

undermines their self-esteem and reinforces their attitude that secondary education is irrelevant to their needs and interests.

Many Aboriginal adolescent students who enter high school are not functionally literate in Standard Australian English, nor are they numerate. Consequent frustration leads to their disengagement from most classroom activities, absenteeism and eventually dropping out in significant numbers as early as Year 9, a full academic year before non-Aboriginal students begin to leave in significant numbers.

The difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student results in literacy and numeracy assessment in Year 7 can be broadly interpreted in terms of months learning progress, which is similar to that described earlier with the Basic Skills Test results. In Years 3 and 5, Aboriginal students are roughly 19 months behind non-Aboriginal students in their literacy learning.

By Year 7, for many Aboriginal students that gap increased to somewhere between 30 and 36 months of learning<sup>24</sup>. There is a huge and unacceptable gap between the literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal students in comparison to non-Aboriginal students. Field trips suggested a two-pronged strategy to eliminate this gap and to enable the system to support secondary schools in assisting these students to succeed in the secondary curriculum.

One proposal is that these students should be withdrawn from mainstream classes and be given intensive instruction to improve their literacy. Possible shortcomings to this “withdrawal” strategy is that it denies the student the opportunity to study the course material for their particular year and allows them to fall behind the other students in their class, and that the withdrawal may be embarrassing for the students.

Another proposal that was strongly supported by teachers and parents on the field trips was the provision of additional teachers to team-teach with the subject teacher to assist Aboriginal and other students who needed help to complete the tasks required in the lesson at the same time as helping them to acquire a higher level of literacy and numeracy.

Community members felt that singling out Aboriginal students for such assistance might create a sense of shame so that they resisted this support. While parents believed that the provision of additional teachers could also facilitate a smoother transition from the primary to the high school environment particularly with the Year 7 students, schools might need to assess the use of their Support Teacher Learning Assistance in further assisting with this transition.

Aboriginal communities strongly rejected any proposal to create alternative courses leading to alternative credentials for Aboriginal students and insisted that their children have the right to participate in the same courses as all secondary students.

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<sup>24</sup> This should be taken as only roughly indicative of the size of the gap.



Some secondary teachers also recommended one-on-one and small group instruction (similar to in-class tuition) within the classroom environment for Aboriginal students because such intervention significantly improved their performance and engagement.

- Aboriginal languages

Students' knowledge and use of their Aboriginal languages are fundamental to the development of their identity and enhance their self-esteem. Since the teaching and learning of languages provide an important gateway to Aboriginal culture, this process also ensures that the school staff and community understand and respect their students' heritage. It is important that students are increasingly given access to the study of Aboriginal languages as an option to satisfy the mandatory language requirements for the School Certificate.

- Aboriginal English

As in primary school, the language differences between Aboriginal students and teachers can create difficulties in communication for both. When this cannot be overcome, Aboriginal students may lose interest in class activities, disengage from learning, possibly misbehave and eventually begin to truant. The legitimacy of Aboriginal English and the need to assist teachers to understand its use is important to many communities.

- Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives/Aboriginal Studies

On the field trips teachers suggested that it is rare for Aboriginal perspectives to be included in programs and lessons in most secondary curriculum areas and that they have limited awareness of teaching resources to support the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives.

Secondary Aboriginal students who elected to take Aboriginal Studies were sometimes given no explanation as to why they had to study another course or were often told that the numbers were not sufficient to allow the course to run.

The majority of Aboriginal students interviewed saw decisions by schools not to run Aboriginal Studies as an elective in Years 9 and 10 as a rejection of them and the importance of Aboriginal culture and history.

### **Involvement of parents/caregivers in secondary education**

The field trips suggest that students have a stronger will to succeed and stay at school if the significant adults in their lives are supportive of their goals and are able to assist with their schoolwork.

Many parents expressed frustration at their lack of knowledge of their children's secondary schools and their inability to assist their children. Parents were very receptive to attempts by schools to provide courses or seminars to enable them to understand the requirements of the secondary school. However, such activities were mostly ad hoc, often initiated by particular committed staff members without

additional time or resources, and lacked support from the system. As a consequence, such positive activities often ceased.

Communities were very keen for secondary school parents/caregivers to attend TAFE NSW courses and for the content of these courses to reflect the needs of the parents/caregivers and the local community.

### **Level of awareness of Aboriginal culture and history among staff**

Aboriginal students and communities expressed frustration that teachers and non-teaching staff in many high schools displayed little awareness of Aboriginal culture and history in general, and of local Aboriginal history and culture in particular. They considered this to be a lack of respect for Aboriginal people, which increased their feelings of alienation from the secondary school environment.

It is important to note that many teachers also expressed a desire to gain more knowledge of both local and broader Aboriginal culture and history as well as resources to support Aboriginal education programs. Schools felt that the system needed to ensure its support as the Consultant Aboriginal Education covered too many schools and in some regions too large a geographical area to effectively deliver quality consultancy support.

### **Provision of significant space to reinforce culture**

Some secondary schools found it beneficial to provide a specially designated space in the school to recognise Aboriginal culture and for Aboriginal students to gather, such as a classroom or a smaller space or section of the playground.

Such rooms were also used by Aboriginal parents and community members for meetings in the school and as a place where they could “drop in for a cup of tea”. These kinds of initiatives were effective in building trust and links between schools and communities.

Strategies suggested during field trips by some individuals and groups, or proposed in submissions as enhancing student identity, self-esteem and self-concept were:

- including Aboriginal perspectives/Aboriginal Studies in the school curriculum
- supporting such Aboriginal Studies electives in Years 9 and 10 by the provision of additional teacher staffing, especially where the number of Aboriginal students is low
- clarifying school/DET policies regarding the acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture, for example, flying the Aboriginal flag and providing flagpoles
- providing culturally appropriate counselling for students by relevant agencies
- providing one-on-one tuition for students with learning difficulties and their parents

- providing full service programs (two years) such as youth programs, grooming, life skills
- establishing properly developed and supported anti-racism programs in schools that assist students in anger management and educate staff, students and communities about them
- providing case management of students by identified teachers
- providing cultural awareness training on the diversity of Aboriginal communities for all teachers and staff of DET
- providing compulsory local school and community cultural awareness training for all school staff prior to commencing duty
- employment of more Aboriginal workers and teachers at schools
- providing leadership programs for Aboriginal students
- creating a student mentoring program/student representative council
- constructing strategies for building ongoing and proactive community links
- initiating programs that systemically link Aboriginal students and positive role models from a broad range of occupations (rather than just elite sportspeople) and from inside and outside students' local community
- training new teachers coming to a community in the differences in language and how to adjust their classroom practice, preferably through in-service.

## **Health and wellbeing**

Communities asserted that government and non-government agencies must work together to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing. The *Two Ways Together: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003-2012*, which combines intervention in health and education to raise the educational levels and retention of students, provides a strategy through which this can be achieved.

Community feedback suggested that all DET staff should be made aware of the effects of health, community and family factors such as hearing problems, poor nutrition and lack of sleep, and the experience of violence, addiction and grief on students in the secondary school environment. Programs to address these problems should be implemented with the involvement of school staff, other agencies and community people.

Factors that inhibit the success of Aboriginal children in secondary school often stem from the social disadvantage of most Aboriginal communities. Schools need to take this into account when Aboriginal students underperform or have behavioural problems. For example, violence and sleep deprivation may lead to continuing lateness and attendance problems. These factors may also influence the behaviour of students in school, with students acting out their frustrations and distress. Usually, such behaviour leads to the suspension of students and the school continues to remain ignorant of their problems. Schools need to take a whole-of-family approach to help students deal with such situations so that they feel able to remain in school.

Interviewees expressed the belief that the presence of Aboriginal workers and/or Aboriginal counsellors at the school would enable distressed students to articulate

their feelings and would help to provide them with strategies for coping with violence and grief. These strategies could run in tandem with the teaching of conflict management skills.

Staff knowledge of these barriers to students' ability to perform is crucial to their wellbeing. Schools need to form strong local community partnerships with parents, community members and Elders because their involvement is critical in understanding the factors that inhibit students from attending and staying on at school.

In meetings with non-government agencies in the areas of health and welfare, greater involvement and access to secondary schools was called for so that programs running in the community could be better developed for the benefit of students inside the school.

Some teachers and principals argued that government and non-government services that worked with the same communities as the school would be better located within the school's facilities as the centre of service provision to these communities. Schools expressed frustration that interagency meetings were often called at times and locations that made it impossible for staff to attend.

Strategies suggested during field trips by some individuals and groups or proposed in submissions as enhancing the health and wellbeing of students included:

- referring students to appropriate agencies with Aboriginal workers and/or Aboriginal counsellors for families in crisis
- referring students to programs that teach strategies for dealing with violence, grief and conflict management
- providing nutrition programs
- providing programs to address other health problems such as hearing impairment, lack of sleep, experience of violence, addiction (eg drug and alcohol education) and grief
- setting up microphone rooms staffed by trained teachers for Aboriginal children with hearing problems (otitis media)
- running parenting courses
- strengthening the skills of parents dealing with adolescents (eg via TAFE NSW)
- providing inter-agency case management for individual students where appropriate
- employing more Aboriginal Education Workers and Aboriginal counsellors with links to medical centres in schools
- providing transport to and from school where required
- providing access to childcare where appropriate
- offering financial support to parents/caregivers including equipment and textbooks for disadvantaged students
- facilitating coordinated interagency support for families
- providing additional staffing for schools that would allow a greater non-teaching component so that staff would have more flexibility and time to

engage in agency and community meetings during school hours without disruption to teaching programs.

### **Community capacity building**

It is important to build the confidence and skills within Aboriginal communities for them to assist and enhance the success of their children at high school. At the same time Aboriginal communities need to be supported in their responsibilities towards helping their children secure a meaningful education.

Ensuring success for Aboriginal students in schools involves supporting ongoing programs that assist Aboriginal communities as a whole to enhance their knowledge and skill levels so that Aboriginal children are inspired by the achievements and participation of the older members of their communities. It is crucial for Aboriginal adolescents to have positive role models who reinforce the value of education. This means that Aboriginal communities have to be supported in building their capacity and self-respect.

Field trips and submissions demonstrated repeatedly that Aboriginal communities were hungry for strategies to educate community members about their responsibilities, and to encourage adolescents to attend and succeed at school.

### **Identification of role models in the community**

A recurring theme of the Review was that many Aboriginal adolescents had no older role models in their community who appeared to value and enjoy education, who have succeeded in school and, consequently, have secure paid employment. Without such successful role models, students fail to see any value in attending school. Rather, many Aboriginal families have no members in full-time employment or in occupations that require perseverance at school.

### **Level of education of parents/caregivers**

It was overwhelmingly clear from the responses of the Aboriginal community that Aboriginal parents want their children to succeed at school. One of the issues raised was the fact that young people were now more educated than some parents who felt increasingly unable to assist their children with their high school education. The Access Division of TAFE NSW has developed Part 1 of an *Empowering Parents* program, which helps parents to support children with their homework. This program has been successful through partnership between the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council and Tahmoor Public School. However, such programs, which enable Aboriginal parents to visit schools and observe teachers in class, are only effective if principals offer strong support and involvement.

Throughout the field trips many parents called for increased knowledge of school procedures and greater involvement in school practices. They felt communication between the school and parents could be improved.

Strategies suggested during field trips by some individuals and groups or proposed in submissions included :

- offering to all schools the *Empowering Parents* program run through TAFE NSW. This program actively builds partnerships between schools and Aboriginal communities
- familiarising parents with organisational and school procedures.

### **Transition to high school**

If retention rates are to improve, transition to high school has to be managed so that students are supported and encouraged. This is especially true when this might involve moving from a one-teacher school environment to a different, more challenging and independent learning environment in a larger high school, sometimes in another town or community.

Society expects schools to have prime responsibility for addressing the issues of literacy and numeracy since they are essential for educational success and meaningful participation in the wider society. Success in the secondary school curriculum requires building on a level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy achieved at primary school. Unfortunately, this is not the case for significant numbers of Aboriginal adolescents.

### **Improving levels of literacy and numeracy on entry to high school**

A greater proportion of Aboriginal students are placed in the lowest two literacy and achievement levels when they are assessed by the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) and Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program (SNAP) test results at the commencement of Year 7 than non-Aboriginal students

While 17.6 percent of non-Aboriginal students were placed in the two lowest levels in ELLA (Reading), 45.3 percent of Aboriginal students were similarly placed. In the SNAP Numeracy Test, the comparison was 33.3 percent (non-Aboriginal students) with 68.3 percent (Aboriginal students).

On average, in 2003 many Year 7 Aboriginal students were in the order of 30 to 36 months behind non-Aboriginal students in their reading ability. In addition, 45 percent of the Aboriginal students assessed failed to exceed an elementary level of proficiency in reading compared with 17 percent of non-Aboriginal students. This significantly lowers the capacity for Aboriginal students to engage meaningfully with the requirements of the secondary curriculum.

**Table 3.4.2: Percentage distribution of results across bands, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, Year 7 ELLA and SNAP results: 1999–2003.<sup>25</sup>**

	Aboriginal students				Non-Aboriginal students			
	1999	2001	2002	2003	1999	2001	2002	2003
ELLA Reading Year 7								
Low	17.4	15.3	14.5	16.6	5.4	3.8	4.5	4.1
Elementary	26.9	32.7	30.9	28.7	12.3	14.1	15.1	13.5
Proficient	45.5	42.0	44.4	43.6	49.2	47.3	47.9	46.6
High	10.2	10.0	10.2	11.1	33.1	34.8	32.5	35.8
Total number	2980	3208	3350	3402	50 885	49 245	50 307	50 671
SNAP Numeracy Year 7								
Low		13.7	19.2	18.3		3.3	4.6	4.5
Elementary		48.3	43.2	50.0		23.2	24.4	29.8
Proficient		29.7	30.5	26.3		40.2	40.9	40.3
High		8.4	7.1	5.5		33.3	30.1	25.5
Total number		2951	3039	3049		48 393	49 049	49 384

The training of subject-based secondary teachers does not always include literacy training for adolescents and, in fact, there appears to be an assumption at high school that students in Year 7 have already achieved a certain level of general literacy.

### **Better management of curriculum transition**

Students entering high school encounter an unfamiliar secondary curriculum which is faculty and subject-based. The primary school approach offers a more integrated learning system with a strong literacy and numeracy focus across key learning areas. Students are generally taught by one teacher in Year 6 in primary school, and then have to adapt to the styles of possibly 10 different teachers teaching different subjects in Year 7. This means that teachers have to actively engage and support students in the new curriculum and adopt innovative teaching practices. Teachers need to be supported in developing teaching programs that engage and motivate students.

Some secondary schools have restructured their approach to ease transition into the secondary school by reducing the number of teachers who teach each class and by attempting to timetable the majority of Year 7 classes into the same “home room”. This is done to try and reduce the extent of change from primary school and to phase in the experience of being taught by different specialist teachers.

### **Improvement of access to schools**

In field trips, concern was expressed by parents and Aboriginal communities that Aboriginal students who attended a secondary or central school at a distance from

<sup>25</sup> Neither ELLA nor SNAP was administered in 2000.

their immediate community were expected to travel for long periods of time on buses. Some of the reported issues associated with bus travel were:<sup>26</sup>

- A bus company had one bus doing a number of different routes before school and this created the problem that the first pick-up was very early.
- Bus drivers would refuse to travel down some roads in wet conditions which meant that students waiting for the bus were not picked up.
- Bus drivers would drop off students many kilometres from the normal bus stop forcing the students to walk and creating extreme worry for their parents who expected their children to arrive home on the bus.
- Bus drivers often disciplined students by removing them from the bus, sometimes in inaccessible locations.
- Aboriginal students who lived on a mission were often not picked up due to perceived or real safety concerns.

Field trip teams were advised that where schools and communities, (either the local Aboriginal Land Council or other community organisation), provided transport to school, attendance of the students improved and families established a routine of getting their children ready for school.

Where schools had been funded to establish a homework centre, a lack of transport for students to get home often meant students who lived out of town or not within walking distance could not attend.

Distance to the secondary school and the problems related to transport make the transition to high school harder for Aboriginal students who live in more remote communities. At the time of transition to high school these students are faced with having to adapt to a new and larger community, a new and very differently structured high school environment as well as distance and transport difficulties and a longer day.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips or proposed in submissions as facilitating the transition of students to high school included:

- educating teachers on their expectations of Aboriginal students entering high school
- establishing strategies to make performance information from primary schools available to Year 7 teachers
- reviewing the role played by Aboriginal teachers and workers to facilitate easier transition to secondary school, while some communities favoured increasing their numbers
- building ongoing and continuing links with the community
- supporting strategies in primary schools that increase the number of teachers who teach the Year 6 curriculum, and strategies in high schools that reduce the number of teachers who teach the Year 7 students

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<sup>26</sup> In remote areas of the state, complaints about contracted bus services can be directed to the Ministry of Transport or to the Regional Director (DET). There is a “Code of Conduct” which contractors are obliged to honour.



- providing smaller group and individual attention and teaching for Year 7 Aboriginal students. This could occur via the extension of in-class tuition by trained Aboriginal community workers, and by the provision of tutors who would work in class with all students who require additional assistance
- providing Year 7 classes with a “home room” to reduce the requirements for the students to change classrooms after each period
- developing strategies to ensure that Aboriginal parents/caregivers are informed of their rights in regard to the transporting of their children to and from school, and where problems persist, to provide alternative transport.

### **Low literacy/numeracy and course relevance and practicality**

Increasing the engagement of Aboriginal students in the junior secondary curriculum must acknowledge the significant gap between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in literacy and numeracy achievement. An extremely low level of literacy and numeracy for the majority of Aboriginal secondary students undermines their ability to achieve in the secondary course requirements.

It is in the context of this low literacy/numeracy performance that assertions that the curriculum is not relevant and that the curriculum should be “more practical and hands on” need to be evaluated. A student’s attitude and approach to study would be very different if their basic skills in literacy and numeracy were at a high enough level to allow them to succeed in the tasks set in the subject area.

### **Alternative courses and credentials**

During the field trips Aboriginal parents/caregivers insisted that they wanted their children to succeed in the courses that all students were undertaking in high school. Suggestions that Aboriginal students be offered different courses or that they pursue different credentials were rejected by Aboriginal communities.

The only exception was the proposal that some courses should be developed for students who were at greater risk of dropping out of high school and were likely to enter the Juvenile Justice System. The view expressed by many Aboriginal communities was that providing an alternative education path for these students would reduce the likelihood that they would get into trouble with the law. The proviso in regard to these alternative pathways for at-risk students was that the courses must give students credentials that would be recognised as contributing to further study and/or skills that would enable them to take their place in and contribute to society.

### **Aboriginal perspectives in the secondary curriculum**

Teachers consistently asked for guidance and support by DET to increase the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives into the programs implemented in secondary classrooms. It was frequently stated that Consultants (Aboriginal Education) were spread too thinly to assist teachers to incorporate an Aboriginal perspective across the curriculum. Teachers also needed help to find the appropriate resources in order to include Aboriginal perspectives into teaching programs.

Communities called for a greater involvement in the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in schools. Local Aboriginal community members must be shown respect by being paid to share their knowledge and expertise with the school so they can be incorporated into teaching programs.

### **Aboriginal languages**

Community meetings showed strong support for the suggestion that schools teach Aboriginal languages as part of the mandatory Languages component. The teaching of an Aboriginal language in Years 7 and/or 8 was seen to offer benefits in a number of areas. Teaching of language is a vehicle for the teaching of the culture of that language group.

Aboriginal students and communities see the teaching of an Aboriginal language as a school demonstrating an acknowledgement of and respect for Aboriginal people and their culture by the school system and by the school.

### **Aboriginal Studies elective in junior secondary schools**

Aboriginal Studies can be offered as an elective for students in Years 9 and 10. It was common in meetings with secondary Aboriginal students on the field trips that if they were attending a school that did not offer or timetable Aboriginal Studies they felt it was a rejection of them, and a rejection of their culture.

The absence of this course reinforced a view that the school did not recognise them and increased their feeling that the school did not care about them or about their culture and history. Many Aboriginal students wanted to take Aboriginal Studies to learn more about their culture and history, as previous government policies did not allow their parents to attain this knowledge and so they were unable to pass it on. Community meetings wanted their local schools to teach the Aboriginal Studies elective. Some principals advised that Aboriginal Studies was offered as an elective, but it was not able to be timetabled because not enough students chose it and the school did not have enough staff to timetable it for so few students.

According to DET 2003 data, there are 370 high schools and 62 central schools that have Aboriginal students enrolled. However, in 2003 only 6 central schools and 28 high schools ran Aboriginal Studies as an elective in Year 9.

Not all Aboriginal students will elect to study Aboriginal Studies. How the elective is placed on the timetable, how it is promoted in the school and the commitment of the school's executive will all influence the number of students who choose to do it.

## Vocational Education and Training

During the field trips there was much debate about Vocational Education and Training (VET) being provided in Stage 5 and perhaps as early as Stage 4. Many Aboriginal parents/caregivers, while seeing a need for VET for some students, expressed their concern that Aboriginal students may be channelled into VET courses because it was seen to be an easier option.

As stated previously, Aboriginal parents/caregivers did not want their children to do different courses and had the same aspirations for their children as other parents had, but they saw that some Aboriginal students may benefit from a different pathway to keep them engaged in secondary school.

## Effects of mobility on students' learning

Some Aboriginal families relocate to new communities, with their children consequently having to change high schools during their secondary education. For some this occurs a number of times within one school year. From the field trips the Review found that secondary-age students who relocate communities are often unable to continue their elective courses on enrolling in a new high school.

Strategies suggested by individuals and groups during field trips and proposed in submissions as enhancing curriculum options and participation included:

### *Curriculum*

- further research the introduction of VET courses in Stage 5 as an alternative pathway for students at risk
- promote the new *Work Education Syllabus* and encourage work experience for students
- make Aboriginal Studies compulsory in Years 9 and 10
- support the decision to make Aboriginal Studies compulsory by providing additional staffing to schools
- provide teachers with professional development and resources that support the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum
- develop a culturally appropriate form of “quality teaching” so that productive pedagogies for Aboriginal students may be constructed.

### *Students*

- involve Aboriginal Education Consultants and TAFE NSW Aboriginal Coordinators in careers advice (eg TAFE NSW options/traineeships)
- provide additional literacy support to secondary schools
- extend *in-class tuition* for literacy and numeracy to secondary schools
- introduce a tracking system to monitor Aboriginal students' progress through secondary school
- increase the staff-to-student ratio for students who are more at risk of dropping out or failing
- provide homework assistance and other resources through school library or homework centres. Provide additional resources to allow school libraries to open for longer hours and provide transport home

- provide bus transport as required.

#### *Staff*

- provide extra remuneration for teachers who are willing to undertake appropriate postgraduate courses that will enhance the quality of their teaching.

This means that some students pick up an elective mid-year or halfway through the course. This causes great disruption to the continuity of the students' learning. The mobility of some Aboriginal students also has an effect on their learning in the core curriculum areas where a student may repeat topics or miss out topics altogether within the faculty programs.

Teachers considered an identification number to help track all students would be beneficial. This would allow the new school to better access information regarding the students' subject choices, abilities and/or learning difficulties without having to spend the time retesting the student to find out where the student was up to.

Teachers felt there needs to be more flexibility to enable students to access distance education to allow them to study their original electives.

The Review was told that Aboriginal students need to be supported by a teacher and the school needs to be given additional staffing to support students accessing distance education as often mobile students need greater assistance given the disruption to their schooling.

### **Teaching and professional development**

Repeatedly, teacher and community consultations and submissions expressed the urgent need for all school staff to be provided with an Aboriginal cultural education component in their pre-service training.

There was also a call for new staff members appointed to a school with Aboriginal enrolments, to be engaged in an intensive orientation program that incorporates local Aboriginal community members, providing information about the local Aboriginal community culture prior to their entry on duty at the school. These orientation programs would also incorporate materials that deal with stereotyping and expectations that new staff may have about Aboriginal secondary students and communities.

In schools with a high staff turnover, it was strongly argued that orientation programs should also include information specific to the programs and approaches already being undertaken by the school to maximise continuity of programs. Too often, frustration was evident that the high staff turnover in some schools meant that the education of students was disrupted because the programs that had been initiated by the previous staff members were not known about or continued by the new staff.

One proposal was that new executive and teaching staff to schools experiencing significant staff turnover should be appointed to the school in mid-Term 4 of the

previous school year, so that they can properly engage in an orientation program and work with the teachers already at the school. This was suggested particularly for executive staff.

Concern was expressed that the current Merit Selection Process for the selection of executive staff often did not ensure the appointment of a principal who was appropriate to a school with Aboriginal secondary students. It was asserted by communities that there needs to be a Special Fitness Appointment System brought in that is more able to select principals who have true understanding and can work with and include Aboriginal parents and communities in a genuine way.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips and proposed in submissions as enhancing teaching and professional development were:

- that DET actively support and resource the implementation of the *Dare To Lead* Project<sup>27</sup> at the school level
- employing additional consultants and ensuring the effectiveness of consultants in supporting and enabling quality teaching
- that DET create an up-to-date bank of resources to support Aboriginal education and develop effective systems to ensure these resources are known about and easily accessed by secondary teachers for use in schools
- providing and staffing active mentoring programs for teachers
- that DET provide funds for induction and cultural awareness courses and mentoring programs
- providing courses for secondary teachers on how to teach literacy
- employing additional Aboriginal adults in secondary and central schools
- introducing in-class tuition into Years 7 and 8 and also providing resources to allow the employment of tutors to work with teachers to provide more individual attention to students in the classroom
- providing scholarships to Aboriginal workers to enable them to undertake teacher training.

### **School policies and practices**

Most consultations expressed the need to improve the quality and consistency of the implementation of the *Discipline and Welfare Policy* and the need for greater communication and consultation about school policies and practices with Aboriginal parents/caregivers and the wider Aboriginal community.

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<sup>27</sup> *Dare To Lead* is a Commonwealth-funded, national project with a focus on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It is an initiative of the Australian Principals Association's Professional Development Council (APAPDC) acting on behalf of its members and their associations. More information can be obtained from [www.apapdc.edu.au/daretolead](http://www.apapdc.edu.au/daretolead)

## Suspension

The suspension of students is a very important issue for Aboriginal communities. Parents were critical of how the policy was actually implemented and the lack of community knowledge about suspension procedures.

The short suspension rate for Aboriginal females was four times that of non-Aboriginal females, while the short suspension rate for Aboriginal males was over three times that of non-Aboriginal males.

**Table 3.4.3: Number of suspensions annually per 1000 students: Years 7 to 10.<sup>28</sup>**

	Short Suspensions	Long Suspensions	Expulsions
Aboriginal Female	251	37	0
Aboriginal Male	629	168	3
Non-Aboriginal Female	62	11	0
Non-Aboriginal Male	188	43	2

During field trips and through submissions, communities argued that many students regarded suspension as a reward rather than a punishment because they did not have to come to school. Families also felt that some high schools treated suspension as the easy way to get rid of a difficult or disruptive student rather than trying to understand why the student was behaving unacceptably and help them to improve. There was concern that suspended students were at increased risk of conflict with the police and the legal system. Communities pointed out the anomaly between expecting compulsory attendance and the use of suspension for unruly students as the young people most frequently suspended were the ones in most need of help. There was a sense that students were reinforced in the feeling that their school did not want or care about them.

Communities argued strongly in favour of in-school suspension, demanding that the system supervise students suspended from school. This involved the provision of a structured program in a facility, in or out of school, resourced and staffed to work with students and their families, the school and other agencies as appropriate. This would enable suspended students to continue their education and manage their behaviour in a more acceptable manner.

Communities and families were insistent that such facilities should not be used by schools to abandon troublesome children. They envisaged a situation where schools worked closely with these facilities to case manage the students' return to school.

Suggested alternatives to school suspension included the establishment of centres with resources for the management of the children and liaison with other government and community agencies. It was suggested that such funds could be sourced from other government departments as well as DET.

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to data collected during field trips, p. 28

## **Absenteeism and lateness**

Communities perceived a lack of consistency across secondary schools' processes in handling and following up absences and lateness and monitoring attendance at school.

Parents and caregivers claimed a lack of communication about their children's frequent absences, whereas teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers felt that, when contacted, parents or caregivers often advised that these absences had their approval, thus reinforcing the view of some education workers that Aboriginal parents and caregivers did not support schools.

Other education workers believed that parents did not understand that schooling was compulsory between certain ages and that it was their responsibility at law to ensure their child attended school. There was a perception that some parents and caregivers did not value attendance and success at school in the light of their own negative experiences of schooling or did not realise that poor attendance had a negative impact on academic outcomes.

Communities emphasised that schools should not expect Aboriginal Education Workers to be the sole contact between the school and the family. In fact, contacts with families or communities will only be successful if there is already an established relationship between the principals/teachers and the parents/caregivers/communities.

The different responses that schools have to a student's lateness can indicate the degree of awareness that the school has or does not have of the cultural and community background of the student. Secondary schools need to have roll marking and "late policies" that demonstrate an awareness of their own students. Furthermore, these schools need to be assisted to work with the community and with other agencies to attempt to overcome the causes of lateness where possible. A school's roll marking policy should not be allowed to cause absenteeism, and potentially increase the likelihood that a student will leave school.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips and proposed in submissions as enhancing school policies and practices included:

- schools to formulate with the assistance of DET a uniform policy on attendance and lateness
- schools to formulate a process for monitoring of students' attendance
- schools to establish a process that acknowledges their accountability to the community
- school principals or teachers to contact parents/caregivers by telephone on the first day of absence with the support of the Aboriginal Education Assistant
- establishment of programs to enable Aboriginal parents to understand how important it is for their children to attend school (For example, one school developed a pro-forma sheet where the days of student absence were highlighted over the four terms. When the AEAs showed the parents/caregivers this form and discussed with them the effects of such

absences on the educational success of their children, most of the parents/caregivers agreed that this was undesirable and that their children should attend school. AEAs at a particular school advised that a significant majority of the school absences were because parents had gone to visit relatives in other communities and had taken their children with them and had not realised the effect the absences were having on their children's education)

- establishment of an Aboriginal Council, where called for by the Aboriginal community, similar to a School Council, which would articulate the needs and views of the community
- use of attendance/retention money by the local Aboriginal Land Council to employ a bus driver to drive children to school
- schools not to commence their roll marking at the beginning of the day. This has led to less conflict between the school and the late students, a more positive relationship between teachers and students, and also a reduction in absenteeism.

### **Preparation for school leaving**

Schools are responsible for providing Aboriginal students with practical and useful advice about career options and pathways in education. Career counselling is seen to be essential for Aboriginal students to make informed choices concerning their future pathways into continuing education, further education or employment.

Many parents on the field trips wanted greater access and communication between the school, careers adviser and the family to enable Aboriginal students and their families to make informed subject and pathway choices. Some parents also expressed concern that when children were choosing their subjects for the senior high school, many Aboriginal students were advised to take up Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses in Stage 6, which they felt limited their options at the end of Year 12.

### **Participation in the School Certificate**

In 2003, of the 554 Year 10 students identified by the NSW Board of Studies as Aboriginal, 77 percent were graded at Band 2 and above in English-literacy (This means that students achieved a mark of 50 or more and were able to undertake a range of tasks.) This result compares with 95 percent for all non-Aboriginal students.

In addition, 85 percent of Aboriginal students were graded at Band 2 and above in Mathematics in the 2003 School Certificate. This compares with 97 percent for non-Aboriginal students.



**Table 3.4.4: Percentage distribution of results across bands, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, School Certificate: 1998–2003.**

	Aboriginal students						Non-Aboriginal students					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
English – literacy												
6	1	1	1	1	0	0	6	7	5	5	5	4
5	8	7	6	6	7	3	22	22	21	22	20	20
4	20	19	19	13	20	17	31	29	33	26	37	32
3	33	26	33	32	37	33	26	23	26	26	27	29
2	24	29	32	30	20	24	12	14	12	16	8	10
1	13	18	10	19	16	23	4	5	3	5	3	5
Total number	1241	1117	1038	802	600	554	51 174	50 701	50 658	49 912	50 049	49 441
Mathematics												
6	0.3	1	0.4	1	0	0	4	8	8	6	6	5
5	2	4	3	4	2	3	14	19	15	20	17	18
4	11	12	10	15	12	11	25	25	23	30	29	30
3	23	31	23	38	33	32	28	27	28	30	30	29
2	42	44	43	33	43	39	23	18	21	11	16	15
1	22	8	20	10	11	14	6	2	5	2	2	3
Total number	1253	1136	1045	812	602	557	51 216	50 692	50 738	49 928	50 080	49 524

Source: DET data derived from Board of Studies data.

While there is some variation in the relative performance as measured by the percentage of students placed in each band, the comparative trends can be seen to have been consistent in the period 1998–2003.

## TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW is perceived by many students to offer a totally different kind of learning environment and is perceived by some to be more effective than the school system in valuing difference. Carefully constructed TAFE NSW courses can instil a sense of pride and a good sense of self among Aboriginal students. For some Aboriginal students, TAFE NSW offers a successful educational pathway as an alternative to school.

Parents and caregivers were critical of schools that appeared to encourage students to leave school to attend TAFE NSW. They wanted schools to be more responsible for the education of students over the age of 14 years instead of seeing TAFE NSW as an easier or convenient option.

Strategies suggested during field trips and in submissions as facilitating preparation for school leaving included:

- providing a scholarship program for students to go to university
- encouraging a flexible learning environment that enables some students to choose TAFE NSW as part of their educational options
- encouraging contextual learning (first the practice then the theory) as this is often more suited to Aboriginal students

- making more effective use of Aboriginal workers to enable better targeting of employment outcomes
- establishing programs such as those offered by South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE NSW where under 14-year-olds, including some Juvenile Justice clients (29), enrol in programs such as *Maximus*, *HYPAR (Helping Young People at Risk)* and *Youth at Risk*.

### Students with diverse support needs

The proportion of Aboriginal students placed in specialist classes and units is greater than the proportion of Aboriginal students in the student population as a whole. This proportion is statistically significant for the Aboriginal placements in classes supporting students with Behaviour Disorder, Mild Intellectual Disability, Moderate Intellectual Disability, Language Disorder and Juvenile Justice classes. Juvenile Justice is discussed further below.

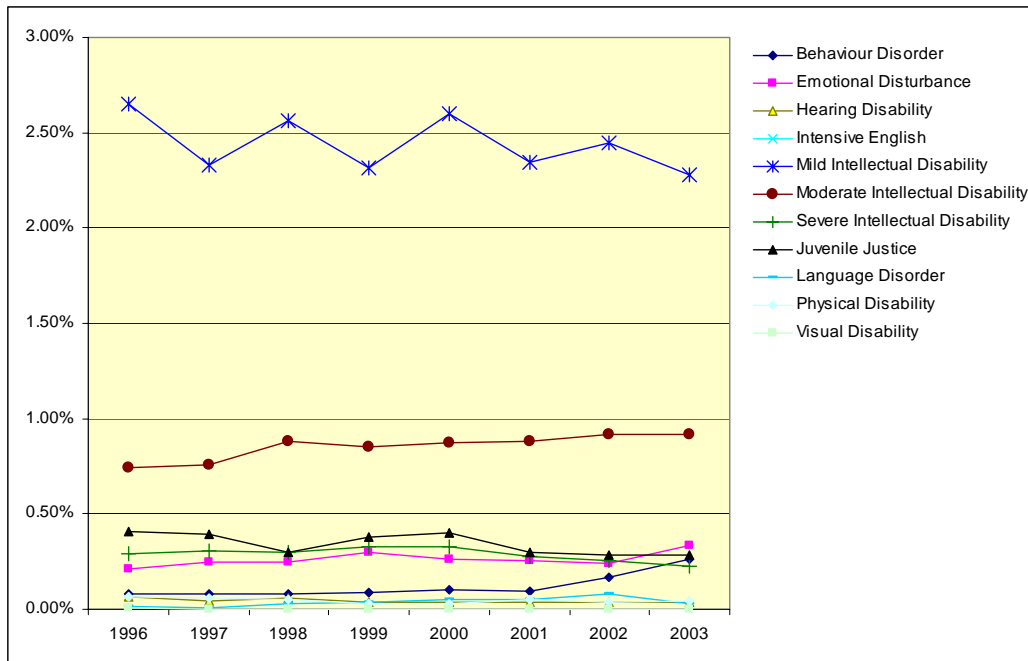
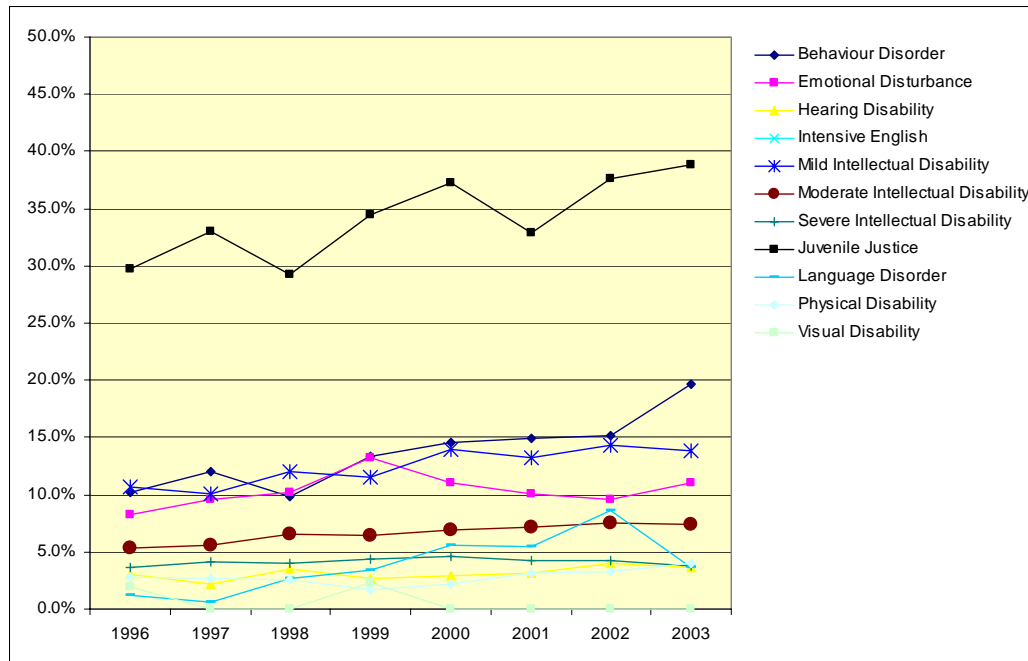


Figure 3.4.2: The proportion of Aboriginal students enrolled in specialist classes or units (DET, 2004)

In 2003, 4.4 percent of the Aboriginal student population (K – 12) was enrolled in specialist classes or units compared with 2.1 percent of the total student population.



**Figure 3.4.3: The percentage of enrolments of Aboriginal students in specialist classes or units (DET, 2004)**

In 2003 there was a higher proportion of Aboriginal children enrolled in Juvenile Justice Classes, Behaviour Disorder and Mild Intellectual Disability programs than the student population as a whole. This phenomenon requires further research.

During meetings conducted as part of the field trips, some parents expressed concern that the behaviour of some Aboriginal students derived from the students' cultural background was often responded to by the school as a breach of discipline. These breaches of discipline often led to referrals to behaviour programs within specialist class settings.

Parents stated that they expected schools to work with students to teach them appropriate behaviour in the school setting, rather than assuming the student was deliberately misbehaving. Parents stated that because of the limited knowledge some teachers and schools have about Aboriginal cultural education, often a student's perceived disruptive behaviour is not seen by the school as a result of that child's cultural difference and is dealt with under the school's discipline policy.

This response to behaviour that is culturally based can set up ongoing conflict that escalates between Aboriginal students, their families and the school. Students become resentful that they are being disciplined for behaviour that is acceptable in their own community.

Parents felt that the school's decision to use a "disciplinary" strategy is caused by the school's mishandling or misunderstanding of the student. Parents argued that too many Aboriginal students are disciplined, suspended and referred to behaviour programs because schools do not have the cultural knowledge to properly handle and respond to the Aboriginal students.

They believe that students attending specialist classes and units should only be referred to such programs if the programs are seen by the family to be meaningful, culturally appropriate and planned in consultation with the family and the local community. Schools that valued Aboriginal cultural diversity, worked with the whole family and had relationships with the home school of the student were considered to be much more likely to help young people succeed in achieving their goals. Strong case management and interagency support of the student and the family was also seen to be beneficial.

As is the case with all students referred to specialist facilities, the onus for ensuring attendance is on the student and carer, some of whom lack the capacity or will to ensure such attendance. The option of bussing was suggested, given the huge expenditure on Special Transport each year.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips and proposed in submissions as facilitating learning in specialist classes included:

- providing cultural education for teachers undertaking specialist class training
- providing cultural education for all teaching staff with an emphasis on cultural difference
- constructing a flexible curriculum that allows a focus on cultural education, with the main focus being on traditional art, music, stories and culture
- constructing practical and basic living skill courses: basic hygiene, cooking for survival, nutrition and healthy lifestyles, how to fill in forms, budgeting etc to be major components
- case management with interagency intervention to support students and their families
- community involvement in program/curriculum development and delivery
- facilitating effective transport for students either by DET-sponsored minibus, community transport or pick up by nominated teaching staff where appropriate
- providing Aboriginal classes in specialist classes and units with more than one class and where the numbers of Aboriginal students are significant.

### **Students in Juvenile Justice facilities**

DET NSW has Education and Training Units (ETUs) attached to nine Juvenile Justice Centres. These units are responsible for conducting the educational assessment of detainees and conducting school-based programs for students, eg School Certificate, Higher School Certificate.

The ETU staff includes a Principal, Assistant Principals, full-time and part-time teachers, an Aboriginal Education Assistant as well as administrative staff. Attendance at a DET ETU is compulsory for young people under 15 years of age.

There is an over-representation (35 percent) of Aboriginal detainees in Juvenile Justice Centres. The majority of detainees (99 percent) are within the secondary school age range.

**Table 3.4.5: Number and proportion of Aboriginal detainees in Juvenile Justice Centres: 2002–2003**

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Male	556 (34%)	1114 (67%)	1670
Female	113 (40%)	171 (61%)	284
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>669 (35%)</b>	<b>1285 (66%)</b>	<b>1954</b>

**Source:** Department of Juvenile Justice, Strategic Policy and Planning Section, CIDS database: 2002–2003.

**Table 3.4.6: Age break-up of detainees.**

Age	Number
10 to less than 12 years	13
12 to less than 14 years	149
14 to less than 16 years	559
16 to less than 18 years	1058
18 years and over	175
Unknown	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1956</b>

**Source:** Department of Juvenile Justice, Strategic Policy and Planning Section, CIDS database, December 2003.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Juvenile Justice and DET was signed in 2002. This outlines both Departments' responsibilities to ensure the provision of school and vocational education and training delivered in Juvenile Justice Centres. TAFE NSW provides vocational educational programs and courses in Juvenile Justice Centres via the *100 TAFE Places* funding provision.

The Equity and Outreach Programs Unit of DET is involved in the statewide negotiation and administration of the 100 TAFE Places provision. This unit is responsible for the provision and monitoring of 100 TAFE Places funds.

During the field trips ETU staff expressed concern that for some students there was an inability to complete full courses due to the length of sentences and because some young people are awaiting sentencing and then being moved to another ETU.

It was suggested that classification levels of detainees also hindered access to particular programs, although detainee risk levels were reviewed monthly. It was suggested that programs of shorter duration and a mixed mode of delivery would help detainees feel some level of success in completing a course and that a mixed mode of delivery may be of assistance for those detainees who move across ETUs. Providing program pathways between centres could also help those detainees.

The Review was advised that the literacy and numeracy levels of detainees were of concern. This often led to a lack of interest and motivation. Joint professional development for TAFE NSW and school staff around the integration of literacy/numeracy and VET provision was seen to be beneficial through offering detainees culturally and artistically diverse modules as part of a larger program with literacy and numeracy outcomes incorporated into each student's interest area.

Education and Training Unit staff found that mentoring and positive role models were essential to detainees. Many of the students come from dysfunctional families and have had bad experiences within the school system before entering the Juvenile Justice System, so their access to positive role modelling has been limited.

A view presented to the review suggested that ETUs within Juvenile Justice Centres had limited funding opportunities to enable the unit to provide such opportunities as cultural programs to re-engage young detainees.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips to further enhance the programs presented by Juvenile Justice Centres:

- Each centre has an LEATAC (Local Education and Training Advisory Committee). Membership includes the Juvenile Justice Centre Manager, the School Principal (Juvenile Justice School), the ICCLC (Institute Correctional Centre Liaison Officer) and the Aboriginal Development Manager. The committee determines what courses will be provided.
- An enhancement of the present *100 TAFE Places* is needed.
- An increased integration within Juvenile Justice Centres of TAFE NSW courses for Juvenile Justice detainees with the support of the schools staff is needed.
- The effectiveness of Aboriginal Cultural Education courses that are run at the Institute level for TAFE NSW teachers working in Juvenile Justice facilities needs to be evaluated.
- Additional funds need to be provided to target Aboriginal teachers in Juvenile Justice Centres and Correctional Centres to achieve Certificate IV. Further training needs to be provided to teach strategies for facilitating non-violence, dealing with people at risk, conflict resolution, dealing with disadvantaged learners etc.
- DET develops a system that details participation in education and training modules/courses for each detainee and allows DET to determine course commencement and completion and evaluate course outcomes.
- The New South Wales Government negotiates with the Australian Government to provide an Aboriginal Studies Grant to detainees in Juvenile Justice Centres.

## **Students in Aboriginal hostels**

The provision of hostel accommodation for Aboriginal secondary students, and the level of support for those students, were other issues identified during the consultation. These facilities provide supervised, away from home accommodation assisting students to access a number of urban high schools.<sup>29</sup> Advice to the Review was that the provision of hostel accommodation has increased the likelihood that these students will stay longer in the education system.

Students argued that the level of service provided by the hostels needs to be supported and expanded. They expressed concern about reduced services in these facilities.

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<sup>29</sup> Aboriginal Hostels Limited is a company that provides temporary accommodation for Aboriginal people. Incorporated on 6 June 1973 in the Australian Capital Territory, AHL is funded by the Australian Government. AHL has established a network of hostels across Australia and currently operates 48 of its own hostels while funding 83 community hostels. The Review Team spoke with students resident in Biala Hostel, Allambie Heights, and Kirinari Hostel, Sylvania Heights. [http://www.ahl.gov.au/html/sl\\_fs\\_about.html](http://www.ahl.gov.au/html/sl_fs_about.html)

Hostel staff expressed a desire for more contact and communication with the executive and teaching staff of the high schools that their students attended. Teaching staff also indicated a desire for this communication to occur. Hostel staff made the point that their students came from a wide range of different Aboriginal communities and that the teachers at the high schools needed Aboriginal cultural education to recognise that all their Aboriginal students were not from the same cultural backgrounds.

Aboriginal students, particularly senior students, expressed the need for more specialised subject tutoring, both inside and out of school hours. Hostel staff stated that senior students needed more specialist assistance and that junior secondary students should have homework support. Hostel staff expressed great concern that new students are academically a long way behind when they enter the hostel. The lack of access to computers and the Internet outside of school hours was also raised.

A further major and sensitive issue that was raised was that because of reduced hostel staffing levels there is limited or no supervisory staff during school vacations so all students are expected to travel back to their communities. The view was put that some students come from extremely dysfunctional and violent backgrounds and that sending them back to this setting is not desirable, but there is no choice at present.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips for the provision of hostel accommodation for Aboriginal students:

- That a plan to improve the level of support to Aboriginal student hostels be developed.
- That a joint agreement be made detailing the additional resources that need to be provided by the respective organisations.
- That strategies be developed so that students are better supported both academically and in their social and personal lives when they are not attending school during the school week.

## **Whole of government policy**

This approach recognises that a holistic approach, from both inside and outside government, will lead to success in Aboriginal education rather than the implementation of a range of individual disconnected programs.

For example, the creation of long-term jobs for Aboriginal people will only be possible if this objective is made a priority by all areas of government.

Throughout the Review field trips the view was expressed that there must be more cooperation, planning and joint implementation of programs by the different government departments and non-government organisations.

It was agreed by both communities and teachers that schools must be a part of this cooperation, planning and implementation. The proposal that schools should be the central community location of the services provided by other government departments and non-government organisations was supported for a number of reasons.

Schools exist in more communities and locations than any other service, and therefore the assets of the school should be made more widely accessible. If the location of other services including health, social services, TAFE NSW, Adult and Community Education, sport and recreation were centred at the school, more community adults would enter the school, which would lead to a lowering of the barriers that presently exist between many secondary schools and Aboriginal adults. The location of other services in the school would enable better sharing, communication and cooperation between the services.

There is evidence that success in Aboriginal education cannot be achieved by education alone. It is crucial that, at the same time that schools and TAFE NSW are focusing on improving the educational outcomes of students, all agencies are working together with Aboriginal communities to jointly enhance the capacity of the community and to bring about improvements in the broader concerns such as health, housing, adult education and employment.

This holistic approach, from inside and outside government, which works with Aboriginal communities as an equal partner, will help make Aboriginal education a success.

Strategies suggested by some individuals and groups during field trips for establishing a whole of government approach to work with Aboriginal communities through schools:

- Initially, differently configured pilot programs could be developed with the engagement of the local communities to ascertain the most appropriate models for the different communities that may wish to develop this across-agency provision.
- Over time, the offices of other government service providers could be physically located in the secondary and central school facilities.



- Protocols could be established that detail the working, industrial, service provision and funding arrangements that will apply in the joint facilities.
- Proposals could be developed and negotiated, as appropriate, to determine the nature of the staffing and resources required in DET to facilitate the genuine involvement of school and TAFE NSW education staff in each of the locations where these across-government facilities are to be created.

## Section 5: Education for 15 to 19-year-olds

The compulsory years of schooling provide students with a common platform for approaching life, work or study. Between the ages of 15 and 19, students make important choices about their future directions in work and life. Young people in this age group who do not stay in study or get a full-time job are at risk of ongoing disadvantage economically and socially. In New South Wales, in May 2003, 15.1 percent of 15 to 19-year-olds were not in full-time education or full-time work. DET student census data reveals that an Aboriginal student has nearly twice the risk of not completing 13 years of school as a non-Aboriginal student.

Completing Years 10 or 11 increases an Aboriginal person's chance of employment by 40 percent. Completing Year 12 increases employment prospects by a further 13 percent.<sup>30</sup> According to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum Report (Curtain, 2003, p. 35), nationally, 45 percent of Aboriginal young people aged 15–25 years in 2001 were neither in full-time learning nor in work. The Dusseldorp Report says unless this trend is reversed, adult Aboriginal employment rates will remain at about 30 percent, compared with 50 percent for non-Aboriginal people. By age 30, this trend is well set.

### **Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12 in schools: features and trends**

In the 2003 mid-year census there were 1065 Aboriginal students in Year 11 and 609 in Year 12. They were enrolled in 308 public schools. The majority were in a school which had one to five Aboriginal students (193 schools). The dispersal of Aboriginal students in schools across New South Wales has implications for the support strategies for senior students.

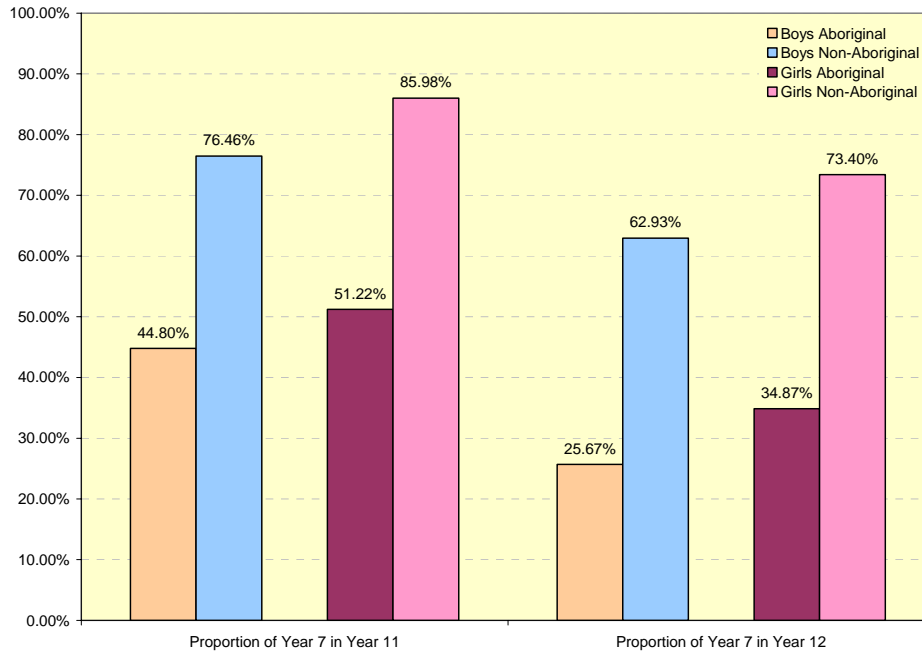
Thirty-nine districts had one or more Aboriginal students enrolled each year in Year 11 or 12. Some were enrolled in central schools in remote and rural areas, but most were in high schools.

The retention rate of Aboriginal students is much lower compared to non-Aboriginal students. There is a high drop-out in Year 11, particularly among Aboriginal boys.

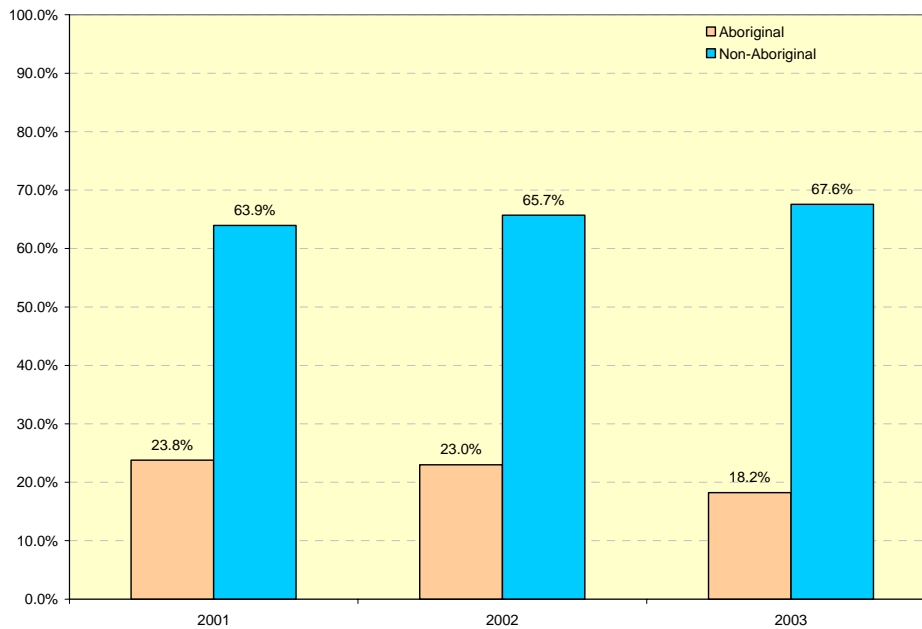
Overall, for the years 2002 to 2003, of those Aboriginal students in Year 10 only 59 percent went on to Year 11, and of those in Year 11 only 63 percent went on to Year 12.

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<sup>30</sup> Taylor, J., Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. (1998). "The importance of education in improving Indigenous employment", Speech to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council, 28 April, Brisbane.



**Figure 3.5.1: Number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12 in 2003 as a proportion of their numbers in Year 7**

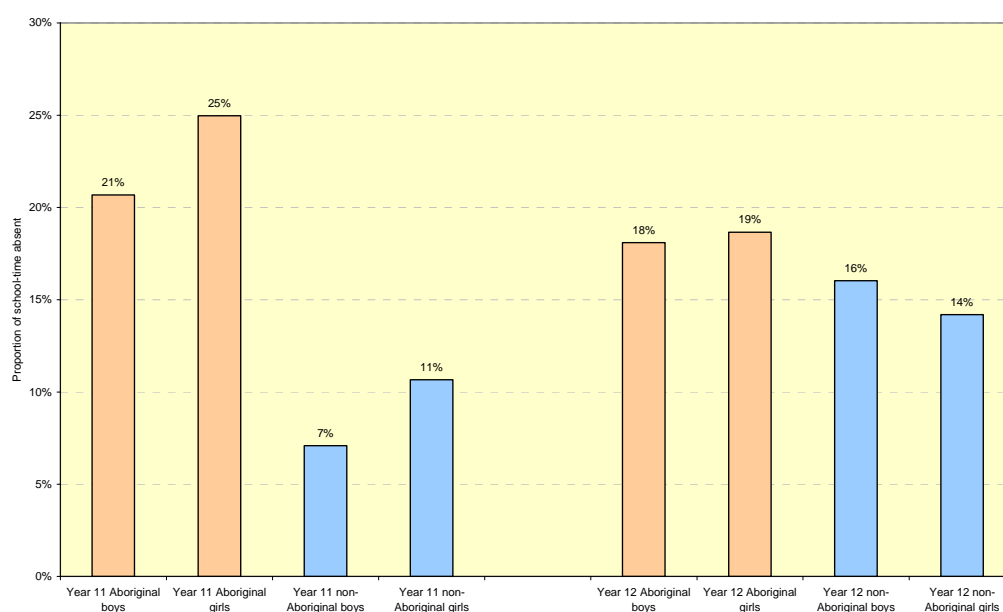


**Figure 3.5.2: Comparative award of an HSC as a proportion of Year 7 commencements: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students: 2001–2003<sup>31</sup>**

<sup>31</sup> These figures represent enrolment in government high schools only. Those students who have left high school may be at a TAFE NSW College or working towards a useful training qualification.

Of similar concern is the fact that, of the number of Aboriginal students originally enrolled in Year 7, fewer are now being awarded a Higher School Certificate (HSC). The proportion of HSCs being awarded to Aboriginal students peaked in 2002, when 467 were successful, representing 1.32 percent of the total number of recipients (Board of Studies NSW data). In 2003 the percentage of Aboriginal students who gained the award had dropped to 1 percent of the total enrolment, or 364 students of a total school enrolment of 36 463.

Senior Aboriginal students tend to have lower attendance rates than senior non-Aboriginal students.<sup>32</sup> The monitoring and management of attendance requirements are a school matter.<sup>33</sup> As the senior years of school are tightly packed with respect to curriculum and ongoing assessment, any absences can have a serious impact on students' learning outcomes.



**Figure 3.5.3: Proportion of school time absent in Years 11 and 12: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students**

There is a high rate of withdrawal from school among Aboriginal students in Year 11, and a high rate of absenteeism. Many teachers contended that the new HSC, in place since 2001, is too hard for some students. The Board of Studies NSW has analysed student retention related to the new HSC. It has found an upward trend of about 3 percent among all students since it was introduced (Submission, p. 17), but

<sup>32</sup> The attendance data collected in the representative sample of 200 schools in March 2004 showed that absenteeism is generally much higher among senior secondary students than among younger students. While Aboriginal students maintain the relative difference of being twice as likely to be absent as non-Aboriginal students, which was established in Kindergarten, the difference equalises by Year 12.

<sup>33</sup> The Board of Studies manual (BOS 2002) states that “while the Board of Studies does not stipulate attendance requirements, principals may determine that, as a result of absence, the course completion criteria may not be met. Clearly, absences will be regarded seriously by principals who must give students early warning of the consequences of such absences. 11.4.1 ... principals may determine an appropriate attendance pattern(s) that will allow each student to achieve the outcomes of each course being studied. 11.4.1”

there has been no clear movement in retention rates for Aboriginal students since 1995. Regular attendance is also critical with respect to assessment schedules. The cultural expectations of teenage Aboriginal students often mean there are greater family demands on them to fulfil an adult role in their communities, particularly in times of ill health and death. The advice of the NSW Board of Studies is to work flexibly to support students to do their assessments or examinations when their circumstances are difficult. Such a level of flexibility places high demands on school organisation and staff.

Similarly, student absences due to suspensions are an obvious impediment to learning, as well as being symptomatic of wider problems of behaviour and engagement. The patterns of suspension disproportionately affect Aboriginal students.

A survey of 2003 suspension data for students in the senior years of school revealed that:

- The suspension rate for Aboriginal boys for short suspensions (from one to four days) was 126 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 61 suspensions per 1000 students for non-Aboriginal boys.
- For short suspensions, Aboriginal boys were being suspended at a rate that was twice as great as that for non-Aboriginal boys.
- The suspension rate for Aboriginal girls for short suspensions was 46 suspensions per 1000 students, compared with 17 per 1000 for non-Aboriginal girls.
- For short suspensions, Aboriginal girls were being suspended at a rate that was two and a half times greater than that for non-Aboriginal girls.

The survey data also suggested that expulsion tends to be used mostly in the years of senior secondary education, and although used infrequently, for the survey period:

- The expulsion rate for Aboriginal males was 4 per 1000 students, compared with 2 per 1000 for non-Aboriginal males.
- The expulsion rate for Aboriginal females was 16 per 1000 students, compared with 1 per 1000 for non-Aboriginal females.

### **The Higher School Certificate in practice**

HSC studies can be undertaken in a number of different ways. Most students undertake Year 11 (Preliminary Year) and Year 12 (HSC Year) at school over two years. It is possible, however, to study for the HSC over a period of up to five years. This provides students with the opportunity to combine part-time work and study, or attend to family responsibilities, by reducing the number of subjects taken but extending the period of study. Students can also combine the study of general education (academic) courses and Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. Some VET courses (Framework Courses) contribute both to an HSC and to the University Admissions Index (UAI). Other VET courses contribute to an HSC but not to university entrance. While in Years 11 and 12, students can

participate in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship. Some students study for their HSC on TAFE NSW campuses, where the Preliminary and the HSC courses can be studied over two years or longer, or the Preliminary and HSC courses can be combined into one year of study.

The Board of Studies NSW is responsible for developing the HSC curriculum, managing the final examinations and awarding the credential. The UAI is a rank that provides a measure of overall academic achievement in the HSC and assists universities in ranking applications for university entry. Universities determine the requirements for the UAI.

The pattern of study required for the HSC is 12 units of Preliminary courses and 10 units of HSC courses and must include:

- at least 6 units of Board Developed Courses
- 2 units of English
- three courses of 2 unit value or greater
- four subjects.

There are approximately 150 Board Developed Courses available and a large range of Board Endorsed Courses. Board Developed and Board Endorsed Courses include general education subjects and nationally recognised VET courses. Extension courses are available in English, Mathematics, History, some languages and some VET courses. These build on the content of the 2 unit course and normally carry an additional value of 1 unit.

### *Curriculum choices*

An analysis of the courses selected for the HSC in 2003 shows significant differences in course choices between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. All students must take two units of English and then choose their other courses subject to Board of Studies NSW requirements relating to the number of units taken and coverage across key learning areas. Student choices will reflect what is being offered by the student's school or is otherwise available to the student, student interests, and strategic thinking by students about what courses they need to achieve longer-term objectives.

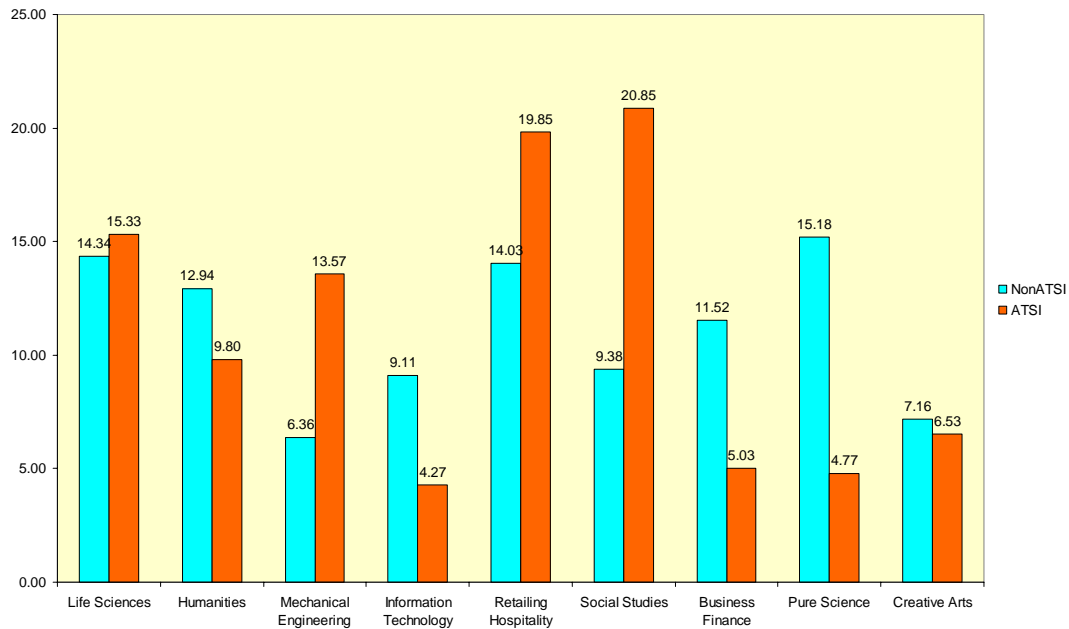
A significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal students have chosen courses that included social studies of various kinds, or retailing and hospitality combined with social studies.<sup>34</sup> Twice the proportion of Aboriginal students chose course profiles characterised by mechanical engineering, and building and construction. By contrast, a higher proportion of non-Aboriginal students took business or finance course profiles, "pure science" profiles (physics, chemistry) and information technology profiles.

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<sup>34</sup> For this purpose, social studies has been taken to include courses such as Child Studies–Children's Services; Child Studies–Centre Based Care; Personal Development, Health and PE Life Skills; Community and Family Studies; Community Care Services; Community Services–Aged Care Work (Traineeship); Exploring Early Childhood; Legal Studies; Psychology, General; Society and Culture; Work and Community Life Skills; Citizenship and Society Life Skills.

As well, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students varied in how they tended to combine mathematics with these other choices. For example, within the group of students choosing courses broadly described as having to do with business or finance, Aboriginal students were far less likely to take a maths course (only 59 percent compared to 90 percent of non-Aboriginal students). Instead, Aboriginal students combined their business or finance courses with social studies or courses in the life sciences (environmental science and courses to do with biology). This is also apparent where students chose courses in the general area of information technology.

Nearly 30 percent of those Aboriginal students did *not* study any mathematics, contrasted with only 9 percent of the non-Aboriginal students: instead, the Aboriginal students combined their choice with courses from social studies or the life sciences. Among those choosing courses that have more to do with the pure sciences, 7 percent of the Aboriginal students combined that choice with only Applied Mathematics and 47 percent with General Mathematics, compared with only 12 percent of the non-Aboriginal students, who otherwise took the more demanding 2 unit Mathematics or extension courses.



**Figure 3.5.4: Proportion of students taking particular types of course choice profiles: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, 2003<sup>35</sup>**

Such choices may mean fewer Aboriginal students will be able to meet the requirements for university courses representing the natural extension of those interests. Data collected during field trips confirmed that career counselling is essential to help Aboriginal students in NSW make course selections that will result in jobs.

<sup>35</sup> Review of Aboriginal Education based on Board of Studies NSW students' course entry data, September, 2003.

### *English courses in the HSC*

In both the 2002 and 2003 HSC, there was a smaller proportion of Aboriginal students taking higher level English courses than non-Aboriginal students. About 15 percent of Aboriginal HSC candidates studied English Advanced compared to 36 percent of non-Aboriginal candidates. In English Advanced in 2003, 9.9 percent of Aboriginal students were placed in the top two performance bands compared to 37 percent of non-Aboriginal students. In English Standard in 2003, 11.5 percent of Aboriginal students attained results in the top two bands compared to 27.1 percent of non-Aboriginal students.

The effects of lower literacy levels of Aboriginal students during Years 3 to 10 impact on their study in HSC English and all other subjects. During school visits, many people in the consultations perceived the English courses in the new HSC to be too difficult. Some said that this is a reason many students do not continue at school after Year 10. Many teachers said that the English Standard course is much more difficult than the Contemporary English course in the former HSC. Research by the Board of Studies NSW, however, has challenged this perception.<sup>36</sup>

Fundamentals of English is an extra unit of study designed to provide assistance for the English Standard course.<sup>37</sup> Board of Studies research showed that students who undertook this course in 2001 achieved better results in English Standard than those who did not. It appears that very few Aboriginal students whose results in Year 10 indicated they would benefit from the Fundamentals course participated in the course. Several submissions call for appropriate Fundamentals of English support materials to be developed specifically for teaching Aboriginal students.

Formal English is the underpinning language of senior school and further study, and strong verbal skills are critical for success. Support Teachers for Learning Difficulties are not available to senior students, because their role is to support students in Years 7 to 10. It is critical that the teaching of formal English for senior study/further study be addressed to enhance the literacy skills of all Aboriginal students enrolled in the Preliminary and HSC years. The Board of Studies NSW proposes endorsement of a project to develop, trial and implement resources for teachers that build on current literacy strategies. Other people have suggested greater tutorial support in Years 11 and 12, and the development of literacy “coaches” who can work with teachers across all subject areas.

### *Mathematics courses*

In 2003, 33 Aboriginal students sat for HSC Mathematics and 197 for General Mathematics. In General Mathematics, there were higher proportions in the lower skills bands (56.3 percent in Bands 1 and 2 compared with 33.2 percent of non-Aboriginal students), and relatively small proportions in the higher skills bands

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<sup>36</sup> *Board Bulletin*, May, 2002, Vol 11 No. 2: “... although there were initial concerns that the new Standard English course was too demanding for students who in the past would have undertaken Contemporary English, the results indicate that most students did not just meet the minimum standard in Standard English, but performed in the mark range 60–70.”

<sup>37</sup> *Board Bulletin*, May, 2002, Vol 11 No. 2.



(4.1 percent in Bands 5 and 6 compared with 12.7 percent of non-Aboriginal students).

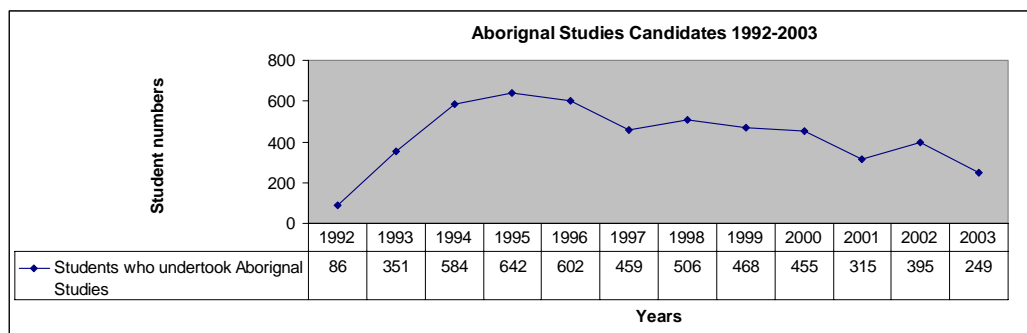
In Mathematics, one student achieved a score in Band 6, four were placed in Band 5, 45.4 percent of those who sat the examination were placed in Bands 3 and 4, and 39.4 percent scored in Band 1 and 2 compared with 16.4 percent of the non-Aboriginal students.

The Board of Studies NSW has several initiatives aimed at the compulsory years of schooling, which if successful will improve Aboriginal numeracy levels. This is not just of critical importance in opening up access to business and professional opportunities for Aboriginal students at university level. In consultations, low numeracy was also identified as an issue by TAFE NSW teachers, who said that Aboriginal students with low numeracy skills had major problems with apprenticeship courses such as automotive skills. This was often one reason for their leaving a TAFE course.

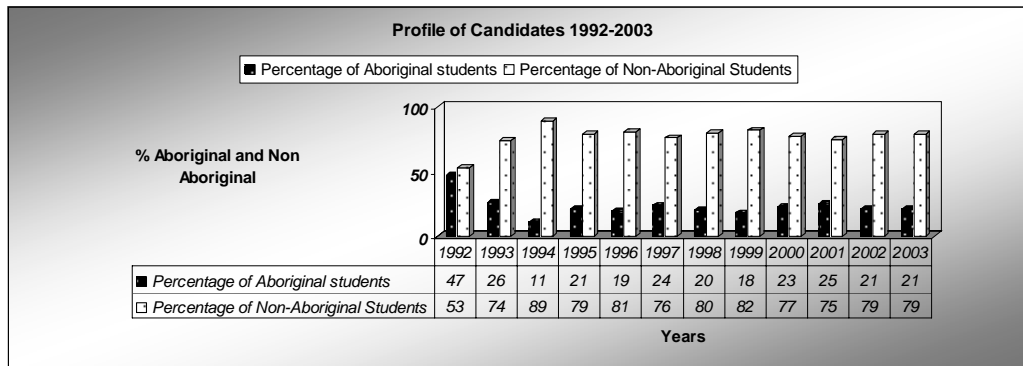
Consideration needs to be given to creating parallel strategies for literacy and numeracy and career counselling to support Aboriginal students to make appropriate choices in combining mathematics with other subjects.

### *Aboriginal Studies*

Since 1991, 2 Unit Aboriginal Studies has been an HSC course. In 1992, 86 students sat for the exam, and in 1996 the number was approximately 600. This is a significant increase. However, the numbers of students taking Aboriginal Studies has decreased since the introduction of the new HSC. A paper prepared by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (March, 2004) raises critical issues as set out in the following discussion.



**Figure 3.5.5: The numbers of students taking HSC Aboriginal Studies, 1992–2003 (NSW AECG Inc, 2004)**



**Figure 3.5.6: The profile of candidates taking HSC Aboriginal Studies, 1992–2003 (NSW AECG Inc, 2004)**

The percentage of Aboriginal students undertaking the course is quite steady, averaging at 23% of all the candidates across a period of 12 years. This needs to be compared to the average 0.86% participation rate of Aboriginal students in all other subjects in the HSC. It demonstrates that the course can be a factor in Aboriginal students remaining at school (NSW AECG Inc, 2004, p. 3).

In 2003, 287 government high school students registered for the Aboriginal Studies Course: 72 were Aboriginal, and of these 48 attained a result. A concern often voiced by students and communities was that the course is not offered in some schools because only a few students have chosen it in Year 11. As well, because of the small Aboriginal Studies candidature there is no textbook and schools have to develop much of the material themselves. Materials need to be made more relevant by teachers through consultation with the local community. It is very demanding for each teacher to do the community consultations and develop resources at school level. Other feedback suggested that:

*The course is too academic and even though some students do excellent work with local cultural input, assessment is based on written assignments/exams. This perception needs to be balanced with the Aboriginal Studies syllabus writers' wish to present a course of sufficient rigour for it to be accepted as a Category A course. The Aboriginal Studies Board Curriculum Committee has representation from Aboriginal community members and the NSW AECG Inc.*

*Some schools think the course should only be offered if there is a large number of Aboriginal students.*

A forum run by the Board of Studies Aboriginal Education Initiatives Advisory Committee in November 2003 noted that the syllabus needs to be reviewed for content overload. It recommended promotion of the course, training and development for parents and community members who assist in teaching programs, and that the UAC booklet advise that Aboriginal Studies is a recommended course for key university courses.

Because the Aboriginal Studies course is important to Aboriginal identity, it is suggested that DET regions examine ways to provide the Stage 6 Aboriginal Studies course to all small cohorts in schools, through flexibility in class sizes, and

mixed mode delivery (including face-to-face/distance education /e-learning/local network learning), with appropriate resources allocated.

### **Community consultation: perceptions about Years 11 and 12**

In field trips and submissions, *Aboriginal families* clearly stated that they want their children to be successful at school. They want their children to have a better life with more opportunities than they had. They see education as the key.

*Community members* saw the following as barriers:

- Tutoring is available under the *Aboriginal Tutoring Assistance Scheme* (ATAS), but only for students who are performing poorly. Some teachers were very helpful and wrote letters to ask for tutoring, but they had to say the student was doing badly before the student [met] the guidelines. Tutoring is not available for students who are achieving.
- Racism and lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal culture was raised in numerous community meetings and submissions.
- Teachers with low expectations of Aboriginal students.
- Not having an AEA in schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal Education Workers and AEAs are valued highly and play important support roles for senior students.

Many communities consulted during the field trip reported that the teachers' attitude in junior school was: *Leave school at 15 – go to TAFE!* This seems related to an attitude that is tied up with many issues such as underachievement, poor literacy and inappropriate behaviour.

*For 40 years our kids have been told to leave school at 15. We're sick of it.*

– Aboriginal community meeting

*Students* want to succeed at their studies: *We want to do something good, something constructive.* Many Aboriginal students are the first in their families to study in Years 11 and 12, so they are taking a huge risk. The expectations on them are high; the perception is that by reaching Years 11 and 12, they “have made it”. They saw some of the barriers to their success as:

- There is a big difference between studying in Year 10 and then in Year 11. Year 11 work demands are much steeper; teachers expect that a lot more work be done outside of class.
- Students don't always understand how to organise their folders, papers and their study time.
- Many Aboriginal students do not have access to a computer at home. Other students often use computers and the internet at home to do their assignments.

- The way teachers talk is not always easy to understand. Students are not always sure of what the homework really means, or do not understand the instructions in the assignments.
- Assignments have to be done outside class time.
- Many Aboriginal students are in sports teams at regional and state levels. Others have family responsibilities and miss school. When they travel for their teams, or are absent for other reasons, teachers expect them to slot right back in although they have missed work.
- There is a lack of information and advice about university courses and subjects and career advice on how to achieve their goals.
- Some students cannot see the relevance of the curriculum.
- The curriculum is too academic for some students.

*Teachers* of Years 11 and 12 stated that students are at school to learn, and they want them to succeed. The teachers saw as barriers:

- The syllabus expects that all students have met a high standard of literacy levels for senior study.
- Aboriginal students may understand the complex issues in HSC courses, but not necessarily have the skills to express them in written ways. However, assessment is driven in the HSC by written assessment, and there is not enough opportunity for oral and visual modes.
- Many students do not have access to adults who can assist and advise them on their homework and assessments in courses.

During the field trips, many Aboriginal parents and carers said they did not feel as comfortable or welcome in high schools as they did in primary schools. Asking questions about the HSC can be frightening. Only 16.1 percent of Aboriginal people over 15 years have achieved an HSC, compared with 38.33 percent of the general community (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001b).

However, teachers still need to know their students and where they come from. Many teachers lack Aboriginal cultural knowledge, which translates into different perceptions for them and their students.

All too frequently it seems that there is acceptance that educational inequality for Aboriginal students is normal. Work done over recent decades to achieve educational equality in outcomes has failed to eliminate this perception (MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2000, p. 15).

### **School-based strategies for improving outcomes**

According to the national report, *The School to Work Transition of Indigenous Australians* (Long et al, 1998), Aboriginal students are more likely to remain in school from Year 7 to Year 10 and move on to Years 11 and 12 if:

- the school or TAFE campus is welcoming and sensitive to the need of Aboriginal students, and
- there is the support of peers, role models, teachers, counsellors and parents.

The report found that the key motivational factors influencing young Aboriginal students to stay on at school are self-reliance, confidence and goal direction. Field trips and submissions support those findings.

There were calls for study skills programs to be run during the weeks before the start of Year 11 to prepare students for the big gap in study expectations between Years 10 and 11. Summer schools are another approach. After-school activity centres (or homework centres) may be more successful if they incorporate opportunities for exercise, games, relaxation and team development, as well as study.

Review teams visited schools whose successful approaches included:

- timetabling of elective subjects so that subjects that may support Aboriginal Studies are not included as competing timetable choices
- flexible timetabling and module-based assessment such as at Illawarra Senior College. Assessment strategies and alternatives need further attention to increase successful outcomes for Aboriginal students
- provision of homework centres
- provision of Aboriginal mentors is frequently raised as an important strategy to support Aboriginal students in senior years. An example is the *Better Futures* program on the South Coast
- celebration of student success through Aboriginal awards evenings and display of major projects to showcase the wonderful work done by Aboriginal students for their HSC, particularly in Aboriginal Studies
- effective partnerships with local Aboriginal consultative committees, businesses, agencies, universities and industry that emphasise the link between the formal school curriculum and vocational skills development; for example, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Police Service partnership on the South Coast, and the Armidale-based *Pathways for Indigenous people in vocational education, training, employment and business*.
- fostering *Enterprise Education* through the *Priority Action Schools Program* and *Priority Schools Funding Program*, with school to work planning and support structures
- implementation of a peer tutoring program, where peer tutors have completed a TAFE NSW accredited course on tutoring.

## **Career counselling**

Career counselling was also suggested as being an important factor in both retention and engagement of senior school students. The quality of career counselling emerged as a major issue in field trips, submissions and research. Young people need support to set goals and reach their dreams. Many submissions call for focused quality career counselling rather than careers advice, accessible to every student. In comparison to careers advisers, counsellors focus on the individual, linking their skills and interests to a career path. They match Aboriginal students' potential with their aspirations, and are able to guide them in subject

selection, goal-setting, work experience/work placement and career pathway planning.

Craven (2003, p.11) found that family and friends are the most frequently consulted sources for career advice for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students:

Many Indigenous families historically have not had broad enough educational or employment opportunities themselves to provide advice on varied career options. This is a particularly significant feature of Aboriginal experience in rural and remote areas.

Craven suggests that many students are not receiving adequate quality career education advice. This view is supported in the report from the Standing Committee on VET in Schools (March, 2004, p. xviii). It recommends more structured career education and advice, especially for Aboriginal students.

This Review was advised that in some cases the Aboriginal Education Assistants have become a major source of careers advice.

Links between Aboriginal careers advisors, Aboriginal TAFE NSW coordinators and student counsellors need to be strengthened. There needs to be an integrated approach to providing Aboriginal students with the opportunity to visit TAFE NSW colleges, universities and workplaces to broaden their horizons.

ATSIC called for regular trips by students to local universities and training providers from Year 8. Aboriginal career workshops such as the residential *Indigenous Health Careers* workshop conducted by Charles Sturt University, careers expos and a program run by University of New England in Armidale have been recommended.

It is recommended that specialist career counsellors (not just career advisors) be available in each region and TAFE NSW Institute for Aboriginal students. These career counsellors need to be professionally trained and familiar with Aboriginal culture.

### **Higher level strategic options**

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council submission says that the Years 11 and 12 curriculum options *do not sufficiently acknowledge Aboriginal culture and the often unique circumstances facing many Aboriginal students* and that the Board of Studies NSW should work with TAFE NSW and universities to investigate a different qualification to the HSC.

Victoria has introduced the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), an alternate course to its Year 12 certificate, which is available to all students. In 2004, VCAL is available in 317 secondary schools, TAFEs and Adult Community Centres. Unlike the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), which is widely used as a pathway to university, students who do VCAL are more likely to be interested in going on to training at TAFE, doing an apprenticeship or going straight into the workplace. Dr John Henry from Deakin University is reviewing the pilot introduced in 2002. The Aboriginal Centre at Sunraysia TAFE in Mildura

offers the VCAL in Performing and Visual Arts and reported to this Review Team that outcomes were positive.

When the issue of the HSC curriculum being too difficult was discussed in community meetings, Aboriginal people were very clear that they do not want a course just for Aboriginal students. They do not want a course that is seen as having less value. They want Aboriginal students to meet the same standards as everyone else.

The Board of Studies NSW submission opposes attempts to impose a differentiated curriculum based on lower expectations of Aboriginal students. It stresses that curriculum must be considered with the way teaching and learning happens.

Yet we are confronted by a 30 percent retention rate to Year 12. While the solution might not be a differentiated curriculum leading to a different credential, there remains the need for a deeper debate about other courses available to all students – courses that are designed to engage students and to be offered through the current HSC structures.

### **Vocational Education and Training courses**

Teaching VET is very different from teaching modern history, which is my background, where you go in and talk to the kids. You love your subject. When you teach VET, you love the kids (Mrs Christine Klee in House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2004, p. 104).

During the consultations, many people perceived VET in Schools to be the answer to increasing the engagement of Aboriginal students. In some country schools, all Aboriginal students take a VET course whether or not they aspire to go to university.

Nationally there is an increase in the numbers of students taking VET courses. In 2003, 47 percent percent of all students enrolled in a senior secondary school certificate in Australia were enrolled in VET in Schools and 95 percent of all schools with senior secondary programs offered VET in Schools. Nearly 50 percent of programs were in tourism/hospitality, business and clerical areas, and computing. About 10 500 students nationally commenced a school-based New Apprenticeship in 2003.<sup>38</sup>

VET courses enable students to study courses that are relevant to industry needs and have clear links to workplace destinations. They are part of the Australian Qualifications Framework. Students taking VET courses within the Higher School Certificate program may be eligible for an AQF VET Certificate issued by TAFE NSW or the Board of Studies NSW on behalf of school sector registered training organisations (RTOs) or credit towards such a certificate.

The Board of Studies NSW has developed VET industry curriculum frameworks for nine industries. Within each framework there is a number of courses including

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<sup>38</sup> Data provided by NSW DET's VET Directorate.

extension courses. One designated 240-hour course (2 units in each of Preliminary year and HSC year, totalling 4 units) in each framework may contribute toward the UAI. The industry curriculum frameworks are: Business Services; Construction; Entertainment; Hospitality; Information Technology; Metal and Engineering; Primary Industries; Retail; and Tourism.

In New South Wales fewer Aboriginal students as a proportion take a VET course in Years 11 and 12 than non-Aboriginal students.

**Table 3.5.1: Aboriginal students completing VET courses in 2002 (derived from Board of Studies NSW and NSW DET mid-year census).**

	Aboriginal students		All students	
	Number completing VET course(s)	% of all Aboriginal students in Year	Number completing VET course(s)	% of all students in Year
Year 12	304	51.7%	343	55.75%
Year 11	436	45.43%	27597	64.68%
Year 10	19	1.05%	170	0.33%

While most schools deliver VET courses within the school, in many schools HSC VET courses are delivered at a TAFE NSW college (TVET, TAFE-delivered VET). In 2003 TAFE NSW was delivering TVET courses to 842 Aboriginal students in both Years 11 and 12. Some students do more than one course. During the period 2000 to 2003 this participation level grew from 525 to 842 (60 percent).

In 2003 there were 537 Year 11 Aboriginal students in the HSC Industry Curriculum Frameworks. Hospitality was the most popular VET course with Aboriginal students, with 202 enrolments.

In 2003 there were 136 Year 11 Aboriginal enrolments in Board Endorsed Courses: 32 in Automotive and 27 in Child Studies as the most popular (Board Endorsed Courses do not contribute to the UAI.) In 2003 there were 293 Year 12 Aboriginal students in Industry Curriculum Frameworks, with 103 of these in Hospitality Operations. Seventy Aboriginal students were enrolled in Board Endorsed Courses (the highest numbers were in Child Studies with 12 and Automotive with 8 students.)

The report *Young Visions* (Polesel et al, 2003) prepared for the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation found a considerable improvement in the image of VET among students and teachers. The factors that make VET in Schools successful are well documented in a number of publications, as are the barriers to success. The success factors can be summarised as attitude, commitment and connections:

- School principals, teachers, parents and students need to have a positive belief in vocational education.
- Teachers require commitment because of the additional time required to timetable, plan, deliver and record vocational outcomes.
- Teachers need connections with other teachers and good relationships with local TAFE NSW colleges, local employers and the local community.

Structured workplace learning and assessment is a mandatory feature of VET in Schools. Aboriginal students reported that they learned more at their workplace



than at school (77.7 percent Aboriginal compared to 47.4 percent non-Aboriginal) (Polesel et al, 2003). Another key difference was in relation to the role of work placement in helping them secure future employment: 92.8 percent of Aboriginal students reported that their work placement could help them move into a good job in the future, compared to 75.4 percent of non-Aboriginal students.

However, Aboriginal students were less likely to report that their work placement helped them with their self-confidence (63.5 percent compared to 79.3 percent). It is worth noting also that 51 percent of male students in VET courses reported that they would rather be in work than at school. Students saw the weakest aspect of careers advice and assistance as being that area related to advice or help in making a direct entry to the workforce. Aboriginal students see this as a more important service than non-Aboriginal students (Polesel, 2003, p. 67).

Review teams were told Aboriginal students are hesitant about the mandatory work placements for the Frameworks VET courses. Work placement was seen as an alienating experience for many students. With intergenerational unemployment, many Aboriginal students do not have role models who can counsel them about work placement, and what employers expect. Teachers reported that students feel racism in the workplace and leave the course.

DET has developed a number of partnerships with government organisations and group training organisations in relation to increasing participation and improving access for Aboriginal students in the School Based Traineeship program. This included 41 Aboriginal students across 2002–2003.

Employment of Aboriginal students as School Based Trainees is part of a broader strategy to encourage greater participation and employment of Aboriginal people in the legal professions.

Introduction of School Based Traineeships with the Attorney General's Department in New South Wales is an initiative sponsored by the NSW Attorney General's Department and supported by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, Vocational Education in Schools Directorate.

The NSW Attorney General's Department was seeking to recruit Aboriginal students for School Based Traineeships in Office Administration. These traineeships form part of a broader strategy that seeks to increase the representation of Aboriginal people in the legal occupations and to assist Aboriginal people to gain formal qualifications in these legal occupations. This strategy targets Aboriginal students commencing in Year 11.

Currently, the Certificate II in Business is endorsed for the School Based Traineeships in the New South Wales program.

In 2002 eight Aboriginal School Based Trainees commenced a Certificate II in Business with the Attorney General's Department. These trainees were placed in the local courthouses in Moree (2), Bourke (1), Wagga Wagga (1), Wyong (1), Toronto (1) and Campbelltown (2).

In 2004 another four Aboriginal students have commenced the School Based Traineeship program in Campbelltown (1), Lismore (2) and Nowra (1) local courthouses.

Successful outcomes of this program include a retention rate of 75 percent in Year 12 for the first cohort of students commencing in 2002. Of this cohort three students have secured further employment and training with the Attorney General's Department in the local courthouse.

However, *School Based New Apprenticeships* are not without their problems. Their educational efficacy is contested (Smith & Wilson, 2002, p. 14). They argue there is not a neat fit between the work demands of new apprenticeships and school organisation. Of great concern is the issue of *possible consequences for student well-being of spending school holidays catching up working hours or attending a training provider*.

Although there has been a significant take-up of VET courses by Aboriginal students, their HSC completion rates have declined. It may be more useful to also look at how "academic" subjects can be taught differently. In *Learning to Work* the following statement is made:

... the emphasis needs to be on the right type of information for the students and also on getting teachers to making a pedagogical mind shift and understand that is not their subject in isolation that is important. They have got to place that student in the real world, and that involves work, employment, further training, everything (2004, p. 108).

Greater and more sophisticated research needs to occur around the VET in Schools project to ensure Aboriginal students do succeed broadly and are well prepared for the demands of working in the rapidly expanding "knowledge economy".

Low levels of literacy and numeracy are as significant an impediment for such VET courses as for general or academic courses (*Learning to Work*, 2004, pp. 89–90).

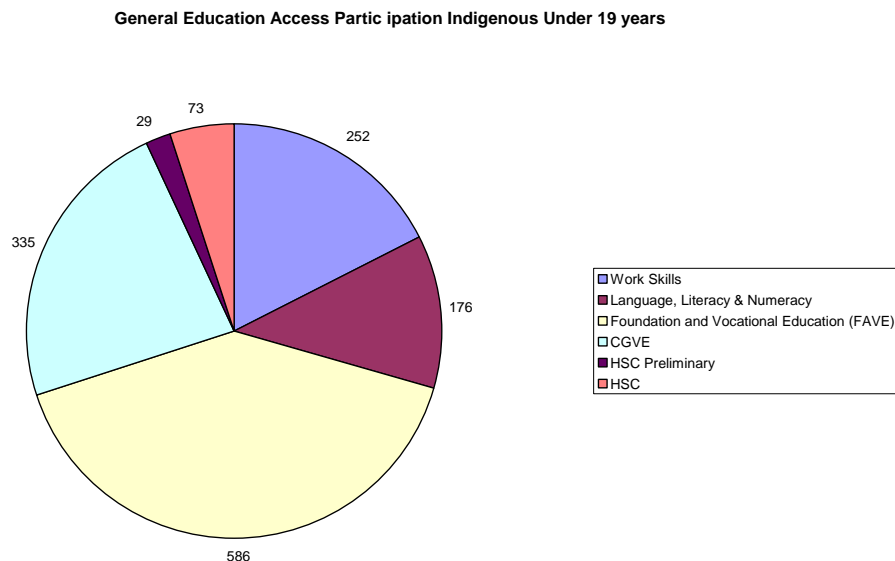
Vocational Education in Schools has an important role to play in engaging senior secondary school students. However, an increased uptake by Aboriginal students of VET programs is not matched by an increase in overall retention rates to the end of Year 12.

The United Nations *World Youth Report 2003* makes reference to an OECD 14-country review of how young people make the transition between education, training and employment, and concluded that young people *are decreasingly likely to decide to follow an upper secondary vocational qualification pathway if this does not lead to eligibility to enter tertiary education later (should they decide they wish to do so rather than entering the labour market) (p. 38)*.

## Pathways in secondary education through TAFE NSW

The number of Aboriginal students under the age of 19 enrolled in Access courses<sup>39</sup> in TAFE NSW is about 1500 – the equivalent of a large state high school. These students are spread across all TAFE NSW Institutes and colleges, and in formal award courses ranging from Language, Literacy and Numeracy up to the Higher School Certificate.

The number of under 19-year-old Aboriginal students enrolled in TAFE NSW’s general education and Access courses has increased by 63.9 percent in the period 1998–2003. This compares to 24.5 percent for non-Aboriginal students.



**Figure 3.5.7: Participation of under 19-year-old Aboriginal students in Access and general education courses.**

As can be seen in Figure 3.5.7, two-thirds (1014) of young Aboriginal students were enrolled in courses addressing basic skill levels in literacy, numeracy and general education. The Certificate I in Foundation and Vocational Education, the largest cohort, enables students to progress to the Certificate in General and Vocational Education (CGVE), a School Certificate equivalent course.

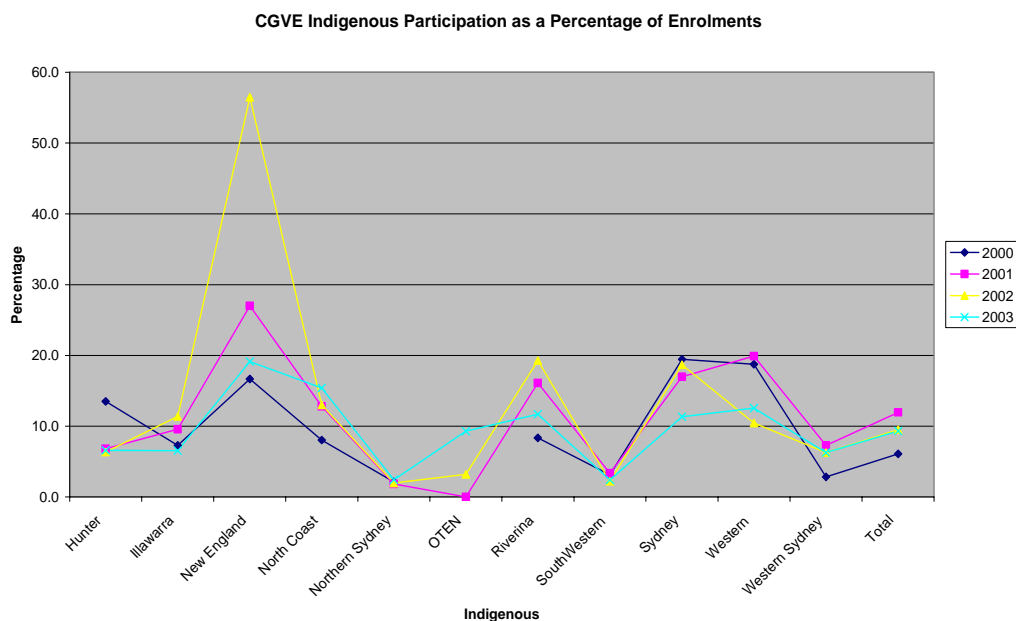
<sup>39</sup> There is much debate around the term “second chance” education, as many Aboriginal people feel they did not get a first chance. TAFE NSW uses the terms Access and General Education for a range of courses including those that prepare students for further study and expanded vocational options.

The statistics used in this section are from DET Statistics using the TAFE NSW data warehouse.

The CGVE, with 335 Aboriginal students in 2003, equates to the School Certificate for HSC entry and is equivalent in its level of educational attainment. The course enables students to combine general education and vocational modules, and can be achieved by assembling a number of statements of attainment. This provides early and frequent success as an alternative to focusing on a single qualification as the end result. Teachers in *Youth at Risk* programs find that vocational modules are a way of re-engaging young people in preparation for undertaking mainstream educational pathways. However, the Review was also advised by the TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre that the majority of students enrolled in Year 10 and Year 11 equivalent courses and the HSC in TAFE NSW do not choose the vocational modules, even though vocational pathways have been promoted. The IT pathway is an exception to this. Otherwise student demand is for general education modules.

The fact that Access courses are attempted by so many Aboriginal students shows how highly valued they are by Aboriginal communities and this was confirmed in the Review's field trips. Concerns were expressed by communities that funding priorities adopted by TAFE NSW may see the number of Access courses decline, particularly the CGVE.

Aboriginal participation rates in the CGVE (Year 10) are variable across TAFE NSW Institutes, and these variations are difficult to explain. However, many Institutes are enrolling Aboriginal students into courses at a much higher rate than their demographic profile. It is important that there is a continuing commitment to CGVE courses in TAFE NSW, and that encouragement is provided to Aboriginal students to enrol. However, enrolment does not guarantee success.



**Figure 3.5.7: Aboriginal participation in the CGVE as a percentage of enrolments.**

The CGVE is a vitally important alternative to the School Certificate for Aboriginal students. The successful completion rate of 41 percent represents a significant improvement in respect to school results, even though non-Aboriginal students have a higher completion rate at 49.1 percent. The overall results for the Foundation and Vocational Education Certificate vary from 53 percent to 68 percent for Aboriginal students, depending on how the course enrolments were configured.

The variation in enrolments in Aboriginal participation rates in the CGVE (Year 10) reflects the different levels of enrolments of Aboriginal students across TAFE NSW Institutes, and the priorities established within the Institutes' planning strategies. In New England Institute, for example, Aboriginal students represent 13.6 percent of total enrolments. Aboriginal enrolment rates in most metropolitan Institutes are much lower, despite a higher population concentration in the communities served by those Institutes.

#### Case study

Riverina Institute Griffith Campus offers the *Koori Kool* program, in partnership with Centrelink, Department of Community Services, Griffith Lands Council, Lagunyah House Youth Refuge, Koori Health Post and other government agencies. Students study the Certificate 1 in Access to Work and Educational Opportunities, which has been developed in consultation with Aboriginal Elders, teachers and mentors. Students develop skills in language, literacy and numeracy as well as interpersonal skills and Aboriginal culture. Transport to class is provided. Case management and mentors are features of the course. Twelve of the fifteen students enrolled graduated to the Year 10 equivalent course, Certificate II in General and Vocational Education.

In the Higher School Certificate, the TAFE NSW completion rate for Aboriginal students was 23 percent, compared to 61 percent for non-Aboriginal students.

Student results need to be understood with respect to a number of issues – the Commonwealth requirements for maintaining a Youth Allowance mean there are many reluctant “starters” in TAFE NSW courses; TAFE NSW is an adult learning environment which is not ideal for many young learners; (TAFE NSW had more than 230 Aboriginal students under the age of 15 in 2003); and TAFE NSW Institutes are funded on a formula basis calculated on an average cost per hour of teaching. Because the learning needs of Aboriginal students are much deeper and their support needs are greater, they generate costs that are much higher than the formula usually provides. Institutes do have discretion on how to fund these courses. Nonetheless, the rates are much lower than those applied in high schools, for secondary students.

Recent NCVER research (Polesel et al, 2004, p. 47) has found that those students who reported a low level of satisfaction with the quality of learning at school were also more likely to report poor levels of satisfaction with TAFE NSW training, particularly at the lower AQF levels. Compounding this is the Review finding that the average Year 7 Aboriginal student enters high school three years behind the expected literacy level, with limited programs in place to make up the gap. This

reinforces further the need for a more flexible and realistic approach to funding TAFE-delivered Access programs to Aboriginal students. As good literacy skills are essential for success in life, it is important that there is a continuing commitment to CGVE courses in TAFE NSW, and that encouragement is provided to Aboriginal students to enrol.

TAFE NSW has developed alternative learning programs for young people who have experienced difficulties in traditional high schools. Senior school programs that link with TAFE NSW include: Bradfield College at North Sydney, Coffs Harbour Educational Campus and CityEast@Randwick College.

Features of these programs include case management; pastoral care; strong community linkages; a four-day program (Bradfield) and three at Coffs Harbour; direct university linkages (Coffs Harbour); adult mentors for all students (Randwick); individual learning programs (Randwick); and dedicated counselling (Bradfield/Randwick). All course programs enable students to achieve a UAI and a TAFE NSW credential. In the case of Randwick, the program is offered for Years 10, 11 and 12 and numbers are capped at about 360 to ensure all students receive personal attention.

At CityEast@Randwick, 10 percent of the Certificate in General and Vocational Education students are Aboriginal. A Koori Support Team has been established by CityEast's Director, including a Student Counsellor, Aboriginal Development Manager and Vocational Officer (Careers). The Team meets fortnightly, and student progress is kept under constant review. Each student has an individual learning plan based on career and learning aspirations. High level contact is maintained on a cross-agency basis, particularly as some students have past experience of Juvenile Justice Centres.

In TAFE NSW, in order to monitor the progress made toward general education targets for Aboriginal people in the next decade, it would be of value to track at the local level the destinations of students from one course to another as part of core business in Colleges and Institutes. The national research conducted by Polesel et al, together with TAFE NSW's statewide student satisfaction data, provide a data-rich tool for analysing and improving educational provision to young Aboriginal students at both the planning and delivery stages.

## **Conclusion**

Retaining Aboriginal 15 to 19-year-old students in learning is a major challenge. Great emphasis needs to be placed on engagement, particularly in Years 10 and 11, when major drop-outs occur. Curriculum support, engagement strategies, better counselling and extensive support systems are all important in achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Solutions to improved retention and achievement for Aboriginal students need to be framed in the interests of individual students, their aspirations and their special strengths. This section has identified many strategies that can be adopted at the local school or TAFE campus, and wider systemic ideas for improving outcomes. Because Aboriginal students are so widely dispersed across schools and TAFE

campuses, provision of personalised learning plans and services will need to form a key part of school and TAFE approaches to ensuring that high expectations are held and met.

Funding arrangements must be equitable, so that Aboriginal students can complete Year 12 through the HSC or TAFE NSW equivalent courses. Funding must ensure that the support services needed for 15 to 19-year-olds in TAFE NSW are equal to those for school students through to Year 12.

Consultation with Aboriginal communities has made it clear that they want the same opportunities and pathways for their children as non-Aboriginal children. Aboriginal students must be supported to succeed in the HSC. Similarly, alternative pathways or more flexible pathways within the HSC structure should be available as options to Aboriginal students who may be likely to “drop out”, and indeed all students who may be at risk of leaving school because courses do not seem relevant or engaging. High expectations, curriculum engagement and good teaching remain the fundamental planks of Aboriginal student success.

## Section 6: Vocational Education and Training and Employment

The 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made a number of recommendations about Aboriginal education. The Report expressed strong support for the principle of self-determination.

The only chance for improving education as a social resource for Aboriginal people will come as a result of Aboriginal people deciding for themselves what it is they require of education and then having the means of determining how that end is to be achieved.<sup>40</sup>

The current New South Wales Aboriginal Education Review has provided an opportunity for Aboriginal communities to be consulted about what they perceive as the shortfalls of the system and what needs to be changed to achieve quality learning outcomes for Aboriginal students and communities. In relation to Vocational Education and Training (VET), the four key themes that emerged were:

- improvement of educational outcomes, particularly course completion rates
- improved employment rates
- lower rates of recidivism for people in Corrective Services Centres and Juvenile Justice Centres, and most importantly
- the need for greater assistance for community capacity building.

### Participation in VET

Over the last five years the number of enrolments by Aboriginal people in TAFE NSW has grown by 25 percent, from 15 715 in 1999 to 19 632 in 2003. Most of the enrolments are in rural areas (80.4 percent) with Western Institute having the highest number of Aboriginal students with 4173 enrolments. This represents 11.6 percent of the Institute's total enrolments. New England follows with 3159 enrolments which represents 13.1 percent of total enrolments.

**Table 3.6.1: Percentage of Aboriginal enrolments in TAFE NSW**

Institute	2003 Indigenous Enrolments	2003 Total Enrolments	Percentage of Enrolments
Hunter	1,615	60,671	2.7
Illawarra	1,569	41,326	3.8
New England	3,159	24,022	13.1
North Coast	2,724	41,385	6.6
Northern Sydney	373	54,690	0.7
Riverina	1,357	35,331	3.8
South Western Sydney	878	57,405	1.5
Southern Sydney	454	44,619	1.0
Sydney	976	55,376	1.7
Western	4,173	35,890	11.6
Western Sydney	1,172	53,377	2.2
OTEN	1,182	37,878	3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,632</b>	<b>541,970</b>	

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee, 2000.



## 2003 ACE enrolments

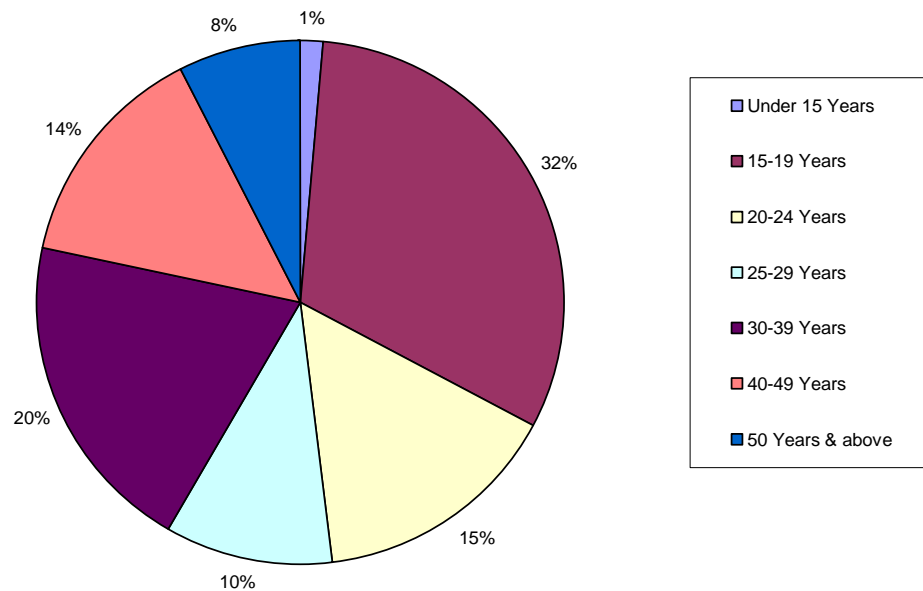
A similar pattern is evident in Adult and Community Education (ACE) participation levels.

**Table 3.6.2: Percentage of Aboriginal enrolments in ACE Colleges**

Cluster	Total		Indigenous	
	No.	%	No.	%
Greater Sth West	7,399	100.0	829	11.2
Inner West	45,609	100.0	1,355	3.0
Mid Nth Coast	24,820	100.0	649	2.6
Northern Inland	10,943	100.0	557	5.1
Northern Rivers	23,588	100.0	2,233	9.5
South East	7,398	100.0	47	0.6
Watagan	36,467	100.0	204	0.6
<i>Total rural</i>	<i>156,224</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>5,874</i>	<i>3.8</i>
Metropolitan	220,535	100.0	572	0.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>376,759</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>6,446</b>	<b>1.7</b>

## Participation in TAFE NSW

**Indigenous Participation by Age Group 2003**



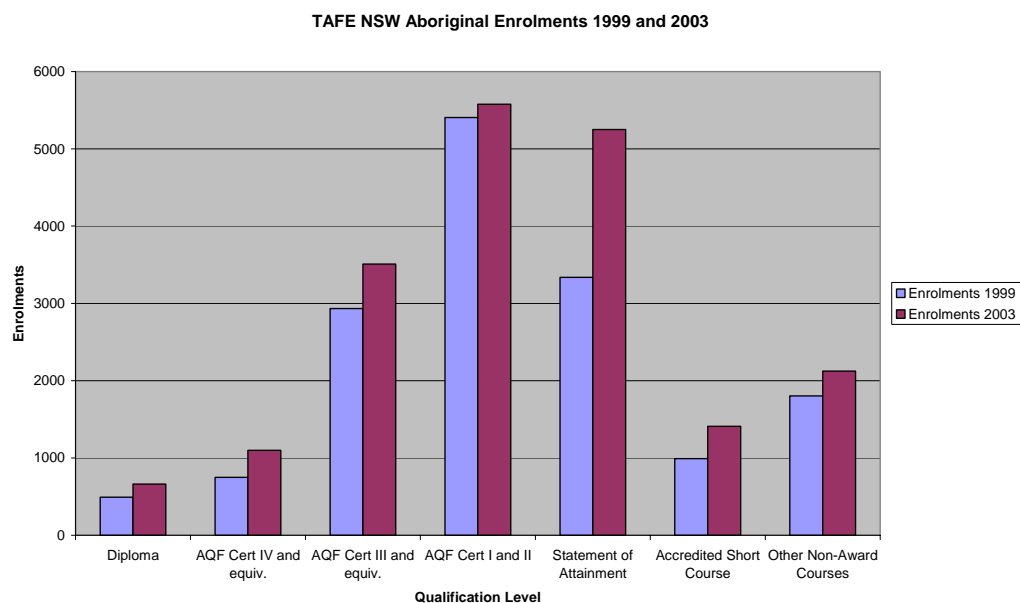
**Figure 3.6.1: Age distribution of Aboriginal students enrolled in TAFE NSW.**

In Figure 3.6.1 the largest single cohort is the 15 to 19-year-old group. Their participation in vocational education has been discussed in Section 5 of this Review. However, as the chart shows, there is also high participation by the 30 to 39-year-old-age group as many adults return to study.

The most popular courses undertaken by TAFE NSW Aboriginal students were Access courses, with enrolments in this area accounting for 35 percent of total Aboriginal enrolments. This is because these courses provide an entry back into education by adults who left school early. All educational categories recorded growth in Aboriginal enrolments between 1999 and 2003, with the exception of the Information Technology, Arts and Media Division, where there was a slight decrease. The most significant growth occurred in the Primary Industries and Natural Resources Division where enrolments grew by more than 80 percent, from 1034 in 1999 to 1869 in 2003.

ACE Colleges also provide both general and VET programs for Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal enrolments in ACE Colleges has increased from 2053 (0.6%) in 1998 to 6047 (1.6%) in 2003. The courses with the highest enrolments are Literacy and Numeracy; Automotive Vehicle Operations; Occupational Health and Safety; First Aid; Land, Parks and Wildlife Management; Practical Computing Skills; and Work Practices Programs. Ninety-one percent of enrolments were in rural areas.

As well, there are several independent Aboriginal adult education providers such as Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative, the Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern, National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Inc (NAISDA), and Booroongen Djugun College at Kempsey, which offer nationally accredited courses. Booroongen Djugun College started in response to the training needs of its Aboriginal people's aged-care facility but now also provides courses over a wide range of subjects that are industry-approved and nationally recognised. Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistics (AVETMISS) figures for 2002 show 839 enrolments in VET courses in independent Aboriginal adult education colleges.



**Figure 3.6.2: TAFE NSW enrolments by qualification level for Aboriginal students.**

Despite the relatively high levels of participation, concern is continually expressed by government agencies about the fact that Aboriginal students are more likely to be involved in vocational education and training at the lower qualification levels. As Figure 3.6.2 shows, there has been some progress in increasing Aboriginal enrolments in higher level courses.

However, it should also be recognised that a large number of mature-age Aboriginal students enter TAFE NSW and ACE wanting to build up their basic education skills and self-confidence before they can progress to the more vocational and higher level courses. The field trips revealed a high level of support for the Access and Arts and Cultural Studies courses as they provide a non-threatening platform and a success cycle for those returning to study after leaving school early. These courses build up the confidence of students and give them the skills needed to continue their education and move on to other, higher level programs. There is also another benefit in that the older members of the community then lead the way for the entry of younger community members into post-secondary education. Research undertaken by TAFE NSW's Access Division has found that 61 percent of all students who completed the general education courses subsequently enrolled in vocational courses the following year.

However, despite the continuing growth in participation, the field trips and submissions identified a number of inhibitors to access that need to be addressed.

A common theme was the lack of adequate transport, particularly in rural and remote areas where students might have to travel from one town to another to attend a campus that delivered the appropriate course. Contributing factors include lack of a vehicle, lack of access to public transport and the fact that many Aboriginal people don't have a driver's licence.

One way of addressing this issue is for VET providers to seek alternative ways of delivery that either limit the number of times a student needs to attend the campus through arrangements such as block release (apprentices are released from work to attend TAFE NSW for several days in a row rather than one day per week), or take the course to the student. Vocational education and training needs to be delivered when and where it is needed. TAFE NSW and other VET providers need to develop innovative and flexible vocational education and training services to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities and people.

One way that TAFE NSW has enhanced flexibility and provided a welcoming environment for Aboriginal communities is through the establishment of specialist colleges (such as Eora College, TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute) and centres (such as the Djigay Centre at Kempsey).

Distance education has been suggested as a way of enabling programs to be delivered to individuals when there is insufficient demand within small communities. The delivery of VET via on-line services may have considerable potential for Aboriginal Australians in urban, rural and remote environments. However, it needs to be recognised that as on-line learning generally requires a high level of literacy and self-directed learning skills, many Aboriginal students would require face-to-face literacy tuition and computing skills training prior to

commencing an on-line course. For on-line learning to be successful, students need to be prepared for on-line learning, supported during the program and continually monitored to ensure that they are progressing satisfactorily.

### Eora

The concept of Eora started in the inner-city Aboriginal community in 1984 with the provision of education and training in cooking and hygiene for women living on The Block in Redfern. By 1987 the focus for training had changed to visual and performing arts. In late 1993 the present Redfern site of Eora College was opened by The Hon Virginia Chadwick, ready for classes to begin in 1994. So this year marks the 20-year anniversary of the concept and 10 years of delivery of targeted training at the Abercrombie Street, Redfern site.

The philosophy of the College is to maintain cultural sensitivity and work towards reconciliation. To this end, an informal style is underpinned by structure and control. The student base of 70 percent Aboriginal students allows for inclusion of non-Aboriginal students from a wide ethnic mix.

The close affiliation of the College to the Redfern community is demonstrated by the use by the community of College facilities. Community building strategies within the College have included a fortnightly “cook up” resourced from Student Association funds, during which one class provides lunch for the entire College.

Programs from Eora can begin for students while they are still at school. *Youth at Risk* programs are run at the College and also in schools. A successful mentor program at Matraville High School focused on Years 7 and 8 students with the goal of increasing retention rates so the students could complete Year 10. Aboriginal students from Lismore and Bourke have visited the College in the last year. Students from Eora have, in turn, visited them. The visual and performing arts skills of Eora students have been showcased at concerts in schools once a fortnight.

The flexible approach shown towards students enrolled at the College includes a strong commitment to individual goals and acknowledgement of any constraints they face. The College has developed a specific Aboriginal curriculum, in particular the gap training provided by the Aboriginal Access to Further Studies course, which provides a pathway for Aboriginals to enter the Police Force, Armed Services and Fire Brigade. There is a strong commitment, Institute-wide, to strategies in place to support students who enrol in higher level courses.

While there are some high-profile graduates from the College who have forged successful careers in television production, stage management and performance, Eora is proud of the welcome and support it provides for every student.

One reason why it is important that the use of information technology is explored as a method of delivery for rural and remote communities is that, as Australia continues to embrace information technology, there is a danger that those without the means or skills will slide further away from participating socially and economically alongside those who do (Campbell, 2000, p. 7). The lower socioeconomic conditions of the majority of Aboriginal people place them in greater danger of not being able to access technology to develop these skills. Currently there is a lack of IT infrastructure in many rural and remote communities and this situation needs to be recognised and resolved. The use of IT technology will require not only the hardware and software to enable access, but the development of appropriate programs, the regular review and upgrading of the

whole system and the implementation of expertise to assist students when either educational or technological problems arise.

There are some interesting new projects currently being piloted that may benefit people in remote areas. An example of this is the *Interactive Distance Learning* (IDL) project, which enables the TAFE NSW North Coast and Western Institute to provide interactive lessons and learning to students in remote New South Wales, including rural and remote Aboriginal communities, via satellite telecommunications technology. This three-year project is a partnership between Optus, the Department of Education and Training in New South Wales, the Department of Employment, Education and Training in the Northern Territory, as well as local communities and schools. Projects such as this need to be supported to ensure both sustainability at the end of the three years and expansion to other regions.

If participation in vocational education and training is to increase, it has to be relevant to the needs of the local community. Therefore, it is important that strong links be formed between VET providers and Aboriginal communities. It would be advantageous for:

- the Deputy Director-General, TAFE and Community Education to establish a statewide Aboriginal Advisory Committee for TAFE NSW and ACE which would consist of representatives from key Aboriginal organisations, and
- all TAFE NSW Institutes to establish an Aboriginal Education and Development Advisory Council and all TAFE NSW campuses to establish an Aboriginal Education and Advisory Committee. The Advisory Councils and Committees would provide advice on the development and implementation of Aboriginal Education and Development Plans for each campus and Institute.

### **Completion rates**

The average module completion rate for Aboriginal students in TAFE NSW in 2003, at 64.1 percent, has improved by some 7.4 percentage points since 1999. The highest rates of module completion were for short courses, such as TAFE PLUS Statements (100 percent) and College Statements (72.5 percent). In terms of accredited AQF qualifications, module completion rates were highest for Certificate III level courses (67.8 percent) and lowest for courses at Certificate I and II (59.1 percent). Between 1999 and 2003, the number of Aboriginal graduates increased by 43 percent, from 4470 in 1999 to 6387 in 2003. However, despite this improvement, this is still significantly below the rate for all students. TAFE NSW recognises the need to improve completion rates and has strategies in place to achieve this. Each TAFE NSW Aboriginal Development Manager is required to report quarterly on progress made.

A 1999 study (Durnan & Boughton, 1999) of the outcomes of Aboriginal people enrolling in VET courses in independent Aboriginal adult education colleges found that pass rates were higher than Aboriginal outcomes attained by the VET sector as a whole. This result is thought to be due in part to the additional support and more

accommodating environment provided in independent Aboriginal adult education colleges, as well as more focused course offerings.

A number of submissions to the Review described initiatives that resulted in very good completion rates. The Booroongen Djugun College identified the key features of “Best practice Aboriginal Pedagogy”; the NSW Lands Council described the training program developed and implemented in partnership with TAFE NSW – Western Sydney Institute, and TAFE NSW – Riverina Institute described the success factors that resulted in all students enrolled in a Work Skills Certificate 1 course for Aboriginal students either completing the module or the course.

The success factors identified in these submissions included:

- regular involvement of the community and its representative organisations
- the use of Aboriginal teachers and community members as teachers, resource people and mentors and administration systems that facilitate this employment
- the provision of a friendly and welcoming learning environment
- appropriate teaching methodologies
- a holistic approach to curriculum development and delivery
- customisation of national training packages to local needs
- development of students’ positive self-identity, dignity and respect through cultural affirmation
- comprehensive student support services, including counselling, transport, childcare
- appropriate resourcing
- teaching and learning resources that are culturally inclusive.

These were all issues raised during the field trips. Community members believed that many TAFE NSW campuses were unwelcoming and provided insufficient support for Aboriginal students.

The following strategies are proposed to improve the completion rates of Aboriginal students:

- Training packages and courses to be delivered with sufficient flexibility to enable additional literacy, numeracy and communication support where needed by Aboriginal students, and assessment practices to have regard to cultural appropriateness.
- TAFE NSW and ACE Colleges to put strategies in place to ensure the learning environment for Aboriginal students is appropriate, there is genuine community involvement and that adequate and appropriate support and resourcing is provided.
- TAFE NSW campuses and ACE colleges to introduce a case management approach to ensure that each student is considered as an individual and receives the support appropriate for their needs.

## Pathways

If both educational and employment outcomes are to be improved, it is essential that formal pathways are established to facilitate the movement of Aboriginal people between schools and TAFE; ACE and TAFE; TAFE and universities; higher education and work.

Aboriginal people are still under-represented in higher education. In 2001 there were 7341 Aboriginal students in higher education. This represents 1.2 percent of domestic students. According to the issues paper prepared for the Australian Government Review of Higher Education called *Achieving Equitable and Appropriate Outcomes: Indigenous Australians in Higher Education*, the Aboriginal higher education population shows a somewhat different profile to that of other students. In general, Aboriginal students are older than non-Aboriginal students and are more likely to come from rural and isolated parts of Australia. Aboriginal students are more likely to enter higher education through special entry schemes and to enrol in bridging courses or diploma courses than in bachelor or post-graduate courses. Aboriginal students are more likely to be enrolled externally or in multi-mode attendance (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002, p. 14).

Therefore, if the number of Aboriginal people in higher education is to be increased, it is imperative that a range of alternative pathways is developed and implemented. Partnerships between TAFE NSW and universities have led to the development of a number of joint programs specifically targeting Aboriginal students, whereby the first part of the course is done at TAFE NSW and the student then completes a bachelor degree at the university. This sort of model needs to be extended and other cooperative models developed.

### Case study

There is a tripartite agreement between TAFE NSW – Illawarra Institute, Illawarra Area Health Service and the University of Wollongong. Aboriginal students who successfully complete an introductory health course may apply to do the Enrolled Nurse Education Program. On successful completion of the program, students are offered two years employment as enrolled nurses with the Illawarra Area Health Service. Following this, enrolled nurses may apply to the University of Wollongong to complete the undergraduate nursing program. Successful graduates may be offered two years employment with the Illawarra Area Health Service as registered nurses. TAFE NSW – Illawarra Institute and the University of Wollongong are also developing and implementing a joint degree program, the Bachelor of Science in Indigenous Health Studies. The degree is structured so students complete the Advanced Diploma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Health at Illawarra Institute with simultaneous enrolment and completion of a number of supporting programs (such as Introductory Communications) at the University of Wollongong. At the conclusion of the Advanced Diploma students articulate straight into the final stage of the degree at the University of Wollongong.

The following strategies can improve pathways for Aboriginal people if:

- TAFE NSW campuses and Institutes further develop formal links with their local schools, Aboriginal communities and universities to implement

strategies to improve retention rates in school to Year 12 and pathways to TAFE NSW, university and employment

- TAFE NSW Institutes enter into partnership with universities and local communities to develop bridging and joint programs to facilitate the entry of Aboriginal people into TAFE NSW and university.
- TAFE NSW Curriculum Centres ensure that clear articulation pathways and credit transfer arrangements are built into Aboriginal preparatory and specialist courses.

## Employment

A fundamental question raised during the consultations was “Education for what?” From the VET sector perspective, the answer is “education for employment or further education”. This also includes community capacity building to support Aboriginal communities in taking charge of their own destinies. Both the field trips and the submissions raised the importance of improving both educational and employment outcomes including increasing the number of Aboriginal people gaining apprenticeships and traineeships.

The employment statistics for Aboriginal people are not good. Just over 39 percent of the Aboriginal population are employed compared with 55 percent of the total population. The Aboriginal unemployment rate for 25–44 year-olds is much higher than that for the total population (21.9 percent compared with 6.5 percent). Young Aboriginal people (15–24 years) have an unemployment rate of 32.7 percent compared with 12.8 percent for the total population. There is no sign that the gaps between the Aboriginal population and the total population narrowed between 1996 and 2001.

Aboriginal workers are under-represented in the two highest skill categories (occupations requiring degree or diploma qualifications) and strongly over-represented in the lowest skill categories. Almost 60 percent of Aboriginal workers are employed as Routine Workers (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, 2001, p. 196)

Both State and Australian Governments have recognised the need to provide programs that seek to improve Aboriginal employment prospects, particularly in the private sector. The NSW Department of Education and Training administers three New South Wales Government-funded programs, which together provide over \$3.3m for Aboriginal employment. These are the *Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program*, the *Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer (AEDO) Program* and the *New Careers for Aboriginal People (NCAP) Program*. The emphasis of all these programs is on providing funding to community-based organisations to employ Aboriginal people to assist Aboriginal people to gain employment. The Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has developed an Indigenous Employment Programme which provides support for employers and for Aboriginal people looking for work. All these programs aim to encourage employers to take on Aboriginal employees.

However, the overall impact of these programs is hard to assess as they are submission-based and there appears to be little coordination or interaction between



the management of state and national programs. There is a need for an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs to ascertain whether they have in fact improved economic capacity for Aboriginal people and, if so, were they short-term rather than long-term sustainable measures.

The need for programs to encourage private enterprise to employ more Aboriginal people is demonstrated by the findings of a survey of the views of Chief Executive Officers of large companies (Australian Centre for International Business, 2001)<sup>41</sup>. The survey revealed that only 14 percent of firms surveyed had a documented Aboriginal employment policy. The views reported by CEOs indicated that increasing the employment of Aboriginal workers is constrained most strongly by employers' perceptions of the level of education, skills and commitment of Aboriginal job seekers. This translated into specific CEO concerns about possible absenteeism and non-retention and represents a significant barrier to increasing Aboriginal employment.

One strategy for overcoming this barrier is for VET providers to enter into partnerships with private companies and enterprises so that the students are "job-ready" for employment by the company. The partnership between Australia Post and the former TAFE NSW – Southern Sydney Institute is a good example of what can be achieved. Since the partnership commenced in 1996, over 250 Aboriginal people have been trained by the Institute and on successful completion have been employed by Australia Post.

#### **Hunter Community College (HCC)**

A unique partnership between three registered training organisations (RTOs), the Yarnteem ATSI Corporation and some local businesses in the Hunter region has worked to develop employment opportunities and to establish new models of Aboriginal education. Yarnteem sponsors a number of pre-vocational and culturally enriching training programs while Yamuloong provides vocational training. Hunter Community College (HCC) and Hunter Group Training Company (HGTC) are the other two RTOs in the partnership and they provide training in specialised areas. Specific businesses have been strategically linked to a number of training programs to provide work experience for the students and possible future employment.

The success of the programs rests largely on the supportive partnership that has emerged between Yarnteem, Yamuloong and HCC. Having a supportive environment has been critical to keeping the students in these courses. Teacher selection is another major factor. Another critical success factor is flexibility and the need for programs to evolve with the changing needs of the students.

The ATSIC submission to this Review supports models such as the Moree Aboriginal Strategy and the compacts initiative operating in Forster. A significant element in the success of these initiatives is the partnerships between schools, training providers, employers, communities and students. An important element was the case manager who provided an effective liaison between each of the parties in the partnership. This should be an essential component of all such partnerships and programs.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Labour Market Policy Group, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, (2002). *Indigenous Employment Policy Evaluation Stage One: Progress report*.

A common theme during the field trips was the need for more Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. An analysis of apprentice and traineeship figures (Bowman, 2004, p. 8) has shown that there has been a less than 20 percent increase in the number of Aboriginal people undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships over the period 1997–2001. This compares with a doubling of the New Apprenticeship population over the same period.

As at May 2004, in New South Wales there were:

- 792 Aboriginal apprentices out of a total of 44 594 (1.7 percent)
  - 596 Aboriginal existing worker traineeships out of a total of 39 334 (1.5 percent)
  - 1435 Aboriginal new entrant trainees out of a total of 53 726 (0.02 percent)
- a total of 2822 Aboriginal apprentices and trainees out of a total of 137 654 (2 percent).

In response to this under-representation of Aboriginal people in apprenticeships and traineeships, the Department of Education and Training New Apprenticeships Centre (DETNAC) has been active in the promotion and development of apprenticeships and traineeships for Aboriginal people. Since 1 July 2003, 462 Aboriginal apprenticeships and traineeships have been facilitated. The DETNAC is currently planning a media and promotional campaign aimed at encouraging employers to provide apprenticeships and traineeships for Aboriginal people and at encouraging young Aboriginal people to consider apprenticeships and traineeships. The campaign will be supported by initiatives including:

- pre-vocational courses specifically tailored to assist young Aboriginal people to enter apprenticeships and traineeships
- a mentoring program involving support for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees provided by Aboriginal people in business, education and training
- a personal and leadership development program for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees.

However, as the figures show, there is still a very long way to go. If the numbers of Aboriginal people employed as apprentices and trainees is to increase and be broadened across *all* business sectors, there needs to be strong partnerships forged between both public and private agencies. In particular, there need to be strong links with Centrelink and Job Network agencies to ensure they recommend young Aboriginal people for apprenticeships and traineeships.

A component of the Australian Government's *Indigenous Employment Policy* is the *National Indigenous Cadetship Project* (NICP). This project matches Aboriginal students studying full time at university with employers who can give them work skills and professional development. The need for cadetships for Aboriginal people was raised consistently through the field trips. Therefore the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations should extend the scheme to VET students as their need to gain employment is even greater than that of university students.

There was strong community support for the development of a New South Wales Employment Strategy for Aboriginal people so as to develop and implement a coordinated approach to improving employment outcomes. Development and implementation of such a strategy would need to involve key business and industry organisations as well as the public sector agencies with responsibility for the delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal communities.

The following strategies could be adopted to improve the employment prospects of Aboriginal people:

- The Premier could establish a high level not-for-profit foundation of New South Wales corporate leaders with a strong commitment to Aboriginal education and employment to promote the creation of viable and lasting employment of Aboriginal people in the private sector and to encourage the private sector to fund cadetships and scholarships for Aboriginal students.
- The New South Wales Government could develop a New South Wales Aboriginal Employment Strategy to improve the employment prospects of Aboriginal people and coordinate existing employment strategies, programs and resources into a holistic, strategic framework.
- Indigenous Organisation Training (IOT) could be made available in all areas of the state and its availability could be well promoted and communicated with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

### Corrective Services

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, released in 1991, drew attention to the link between poor educational outcomes and high rates of imprisonment among Aboriginal Australians. Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission for more non-custodial sentences, Aboriginal people in New South Wales continue to be incarcerated at greater rates than non-Aboriginal people compared to their population share of 1.9 percent in New South Wales.

**Table 3.6.3: The number and proportion of Aboriginal offenders in Correctional Centres as at May 2004.**

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Unknown	Total
Male	1411 (18 percent)	6130 (79 percent)	290 (3 percent)	7831
Female	166 (29 percent)	396 (69 percent)	16 (3 percent)	578
TOTAL	1557 (19 percent)	6526 (78 percent)	306 (4 percent)	8409

Source: AVETI, Department of Corrective Services.

The Adult Vocational Education Training Institute (AVETI) is the registered training organisation of the Department of Corrective Services (DCS). AVETI provides a range of programs such as language, literacy and numeracy; vocational and work readiness skills; Aboriginal specific education; information technology and creative arts. AEVETI also undertakes entry-level diagnostic literacy and numeracy for offenders. It has been found that there is a clear link between low literacy levels and incarceration.

The Department of Corrective Services and TAFE NSW have a Memorandum of Understanding outlining TAFE NSW's role and commitment in providing

vocational education and training for offenders in Correctional Centres. TAFE NSW and the Department of Corrective Services have jointly developed and recently launched the TAFE NSW *Provision for Aboriginal Offenders Implementation Plan 2004–2005*.

In 2003 the average module completion rate for Aboriginal students in Correctional Centres was 76.1 percent, which is much higher than the completion rate for other Aboriginal students in VET. However, the course completion rate was very low at 17 percent. It is likely that the main reason for this is because the offender did not have time to complete the course while in the Correctional Centre. This means that the programs in Correctional Centres are not being value added or maintained due to the lack of post-release programs that provide a linkage from Correctional Centres studies to a VET institution. TAFE NSW therefore needs to consider re-packaging programs so that students are able to gain recognition for the skills they have developed even though they may not have completed the whole qualification.

The provision of VET in Correctional Centres has a number of limitations because of the nature of the organisation. One of the problems that prisoners face when trying to complete VET courses is the lack of continuity. Offenders can be moved from centre to centre with subsequent disruption to study. Another limitation is that provision must be structured around the priorities of the centre. Participation may be limited or interrupted by such priorities as other offender programs, work, court appearances, transfers to other centres or lockdowns.

Given the movement of offenders within the correctional system, and the other limitations, flexible delivery including distance learning, continuous enrolments as well as variations to course entry and exit points are important methods of facilitating access to VET. It was suggested that TAFE NSW Institutes needed to work together to ensure that they were offering similar programs so that when offenders changed centres, they could still continue their courses. When providing courses within Correctional Centres, TAFE NSW Institutes also need to be mindful of the labour market of the community to which the offender will be returning. For example, it is of little use developing rural skills if the offender will be returning to an urban environment.

A recent initiative has been the piloting of traineeships within NSW DCS so as to provide industry-specific vocational education and training and work experiences that better re-integrate offenders into the broader employment market at the pre and post-release stages. Traineeships are currently operating at Yetta Dhinnakkal Correctional Centre which has mainly Aboriginal offenders. In 2004 there are thirteen Aboriginal and nine non-Aboriginal trainees enrolled in the Certificate II in General Construction and four Aboriginal and two non-Aboriginal trainees in the Certificate II in Horticulture. Although it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this initiative, it has the potential to make a significant difference to the employment prospects of those who participate in the scheme and perhaps to reduce the chance of re-offending.

The other major issue identified in the consultations was the need for much better pathways and networking post-release so that there are strong support systems in

place. DCS is committed to the implementation of *Throughcare*, which is recognition of the need for integration between community-based and institutional settings and the requirement for offenders to receive ongoing support if there is to be further significant gains in reducing re-offending. If offenders are to be able to complete their courses once they are released from custody, TAFE NSW will need to be involved in the *Throughcare* program before the offender is released so as to be able to provide counselling, career planning and the offer of enrolment immediately after release.

It is therefore recommended that:

- TAFE NSW, in partnership with key Aboriginal organisations, develop and implement a post-release program for Aboriginal offenders based on a case management approach which would incorporate counselling; enrolment in TAFE NSW programs to enable ex-offenders to complete courses commenced in Correctional Centres; and provision of mentoring and community support necessary to reduce the chances of them re-offending.

### **Building community capacity**

A critical review of the VET research and policy literature (Boughton, 1998) suggests that the problem is not so much participation in education and training per se (or the lack of it) by Aboriginal people, but rather the lack of opportunities for *appropriate* participation. Boughton said that one aim of a national Aboriginal strategy should surely be wherever possible to provide Aboriginal people with the education and training they need to be able to raise their living standards on their own lands and in their own communities. It is essential that the educational system has a holistic approach to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

One issue that emerged as a constant theme during the consultations was that many Aboriginal parents were ill-equipped to provide assistance and support for their children's education. It is widely accepted that a critical factor in children's success at school is the value parents place on education. Parental involvement and support in the home for educational processes is recognised as being fundamental to a child's successful engagement and outcomes (Schwab, 2001, p. 4). Often parents who have not had good experiences in school themselves and who have low self-esteem because of their low levels of formal education and poor literacy and numeracy skills are unable to provide this support to their children. In addition, many young fathers and mothers not only lack parenting skills but are forced to leave education early to look after the children.

Vocational education and training providers, particularly TAFE NSW, have a crucial role in providing programs that will assist parents to raise their levels of education and acquire parenting skills. An example of this type of program is the pilot program being run by South Western Sydney Institute at the Tahmoor Primary School in partnership with the Campbelltown SEA (School Education Area) to provide Koori parents with the skills to assist the literacy and numeracy development of their children. It is envisaged that educational pathways will be developed to assist these parents gain qualifications to move into full or part-time

work to assist Aboriginal students. This type of support should be available to all communities who want it.

It is therefore recommended that TAFE NSW develop and promote an Aboriginal family education program which leads to accredited course outcomes. This would include programs for young parents to support them in their own development as well as the development of their own children; basic education for parents to assist them support their children educationally, and volunteer literacy tutoring to provide Aboriginal parents with the skills to enable them to participate in the in-school tuition program. Unless Aboriginal children acquire literacy and numeracy skills at the same rate as other students, their educational outcomes will continue to be below the rest of the student population.

Another important area of community capacity building is through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). The *Independent Review of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme* (Spicer, 1997) says that, across Australia, CDEP has been critical to developing an improved sense of pride in community and culture and has provided the basis for acquiring greater skills, employment and enterprise development resulting in ongoing social and economic growth. Consultations during the CDEP Review revealed that training is seen as important in contributing to the successful outcomes of particular projects. The Review recommended that TAFE NSW systems and other training providers need to consider more flexible, community-focused, on-site delivery based on the concept of “TAFE without walls”.

Field trip interviews indicated that often CDEP participants got caught on the CDEP recycle treadmill in that they did not progress further into employment. Often, for young people, their only aspiration was CDEP, which in effect reduced their opportunities.

TAFE NSW Institutes and other VET providers need to continue to develop close links with CDEP programs to facilitate movement from CDEP to other employment. This includes the need to provide opportunities for the development of small business enterprises supported by relevant VET learning and modelling through methods such as business incubators.

Past experience has shown that the most successful projects are those developed in partnership with the community, which are project-based and delivered within the community. Projects must also be instigated with communities to generate genuine long-term jobs. VET institutions also need to work with CDEPs to assist them with strategic planning skills as part of capacity building.

The New South Wales Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) has funded a number of demonstration projects aimed at community capacity building. The Board’s project *Linking TAFE with CDEPs* addresses the training needs of Aboriginal people participating in CDEP throughout New South Wales. The training will enable Aboriginal communities to plan for and manage the skills training they need to manage CDEP projects and hence improve the education and training and material life of Aboriginal communities. There are several good examples of how CDEP has developed into commercial enterprises such as at

Murrin Bridge. The partnership between the community and TAFE NSW – Riverina Institute has resulted in the development of this commercially viable winery.

#### Case study

The *Tharawal Aboriginal Women's Project* is a joint project of TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute, the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council CDEP, and the Aboriginal Programs and Gender Equity Units of NSW DET. The project aims to increase the number of Aboriginal women participating in higher level courses and link their training to enterprise development, sustainable employment and/or further study. Eleven women completed the Certificate IV in Small Business Enterprise Management in 2003. Seven of these women have gone onto full-time employment coupled with further part-time study in Advanced Diploma level courses at TAFE NSW, while the remaining four have commenced full-time studies at university.

Another BVET-commissioned project that has the potential to be replicated in other areas is the Armidale-based project *Pathways for Indigenous people in vocational education, training and employment*, which addresses the need to link training with employment outcomes. With its combination of training, mentoring and business support through the *Indigenous Business Enterprise*, the *Pathways* project provides educational and flexible vocational training options that address the multiple strands of disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal people to ensure that existing employment and career development opportunities are not lost to local Aboriginal people.

Projects such as these provide very successful models of how VET organisations can work in partnership with communities to build capacity and support self-determination.

The following strategies should be considered to improve educational and employment outcomes:

- That TAFE NSW develop for and with Aboriginal communities an Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Learning which will support community capacity building at all levels of administration, leadership, governance and advocacy for policy change. Each Institute will establish a key centre for Aboriginal Leadership and Learning, which will provide a focus for resource development and will facilitate diffusion of the course through communities, according to the specific needs of different communities. The course will be flexible, and will have multiple entry and exit points, with appropriate levels of course accreditation; it will have experiential learning as its underpinning instructional foundation; and it will include opportunity for intensive literacy and numeracy support.
- That TAFE NSW in partnership with local communities support the development of small business enterprises by the provision of appropriate VET training and modelling through methods such as business incubators.
- That the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) fund further mentoring programs similar to the current *Innovations for the Regions project* to provide more communities with the expertise to initiate and

develop community development programs and expand employment activities.

## **Conclusions**

The field trips, consultations and research show that there are a lot of interesting and innovative vocational education and employment initiatives being introduced across New South Wales. However, most of these are occurring in pockets and so the overall impact on educational and vocational outcomes is marginal.

Meaningful outcomes require the realisation that Aboriginal Education is not the sole responsibility of any Aboriginal Education and Training Unit, but is core business within educational systems and TAFE NSW Institutes. Educational systems and structures need to analyse operations to develop a greater depth of understanding of Aboriginal issues in order to create real and sustainable change across the whole of the vocational education and training system.

In many ways TAFE NSW is seen as being successful for Aboriginal students. TAFE NSW Institutes are regarded as the national leaders in respect to the use of culturally inclusive curriculum and culturally appropriate teaching and learning resources and responsiveness to community and industry needs. However, it is important that TAFE NSW raises the benchmark to maintain its status as national leader and looks at new initiatives and makes personal and systemic challenges a component of the processes Institutes develop in the way they do their business.

Some strategies that could be used to improve VET delivery and outcomes include:

- mainstreaming equity initiatives so that these become a normal part of the institutions' role
- better assessment at entry to vocational education and training and individual case management where required, particularly to ensure that students have the level of literacy and numeracy necessary to successfully complete their course
- community profiling and planning: the focus must not only be on individuals but on families and communities
- intra and inter-departmental planning coupled with private sector, other government agencies and community partnerships to deliver services that address whole of life issues.

In regard to offenders in Juvenile Justice and Correctional Centres, there must be a far greater emphasis on the reduction of recidivism, particularly through the provision of post-release case management and programs that will provide both educational and community support for the ex-offender.

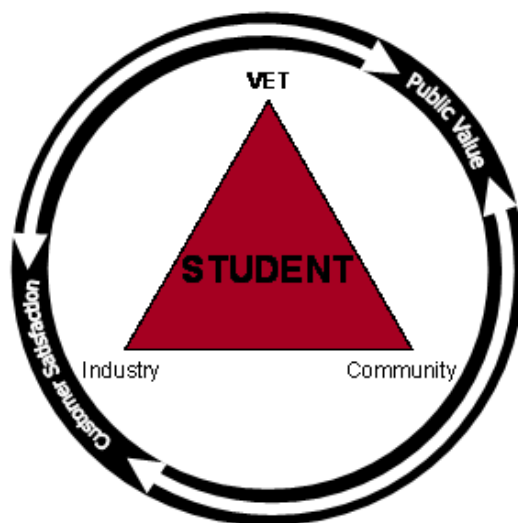
A key issue that has emerged from the consultations both with communities and sections within the Department of Corrective Services that have involvement in Aboriginal education and employment is that the Department is operating in "silos", with little interaction between sections and consequent lack of "value adding" that occurs through sharing expertise and resources. If any significant



improvements in educational and employment outcomes are to occur, the silos must be broken down so that the various sections of the Department work together so that new initiatives and the lessons learned from successful initiatives are disseminated across the whole Department.

If self-determination for Aboriginal communities is to be achieved, there needs to be a radical shift in focus and the development of a holistic, coordinated framework within which Aboriginal education and employment reforms are initiated and implemented, such as the framework shown in Figure 3.6.3.

**“Working to improve Social, Educational, Economic and Cultural development for Aboriginal people and communities”**



**Figure 3.6.3: VET framework.**

The emphasis needs to be on community capacity building through partnerships. VET systems cannot do this alone. New South Wales needs to develop a holistic, five-year strategy for building community capacity through improving educational (particularly literacy and numeracy) and employment outcomes in partnership with key Aboriginal community organisations, industry groups and government agencies.

Ensuring all Aboriginal people and communities have access to quality education and training is paramount, but without the basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, self-identification, self-esteem, confidence and knowing what you want in life, even the best teachers or systems would be struggling to improve social, educational, economic and cultural development for Aboriginal people. Community capacity building has to be accepted as a key organising concept for the development of future directions. This encompasses, as a major component, the maintenance and development of Aboriginal culture by creating an environment where Aboriginal culture can be expressed and developed in its own right.



# **Review of Aboriginal Education**

## **Chapter 4**

### **Junaaygam**

### **Recommendations**

The translation of *Recommendations* in the Gumbaynggir language is

*Things that are told*

## Introduction

Stories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents, students, workers and community members, of teachers, principals, academics, researchers and submission writers collected during the Review have created a small mountain of information.

Stories were often told from the heart. They shared the good and bad experiences of people themselves or of family members in schools, on TAFE NSW campuses and in offices of the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET).

It is pleasing to report that there are school and campus communities where good things are happening, where Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people work together to prepare the next generations for positive futures.

In these school and campus communities, School Education Areas and Regions there is enormous goodwill and fair-mindedness among many towards maintaining or improving the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students in schooling and training.

To give the full picture, however, it must also be said that attitudes and behaviours encountered during some parts of the review process could, at best, be described as defensive or ambivalent.

The bulk of schools, campuses and offices are somewhere in the middle, contributing in some ways to both the improvements and ongoing failures of the education system to make a difference for Aboriginal young people.

The Review indicated that all levels of the education system require inspired leadership and support if they are to move forward. Leadership and support with determination to tackle the barriers to success that are faced by too many Aboriginal students. Leadership and support with wisdom to make worthwhile contributions to Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

Data sets, information, complaints and suggestions are essential parts of the previous chapters in this Report because they reveal what is happening in families, communities, schools, campuses and offices. The Recommendations that follow build on the information offered to provide the impetus for improvement, in effect to “kick start” change.

*To conclude, there is no quick fix to the long-term issues being faced ... The problems are entrenched, complex and multi-faceted. Whilst many well-intentioned people have put forward solutions ... experience has shown that ad hoc and poorly designed solutions only exacerbate the situation.*

– Dr Colin Gellatly (2004) *Report of Proceedings before the Standing Committee on Social Issues: Inquiry into issues related to Redfern/Waterloo*, NSW Government, Sydney, p. 4.

## A cautionary note

Before listing the recommendations of the Review, there are a few matters that need to be raised. Highlighting these matters doesn't make them go away, nor does it in any way absolve DET from responsibility for making meaningful contributions to eliminating the negative impacts that these factors can have on Aboriginal students, families and communities. It does, however, provide a more realistic view of the social context for the recommendations that follow.

First, education and training is only one part of the story of bringing brighter futures to Aboriginal children, teenagers and young adults.

Good health, solid housing, safe and nurturing families are essential to effective learning. For those Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal, students who are intermittently or permanently without these critical foundations, the Review has shown that the Department needs to find better ways to work with the agencies within government that are responsible for providing the assistance needed for families and communities.

Second, one of the most valued aspects of schooling and training is the potential for studies to lead to employment. The Review heard many times, in eloquent and sometimes forceful ways, of the frustration and hopelessness of limited employment opportunities. The jobs simply aren't there for Aboriginal people in many urban, rural, regional and isolated areas of New South Wales.

DET does not create the economic climate that in turn generates jobs. The Review demonstrated that the community does not expect the Department to create jobs for all unemployed people in the community. It does expect the Department to do its bit better – helping students to acquire the literacy and learning skills they need to succeed at school, to have options about university or other vocational training and to seek, obtain and hold employment.

Third, a consistent message from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people during the Review was that many people within DET, its schools and campuses would benefit from additional training and experience in working with Aboriginal people.

*We go to meetings to sort out troubles. We listen. We give them ideas. Then they do what they want. Mostly we don't hear any more about it. What's the point?*

– Aboriginal parent

The understandings of *community*, *collaborative decision-making* and *self-determination* held by non-Aboriginal leaders and staff members are only a shadow of what these concepts mean to Aboriginal people.

The Review heard of the common practice of involving Aboriginal people in the “identifying problems” and “gathering ideas” phases of activities but then excluding them at the critical point of deciding which ideas go into a plan, report or initiative.

Clearly, staff at all levels of the Department require training, guidance and positive experiences to build their capacity to work with Aboriginal people in the collaborative ways that will benefit all parties and make a difference for Aboriginal students. The Review heard enough examples of effective collaboration to conclude that such approaches do succeed.

### **Structure of the recommendations**

As the Review progressed, the ideas, concerns, issues, grumbles, complaints, successes, failures and suggestions in what people said started to settle around a number of consistent messages

The consistent messages, labelled *themes* for this report, were often expressed in terms of “Do something about ...”:

- strengthening policy, planning and implementation
- extending quality teaching and learning
- fortifying identities of Aboriginal students
- engaging Aboriginal students
- applying Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge
- collaborating in partnerships
- building community capacity
- challenging racism
- advancing leadership and accountability.

The frequency with which ideas and suggestions contributed to these messages makes it clear that they should be the focus of recommendations and receive urgent attention.

Brief outlines of the nine themes follow. For clarity’s sake, the outlines are brief. They do not repeat all the points people made over the months of the Review. Rather, they attempt the difficult task of singling out critical aspects

*Don't rush. Listen.  
Be with your people.  
The answer will  
come.*

– Aboriginal community member

from among the complex array of important points mentioned to establish a bridge to the future.

The Review's recommendations follow the outlines of the themes and they too are categorised under the nine themes. It is important to recognise, however, that although recommendations are listed under one theme, many are expected to make a difference across a number of themes. For example, recommendations focusing on data collection, including data about complaints of racism, are listed under *Advancing leadership and accountability*. The recommendation about complaints of racism could just as validly have been listed with recommendations under the *Challenging racism* theme. In this context it is essential that the recommendations be considered together as an integrated package designed to bring greater success to Aboriginal students at school and in training.



## STRENGTHENING POLICY, PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Policy development, planning and evaluation are familiar territory for all in DET. These tools are used to build strategies and priorities within statewide initiatives, such as the *Two Ways Together*: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003-2012, *Aboriginal Education Policy*, *NSW DET and NSW AECG Inc Partnership Agreement*, *State Literacy Strategy* and *Quality Teaching Framework*, into the operation of local schools and TAFE campuses. Participation in policy, planning and evaluation processes can be the way that individuals and groups get to influence what happens in their school or on their campus.

The Review revealed that the community supports many of the Department's policies and plans but remains concerned that:

- implementation of the good ideas contained in policies and strategic plans are rarely fully realised
- development of new or revised policies and plans does not include early consideration of implications for Aboriginal students.

The Department was urged to promote a shift in organisational culture so that contributing to improvements in the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students becomes part of everyone's business in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices. This would ensure that responsibility for overcoming resistance and making improvements is not left to committed individuals, nominated officers or special Aboriginal Education Units.

In bringing this cultural shift into being, the Department was reminded that it is not enough simply to "demand change". Staff in schools, on campuses and in offices require demonstrations of genuine commitment, specific guidance and practical support on how to "build in"<sup>42</sup> Aboriginal education within their core business and how to monitor progress. Inspired leadership in this area would also do much to break down barriers that

*Governments over-estimate their influence and impact in the short-term and under-estimate it in the long-term.*

– Dr Geoff Mulgan  
(April 2004) *Strategic Challenges for the Governments of Europe*, Presentation to the Institute of Public Affairs NSW Forum, Slide 85.

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<sup>42</sup> "Built in" and "bolted on" are terms coined by Bear, R (April 2004) "Built in or Bolted on: Managing equity and diversity in vocational education and training delivery", in *Equity in Vocational Education and Training: Research readings*, Australian National Training Authority, Adelaide, 2004.

undermine the success of cooperative ventures between sections of the Department and sour relationships with external agencies and groups.

In the absence of this support and guidance, strategies to forge improvements for Aboriginal students will be “bolted on”<sup>43</sup> to policies and plans conceived for other students or will remain marginalised as separate issues requiring specialist attention.

Many issues raised during the Review related to the services of other agencies, both state and Commonwealth. For example, transport was consistently identified as a major barrier to access. Contributors urged that the Department continue to advocate for systems and processes to resolve such issues through genuine cooperation between government, non-government and community organisations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Department of Education and Training (DET):
  - a) commit to targets developed under the *Two Ways Together* process that will aim to equalise the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students with those of non-Aboriginal students within 10 years
  - b) work closely with other government agencies to ensure this goal is achieved through their complementary targets that will be required to positively improve the lives of Aboriginal people.
2. That DET prepare an *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan* that:
  - a) establishes strategies to meet the recommendations of this Review
  - b) incorporates targets to achieve the desired results listed in Recommendation 1
  - c) is adopted within the Education Action Plan under the statewide plan, *Two Ways Together*
  - d) forms part of the Department’s i) Service and Resource Allocation Agreement, ii) Senior Executive Service performance agreements, and iii) annual reporting requirements.
3. That an Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force reporting to the Director-General be established to monitor the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, the use of available funding, and the recommendations from this Review Report. It is also recommended that:
  - a) the membership of the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force be representative but the majority membership be Aboriginal people representing the voices of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG), other key Aboriginal organisations such as Land Councils, Aboriginal teachers (both school and TAFE) and Aboriginal workers. This group should also

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

- include principals, senior DET staff and representatives from the NSW Teachers Federation and tertiary sector
- b) the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force also have responsibility for conducting community feedback sessions across the state to introduce the Review recommendations and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan* to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and the wider educational community
  - c) the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force continue to assess recommendations and suggestions arising from this Review, and other sources, and the refinement of practices to provide continuous improvement in education, training and social outcomes of Aboriginal students.
4. That a Directorate of Aboriginal Education be established within DET and:
    - a) the Director be an identified (Aboriginal) position and be included as a member of DET's Board of Management
    - b) this Directorate be responsible for strategic policy advice to the Director-General and providing support to the Advisory Task Force in its monitoring of the Department's performance in relation to the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*. This Directorate should be structured from the current Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) to meet the requirements of this plan.
  5. That each region and TAFE Institute, in partnership with the AECG and other key Aboriginal organisations such as Land Councils, establish an Aboriginal Education and Training Planning Group to identify regional targets and strategies enabling the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, in the form of a *Regional Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, and
    - a) membership of these planning groups include senior DET staff, DETNAC managers and ACE managers, the local AECG and Land Councils, Aboriginal school and TAFE teachers and coordinators and representatives of principals' groups and other key human services agencies assisting families and communities in the region
    - b) these regional planning groups liaise and coordinate with other regional interagency planning mechanisms established by the New South Wales Government.
  6. That the *Aboriginal Education Policy* be updated in partnership with the NSW AECG and:
    - a) the policy be supported in its implementation through professional development strategies for all staff at all levels
    - b) that accountability measures to guarantee implementation in schools be built into regional plans and that regions report each semester to the DDG on the progress of implementation
    - c) DET review all its policies and practices to ensure that they align with the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* and the recommendations of this Review.

7. That each DET region be funded to establish a senior identified (Aboriginal) position, at least at the level of Principal Education Officer, for coordination of regional consultants and the implementation of the *Regional Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*. This officer will report directly to the Regional Director and act as executive support to the Regional Aboriginal Education Planning Group.
8. That DET develop a *NSW DET Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan* which would include personnel planning, recruitment, career development, professional development, mentoring and the provision of support for Aboriginal employees through strategies such as a DET Aboriginal Employee Network. (The plan should address ways in which Aboriginal people may be employed in targeted projects, eg speakers of Aboriginal languages.)

## EXTENDING QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

It was often said that the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students in schooling and training would improve if more Aboriginal people were in classrooms and if teaching and learning strategies better engaged, supported and extended learning among Aboriginal students.

Families, communities and many schools suggested that the critical phase for action was with the youngest children. Quality programs are therefore needed from the start of formal learning. Programs that build on the cultural knowledge and oral language skills of Aboriginal students to develop strong literacy and numeracy skills at a young age. Quality programs that provide solid foundations for ongoing success at all levels of schooling and training.

At the same time, legitimate concerns were raised about those Aboriginal students who have already passed beyond the formative stages of the early childhood and primary years without developing sufficient reading and writing skills to participate in schooling and training in meaningful ways.

Strong resistance was voiced against the idea of an “alternative curriculum” for Aboriginal students. The preferred option for Aboriginal students with limited literacy skills was quality teaching and learning strategies in every class that could assist them to renewed access and success in the regular curriculum. It was recognised, however, that some students may prefer applied learning and vocational training to the academic curriculum. Realistically, this should be an option for some students. In no way should it become the only option or an obligatory requirement for all Aboriginal students.

Family, social, economic and personal factors were all mentioned as contributors to successful learning in schooling and training, but the work of teachers was singled out as the “make or break” element. The teacher characteristics that were believed to make “regular” teaching into “quality” teaching and learning were:

- expectations that Aboriginal students can succeed
- commitment to working with Aboriginal students, families and workers to promote student learning and success

*There is nothing more important to learning than what teachers do when they close the classroom door. Quality teaching focuses on what kids are doing and takes responsibility for adapting approaches when students have troubles. Getting through to kids is the focus, not getting through the content.*

– Teacher

- ability to maintain quality relationships with Aboriginal students and families
- capacity to build regular success into learning programs for all students so that they come to believe in themselves as competent learners
  - understanding that Aboriginal English is a firm foundation for literacy
  - ability to break learning sequences into manageable chunks
  - skill at keeping learning tasks interesting, challenging and meaningful
  - expertise in monitoring and extending the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of students to meet the expanding demands of the curriculum
- professional discernment which ensures that placement of Aboriginal students in special needs provisions is based on accurate assessment of learner needs
- thorough knowledge of syllabuses and the flexibility within them for catering to diversity among students
- familiarity with adapting teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks, classroom management strategies and content selection to cater for Aboriginal students.

Some groups advocated greater scope for local decisions to meet unique teaching and learning needs in communities with high Aboriginal student populations. Others were cautious, concerned that local “solutions” could dilute statewide standards.

Introduction of the Department’s *Quality Teaching Framework* and the *State Literacy and Numeracy Plan* were cited as tools for both promoting quality teaching and learning and for a focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Review heard that the likelihood of Aboriginal students attending, staying on over the years and doing better at school and TAFE is improved by learning activities that are meaningful, by lessons that acknowledge and respect students as descendants of the original people of this Land and by opportunities for them to bring their ways of learning and knowing to lessons and assessment tasks. These factors align closely with dimensions of the Department’s *Quality Teaching Framework*. It is a fervent hope of many that implementation of the *Quality Teaching Framework* will support teachers to make changes in teaching methods that better engage students, particularly Aboriginal students, with learning. Future results will be the measure of the framework’s success.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

9. That through the Department’s *State Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*:
  - a) resources be realigned to better meet the literacy and numeracy needs of Aboriginal students

- b) targets be set biannually to narrow the gap between the literacy and numeracy outcomes of Aboriginal students and all students as measured by the results in the BST, PWA, SNAP and ELLA
  - c) planned teacher support documents focus specifically on literacy and numeracy programs for Aboriginal students.
10. That a professional development program be introduced for school teachers currently employed in DET, based on the *Quality Teaching Framework* and focused specifically at improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal students. This program should include:
- a) a professional learning program for all teachers of Aboriginal students that will be focused on “teachers knowing their students and how they learn”
  - b) training and development for these teachers that includes promising literacy and numeracy programs identified in this Report (eg *Count Me In Too*, *Count Me In Too Indigenous*, *In-class Tuition*, *Maths in Context for Aboriginal Students*, the *Bidialectal Approach to Teaching Standard Australian English*, *Scaffolding Literacy*)
  - c) postgraduate programs developed between DET and universities to facilitate and support teacher enrolment including school academic mentor initiatives
  - d) a set of high level study awards for staff to acknowledge and build on their contribution and achievements in relation to improving the performance and participation of Aboriginal students.
11. That the quality of teaching and learning in vocational education and training (TAFE) be enhanced through the following:
- a) the development of a VET Quality Teaching Framework based on the findings of the VET Pedagogy Project and focused specifically on improving outcomes for Aboriginal students
  - b) inclusion of specific topics on Aboriginal education in the Certificate IV Workplace Assessment and Training designed for people interested in becoming a TAFE NSW teacher
  - c) continued training for teachers in TAFE on Aboriginal education and culture and on flexible teaching methods and upskilling teachers’ knowledge on industry requirements to support Aboriginal students
  - d) the inclusion of Aboriginal representation on all Industry Skills Councils to ensure that Aboriginal issues are recognised in the development and implementation of training packages including adult literacy and numeracy support. It is also recommended that all TAFE NSW Curriculum Centres ensure that all educational resources developed to support training packages are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal students.
12. That as part of the quality teaching program for school teachers, the Department enhances the curriculum support to teachers by developing, in consultation with the Board of Studies, Aboriginal communities, Elders and the NSW AECG, an Aboriginal Education teaching framework for Aboriginal students that delivers:

- a) protocols for the development and implementation of curriculum with Aboriginal communities
  - b) a P–12 framework for Aboriginal Studies (including the elective Aboriginal Studies course)
  - c) regional support material that identifies Aboriginal cultural knowledge, skills and expertise that can be accessed by schools
  - d) regional plans that ensure that schools with high numbers of Aboriginal students have access to language and cultural education programs
  - e) regional reporting that demonstrates increased involvement and participation with Aboriginal communities in the development of culturally appropriate curriculum.
13. That teachers and schools be further supported in curriculum implementation such that:
- a) mandatory content in current and future Board of Studies syllabuses related to Aboriginal cultures and history be made explicit for teachers and that this content be supported by specific support materials and professional learning strategies
  - b) DET officers in consultation with officers from the Office of the Board of Studies provide schools with advice in the development of engaging and relevant Board Endorsed Courses or other programs that address the interests of Aboriginal students and lead to accepted qualifications
  - c) options be explored by the Board of Studies and DET to expand the range of vocational education and training offerings available as part of the mainstream curriculum to students prior to, and in, Stage 6.
14. That an enhanced recruitment and preservice training program for teachers of Aboriginal students be introduced including:
- a) an increase in the numbers of scholarships or cadetships for Aboriginal people to become teachers in schools with large Aboriginal populations (from 30 to at least 60 immediately, and to be under continuous review)
  - b) a pilot involving focused preservice training of a group of students for appointment as teachers to locations with high Aboriginal populations
  - c) a recruitment strategy targeting graduates and aspiring leaders with an interest in teaching in localities with high proportions of Aboriginal people to ensure that priority placement is given to these individuals
  - d) the investigation of a range of more flexible strategies to attract teachers, including acceleration through the pay scale, and/or other financial initiatives (including low cost loans), to ensure a larger number of experienced teachers are both appointed and supported in remote locations with large Aboriginal populations
  - e) the development of teams of teachers equipped and willing to teach in difficult to staff schools to support these schools in challenging circumstances as required.



15. That the government, through DET and the Teacher Education Council (Deans of Education), ensure that universities include Aboriginal education as a mandatory component in education courses. (It would be advantageous if Aboriginal units within each university were involved in this process.)
16. That targeted schools as identified by the Aboriginal Education and Training Taskforce (for example, those with 60 percent of Aboriginal students) may, through consultation and agreement with their communities, and through support by DET in negotiating new industrial instruments to protect the working conditions of employees, be classified as Community Schools and that these schools:
  - a) be permitted to reconfigure their resources in more flexible ways than is currently possible, while maintaining a curriculum guarantee
  - b) be able to determine their own operating times (eg extended days, differing hours of operation)
  - c) develop their own curriculum foci, approved by either the Department or the Board of Studies (for Years 7–12, eg Aboriginal leadership)
  - d) establish a School Board (with school staff and local AEEG members and parents) that will advise on the school's *Aboriginal Education Development Plan* including performance targets
  - e) be provided with increased and ongoing funding to support initiatives
  - f) have a salary incentive package provided to attract experienced staff based on the targets established by the School Board
  - g) be supported through DET negotiating interagency involvement and support to provide a holistic model of child/youth development.
17. That a number of innovative secondary education programs be developed with community agreement that:
  - a) provide greater flexibility in the use of resources and staffing structures in specific schools to better meet Aboriginal student needs and aspirations, particularly in relation to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes
  - b) have a particular focus on supporting and mentoring high achieving students in areas of particular interest.
18. That research and additional data collection be commissioned that provides the Advisory Task Force with information about:
  - a) the link between access to prior-to-school services (long day care, preschools) and outcomes in literacy, numeracy and social development
  - b) the success or otherwise of alternative provision for “at risk” Aboriginal students
  - c) the incidence of racism in schools and the impact of racism on engagement and learning outcomes
  - d) the numbers of Aboriginal students in special education settings and the appropriateness and effectiveness of such placements

- e) other projects as required by the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force.
19. That a conference on Aboriginal Education involving key personnel from across Australia be hosted by New South Wales and conducted by 2006 with a specific focus on innovative and successful programs and initiatives in schools, TAFE and other appropriate organisations to reinforce the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
20. That the New South Wales Government establish an inter-agency working party involving senior officers from relevant state and Australian government agencies to:
- a) identify gaps in early childhood provision for Aboriginal children 0–5 in New South Wales
  - b) develop advice for service providers regarding curriculum support for these children in relation to early literacy and numeracy learning
  - c) identify and promote examples of successful transition to school arrangements and strategies
  - d) pilot collaborative strategies aimed at providing increased access to childcare services for Aboriginal children, including services for young parents undertaking secondary education, and strategies to overcome problems of transport.

## FORTIFYING IDENTITIES OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

For Aboriginal people, identity means *Aboriginality*, and although there are as many ways to live out Aboriginality as there are Aboriginal people, at its core Aboriginality is about *belonging* – belonging to the Land and to each other.

Aboriginal people and their cultures come from the Land and the Land gives a sense of belonging. Aboriginal people are connected to their families, their clans and communities, and these connections nurture belonging. Aboriginal people share celebrations and struggle as a group distinct from mainstream Australia. Celebrating and struggling together strengthen the embrace of belonging.

Contributors during the Review didn't mince words when talking about the impacts of schools and TAFE campuses on the identities and behaviours of Aboriginal students. There were glowing reports of schools, campuses and offices which make Aboriginal students, their families and community members welcome, that cultivate students' sense of belonging and nurture and affirm their developing identities.

There were also uncompromisingly honest and critical assessments of the failings of schools, campuses and offices in which Aboriginal people are made to feel anything but welcome, where Aboriginality is more often ridiculed, denied, discounted or deemed suspect and where the presence of Aboriginal students and their families is begrudgingly "tolerated".

Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people alike suggested that strategies to bring about improvements in the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students are doomed to failure if they don't understand and do something about identity and belonging. To take on this important expectation, schools and campuses need support to make it a priority to:

- maintain environments that are welcoming and in which Aboriginal students perceive they are safe and belong
- ensure that the identities of Aboriginal students as both Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Australians are nurtured and respected
- eradicate attitudes and prejudices among staff and community that act as barriers to accepting and respecting the identities of Aboriginal students.

*The challenges that many Indigenous young people face in coming to terms with their identity are extremely problematic.*

— Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1999)  
*Social Justice Report 1999: Report No. 2/2000*, HREOC, Sydney, p 44

One of the most frequently suggested ideas for supporting the identities and belonging of Aboriginal students was an increased presence of Aboriginal people, both as employees and volunteers, in school and campus communities. The presence of Aboriginal people was an observable difference, but it also achieved the real though less tangible benefits of providing models of success and symbols of support and goodwill.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

21. That DET work in collaboration with the NSW AECG and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to provide schools and TAFE Institutes with information on Aboriginality. This should include:
  - a) assisting schools and TAFE Institutes in affirming, respecting and valuing the Aboriginal community and students for their Aboriginality
  - b) providing information about respectful and appropriate management of information about a student's Aboriginality.
22. That DET work in collaboration with the NSW AECG and DAA to provide schools and TAFE Institutes with guidelines and protocols regarding:
  - a) recognition and involvement of Aboriginal people at ceremonies and as guest speakers at DET functions
  - b) raising the Aboriginal flag
  - c) exemptions from Crown copyright for Aboriginal cultural knowledge materials provided by Elders nominated by AECGs.
23. That government agencies in consultation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academics and the NSW AECG develop a survey tool to determine the health, resilience and wellbeing of Aboriginal students in New South Wales government schools and TAFE, particularly in relation to their sense of identity at school or at TAFE.
24. That schools and TAFE Institutes report on measures to value, affirm and respect their students' Aboriginality and to provide Aboriginal students with skills, knowledge and experiences to participate in the mainstream education and training programs.
25. That the value of and continued need for key Aboriginal personnel in schools and TAFE be affirmed by:
  - a) revising and clarifying the role statements of AEAAs, ACLOs and ASLOs in schools and ADMs in TAFE to ensure that these positions support the implementation of the relevant recommendations in this Review Report
  - b) providing additional training for these staff (TAFE should have a particular role to play in this provision)
  - c) providing principals with clear information and training about these roles and how they complement the responsibilities of other personnel in schools and regions
  - d) reallocating the current AERT funding to regions based on need to provide further support positions particularly in literacy and numeracy as required

- e) realigning the AEA positions in a measured and timely way to better meet identified needs of Aboriginal students
  - f) piloting a number of programs involving flexible support for community involvement in schools.
26. That the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools be intensively supported by existing state and regional staff in partnership with the NSW and regional AECGs and be given highest priority in funding for languages programs commencing in schools with high Aboriginal student enrolments. (It is intended that these Aboriginal language programs will meet the BOS requirements for LOTE provision.)
27. That *Welcome to Country* and *Acknowledgement of Country* guidelines jointly developed by the NSW AECG, NSW Teachers Federation and DET be released and included as an introductory item in all Department (schools and TAFE) events.

## ENGAGING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Aboriginal students are the reason the Review of Aboriginal Education was undertaken. In a nutshell, the Review was about finding ways to make schooling and training more responsive to the needs, potentials and aspirations of Aboriginal students, to make things better.

Over the course of the Review, some of the most penetrating and articulate voices were those of Aboriginal students themselves. Schools, TAFE campuses and the Department itself were urged to include students, and not just the top performers, in discussions and decisions about potential improvement strategies. Students often cut through the layers of details, complexities and “what abouts” that were crippling adults with insights of simple, yet profound wisdom. For example, *I don't know about those things, but it would be much better if teachers got to know us better and we got to know them better.*

Getting to know Aboriginal students, a process strongly recommended and not just by students, reveals that they are a diverse “mob”. Fundamental diversities such as geographical location, heritage, language, cultural knowledge, family structure and socioeconomic status are the starting points. Overcoming any obstacles to learning that these diversities can identify is a complex undertaking requiring whole-of-government and community action.

Getting to know Aboriginal students also reveals that each Aboriginal student comes to school or TAFE with a unique combination of strengths, potentials and vulnerabilities. The Review heard of schools and TAFE campuses where timely actions had made a difference with these diversities.

For example, strengths and potentials, such as those of gifted and talented thinkers, leaders, speakers, artisans, performers and elite sport players, respond positively to nurturing attention and extension. Vulnerabilities and potentials, such as those of the physically or intellectually disabled, those experiencing disruptions to their learning, those with learning difficulties or those too easily provoked to non-compliant or disruptive behaviour, respond positively to appropriate short-term or long-term interventions.

*It's boring. Why can't it be interesting? Why don't teachers let us talk? We aren't cheating. We are asking questions from others – that's the best way we learn.*

– Aboriginal student

Getting to know Aboriginal students involves getting to know their families and kin supporters (another strong suggestion of the Review). These concerned adults not only have high aspirations that their children will succeed, but they mostly have *realistic expectations of the talents, interests and capabilities* of their children. They do not expect schools and TAFE Institutes to promote success in the sense of turning all their children into surgeons or lawyers. They simply want their children to have the chance (with access to the full range and most appropriate delivery of services if needed) to do the best they possibly can and make the most of their time at school and training. They don't want their children's interest in education to be turned off by what they have to experience when they go to school or TAFE.

At the moment, results data suggest that too many Aboriginal students experience frustrating and unproductive times at school and TAFE which relegate them to the bulge of under-achievers in lower levels of results. Aboriginal families and communities want schools and TAFE Institutes to do something, and do it now, so that participation and performance in schooling and training among Aboriginal students move to match the spread of achievements among non-Aboriginal students.

Many ardent voices recommended that Aboriginal students would be best served by planned and purposeful teaching and learning programs in preschools and the early years of schooling. Programs developed and made to work by teachers who have a sound understanding of Aboriginal students and expertise to set Aboriginal students up with a solid foundation of literacy and numeracy skills.

It would sell contributors to the Review short, however, to give the impression that suggestions focused solely on improvements for future generations and ignored the needs of Aboriginal students who are currently under-achieving, struggling or lost to education.

There were many, many suggestions, complaints and concerns about the plight of Aboriginal students who were struggling, those who had passed well beyond the struggling stage to be seriously at risk of failure, for those whose failures had been so comprehensive and crushing that they have disappeared into the pool of "drop outs", and for those who had re-emerged to notice through Juvenile Justice Centres or Correctional Centres. The

*My students weren't getting success. I wasn't getting satisfaction. I had a choice and I chose to ask for help from the local Aboriginal people. Not everything worked. We made mistakes but we learned together, we still are learning lessons about teaching Aboriginal students. But, the students – funnily enough all my students – are tasting success and I am getting satisfaction.*

– Teacher of Aboriginal students

Department was urged to put programs in place and better coordinate many existing programs so that they result in improved services to “at risk” students.

Moving on to suggested solutions, there was considerable discussion of the idea of tracking the progress of identified “at risk” students, throughout their years at school, across schools when they move, at critical transition and progression points, during their years in training and further education and at their post-school/training destinations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

28. That each Aboriginal student have a personalised plan that will be developed by the school in partnership with parents/caregivers and include targets for learning against syllabus outcomes and agreed family support strategies, eg home reading strategies, attendance, transition from primary to secondary education. (Schools need to be funded to support this undertaking.)
29. That the Department celebrate Aboriginal students’ achievements in a range of fields by holding annual Aboriginal Award Ceremonies at a regional and state level. Award ceremonies would be held in consultation with Elders, Aboriginal communities and local and regional AECGs.
30. That an individualised identification system be implemented to ensure all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are monitored and supported through their education, allowing better monitoring of Aboriginal student progress, improved liaison between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools, and timely interventions.
31. That a process for sharing information with the non-government school sector and interstate systems be developed to monitor students as they move between government and non-government schools and TAFE NSW Institutes and across state borders.
32. That a transition-to-school scheme be established and supported by print and staffing resources. Each region will develop a transition-to-school plan for Aboriginal students. This plan should include liaison with Health and DoCS staff to ensure the minimum health needs of Aboriginal children are met. Aboriginal children should be given priority access to DET preschools.
33. That DET, DoCS, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group (ATSIECSAG), NSW AECG and other appropriate agencies liaise and develop protocols to ensure preschools provide the highest quality programs to prepare Aboriginal children for their entry to school.
34. That each DET region and TAFE Institute develop an Aboriginal student leadership strategy, through its Aboriginal Education and Training



Planning Group, to ensure that student leaders are identified, mentored and supported.

35. That a number of academically selective classes be piloted in targeted areas of New South Wales aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in these classes.
36. That each region be given a discretionary allocation to support flexible programs based on need, to support Aboriginal students, that may include transition initiatives, tutoring, mentoring, attendance initiatives and support for Aboriginal students living in hostels or away from home.
37. That regions and schools review the effectiveness of their attendance and welfare programs in conjunction with their planning groups and the AECG to better meet the agreed school and family targets for improved school attendance and reduced suspension rates. Regions in particular will need to ensure appropriate interagency liaison and support where required.
38. That while prevention and intervention measures need to be explored by schools, a range of alternative strategies to suspension be developed for schools to ensure that all options are available to minimise the numbers of Aboriginal students suspended and the impact successive suspensions have on learning. Each school needs to immediately review its suspension data, in consultation with its Aboriginal community, and plan alternative interventions, supported by their region, to reduce these numbers where appropriate.
39. That TAFE NSW Institute Directors work in partnership with school Regional Directors to coordinate efforts to support at risk Aboriginal students to remain in the education system to gain qualifications and progress to higher levels of education or into meaningful skilled employment.
40. That career counsellors be available in each SEA and TAFE Institute for all Aboriginal students. That these career counsellors be professionals skilled in matching Aboriginal students' potential with their aspirations, and able to guide them in subject selection, goal setting, work experience/work placement and career pathway planning.
41. That TAFE, in partnership with key Aboriginal organisations and other appropriate government organisations, develop and implement a post-release program for Aboriginal detainees and offenders based on a case management approach which incorporates counselling, enrolment in TAFE programs (to enable ex-detainees and ex-offenders to complete courses commenced in Juvenile Justice and Correctional Centres) and the mentoring and community support necessary to reduce chances of them re-offending.
42. That non-government schools be required to commit to the same targets for Aboriginal students as described in Recommendation 1.

## APPLYING ABORIGINAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Material presented to the Review revealed that *Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge* is not a single body of knowledge shared by all Aboriginal peoples around the country, or around New South Wales for that matter, but a clan and community-specific inheritance from previous generations that meets the demands of local conditions.

Each clan and community of Aboriginal people has developed their own special ways of being, knowing, doing things and saying things that are unique to their people and communities. Ways that may appear similar on the surface, but which bear marks that make them unique to their people alone. This is the source of the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge spoken of during the Review.

There are some aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that are the sole business of Aboriginal people and these are not the concern of schools and TAFE.

On the other hand, many contributors to the Review urged the Department to promote greater understanding among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and their teachers, of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge. In particular, about matches and mismatches between the assumptions, approaches and world view of Aboriginal students, and those within the cultural knowledge, Western or otherwise, of other students and their teachers. These matches and mismatches are strongly implicated as influences on the participation and performance of Aboriginal students in the business of schooling and training.

The Review heard of Elders of Aboriginal communities sharing traditional knowledge to assist teachers to establish the relevance of syllabus content and sustain student interest.

Consultation with local Elders also made some schools and TAFE campuses aware of the cultural relevance of a “community of learners” approach in classrooms. Not just all students doing the same worksheet, sitting in groups, but genuine small groupings that worked collaboratively and drew on the range of skills and knowledge in the group to achieve meaningful learning tasks. Having observed students in action in learning communities, teachers are more able to include and validate Aboriginal ways of knowing in assessment tasks as they work towards achieving syllabus objectives and outcomes.

*To succeed, we have to be smarter than most white people, because we have to live in two worlds, and be proficient in a second culture; that is, western culture, but we also value and appreciate our own.*

– Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, (1999) *Social Justice Report 1999: Report No. 2/2000*, HREOC, Sydney, p. 49.

These ideas are not “rocket science”. Nor are they beyond the good practice of many teachers. The power of such good practice to make a difference for Aboriginal students, however, cannot be overstated. Overlooking or blocking such approaches takes away effective and culturally appropriate strategies that can enrich teaching and learning programs for all students.

In a spirit of genuine partnership and fairness, Aboriginal people recognised that schools and TAFE “cannot reap what they cannot sow”. That is, schools and TAFE campuses need assistance in determining the knowledge, wisdoms and approaches of local Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that can be incorporated into culturally appropriate teaching and learning programs.

Ideas and suggestions around this theme consistently focused on the transforming potential of:

- Aboriginal students learning the cultural knowledge of their heritage
- Aboriginal students becoming proficient in both Aboriginal “ways of knowing” and school “ways of knowing”
- non-Aboriginal students, teachers and school or TAFE campus communities learning about Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge
- sharing school “ways of knowing” with Aboriginal Elders, parents, caregivers and community members
- schools, TAFE campuses and the system collaborating with Elders of Aboriginal communities to identify elements of local cultural knowledge that can be successfully incorporated into teaching, learning and behaviour management programs as well as syllabuses
- weaving together the knowledge, skills and experiences of both Aboriginal and Western cultural knowledge to enrich teaching, learning, assessment and reporting programs and to improve attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students.

The experience of contributors to the Review suggested that incorporating local Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge within the content and methodologies of teaching and learning programs can initially be a difficult process. It takes time for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants to understand where each side is coming from. It takes time, negotiation and flexibility to identify those aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that could be incorporated eventually and those that can make a difference right away.

*It is through the sharing of such information that the teacher will acquire the knowledge to build strong and valuable relationships with their Aboriginal students. Once students are able to place teachers within their world, their perceptions of where they belong within the school will change. Aboriginality is to do with belonging.*

Herbert, J. et al. (1999) “Do We Belong ... in This System?” Symposium paper, Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, p. 9.

Again, the experiences of contributors reveal that genuine two-way collaboration of schools and TAFE campuses with local Aboriginal Elders can identify aspects of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge that enrich teaching and learning activities. Such consultations build understanding and respect for Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge among school and TAFE staff as well as their capacities and willingness to work with Aboriginal people. They also build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to partake in the planning and decision-making of teaching and learning programs. Establishing strong partnerships with local AECGs was the recommended starting point for meeting and developing quality relationships with local Elders.

Successful community collaboration of this order fosters a sense of ownership and inclusion. It builds respect for and valuing of education by Aboriginal students, their families and communities. It raises the profile and priority of Aboriginal education across learning communities.

An important practical suggestion highlighted the need for resources showing Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge incorporated in key units of work P–12 and within the work-related programs of TAFE. These units of work would offer suggested content and assessment strategies, but retain flexibility to adapt to needs and realities after consultation with local Aboriginal people.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

43. That mandatory pre-service and in-service training in Aboriginal education, particularly in Aboriginal cultures and cultural knowledge, be developed in consultation with local communities and be provided for all teachers, school executives, principals and school administrative staff (commencing in 2005 in schools with high proportions of Aboriginal students). This material would complement or be part of other professional development programs on Aboriginal education, eg. Recommendation 10.
44. That this training include specific content in the following areas: Aboriginal languages, community partnerships, Aboriginal history and Aboriginal cultural knowledge, relationship between Aboriginal English and standard Australian English. This would complement Recommendation 12.
45. That each DET region be supported by an Elders group formed along traditional lines of Country. The Elders group would provide advice to the regional Aboriginal Education Planning Group, including the Regional AECGs, on appropriate cultural programs.

## COLLABORATING IN PARTNERSHIPS

From tens of thousands of years of working together, arguing together, compromising together and agreeing together, Aboriginal peoples understand the wisdom of consensus and expect decision-makers in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices of DET to include them as active partners, not silent partners, in decision-making.

The Review highlighted two interrelated forms of partnerships that benefit from the contributions of Aboriginal people:

- *Partnerships at the local level*

Working together with others to plan, support and, where appropriate, deliver specific initiatives or programs designed to overcome influences that are currently limiting the success of too many Aboriginal students and to promote better outcomes for these students in schooling and training.

- *Partnerships at system level*

Working with others to oversee, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies, plans and programs to make improvements across more than one school, TAFE Institute, office or government department.

Genuine partnerships were frequently cited as reasons for successful attendance, student engagement and learning in early childhood, infant, primary, secondary, TAFE and VET settings. Similarly, genuine partnerships with Aboriginal people have improved the quality and scope of services provided by government agencies, non-government agencies, local councils, AECGs, Land Councils, universities, training organisations and employers, as well as schools, campuses and offices of the Department. Genuine partnerships to provide employment were considered essential.

The reputation of DET as a cooperative partner is patchy. The Department was urged to lift its game and to take notice of factors identified as contributing to successful partnerships. Contributors to the Review suggested these factors were:

- mutual respect for the talents, skills, expertise and experiences of others
- all people of the community with knowledge and expertise being included

*It is evident that children learn most effectively when there is a partnership between parents/ caregivers and educators, when there is a sense of community between home and school environments.*

– MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2001) "Discussion Paper: Effective learning for Indigenous students aged 0-8 years", MCEETYA, Canberra, p. 17.

- Aboriginal people being included in decision-making when it really counts, that is, when determining which ideas get approved and which get left out
- determined leadership that inspires a whole school approach
- ongoing research and development that builds a body of knowledge about promoting the learning and success of Aboriginal students in schooling and training.

As the recognised peak advisory group, Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) at local, regional and state levels are established as reference points for the education system. This mechanism for gaining the support and participation of local Aboriginal people was used effectively in some places, but participation of AECGs was not consistent across the state.

The critical issue highlighted about partnerships was the support required by Departmental employees with limited experience of working with Aboriginal people in genuinely collaborative partnerships.

Partnerships between government agencies have proved very positive and can be extended to bridge state and Commonwealth jurisdictions. The Murdi Paaki COAG trial is one such example.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

46. That a new three-level partnership agreement between DET and the NSW AECG be developed based on the implementation of the Review recommendations and that this new three-level agreement take the form of:
  - a) an overarching agreement between the NSW DET and the NSW AECG Inc
  - b) regional partnership agreements between each region or Institute and relevant regional AECGs and Land Councils, in the case of TAFE, as appropriate
  - c) local agreements between School Education Areas and their local AECGs.
47. That the roles of principals and school executive members in building constructive continuous partnerships with local Aboriginal communities be confirmed as central to their responsibilities in building necessary conditions for success in Aboriginal education and that they be supported in this role by School Education Directors and other regional resources.
48. That TAFE Institutes and schools each develop an Aboriginal Education Development Plan in partnership with their Aboriginal communities or AECG (where a local AECG has been established) or Land Councils (TAFE as appropriate). This should take the form of a partnership agreement in all schools with an enrolment of 20 or more Aboriginal students.

49. That DET maintain programs supported in TAFE and in schools for at least four years and seek the support of other funding authorities for the same commitment.
50. That parent organisations, industry groups and other education-related community groups partner DET in liaising with Aboriginal groups at the state and local level to build a strong community consensus to support improvements in Aboriginal education.
51. That DET negotiate agreements with universities and industries within New South Wales to further engage their expertise to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal students. Such engagement could include:
  - a) identifying the implications of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework for teaching Aboriginal students
  - b) conducting case studies in schools where the framework is being implemented in classrooms with significant Aboriginal populations
  - c) mentoring of students, gifted and talented programs, research, project work with remote locations, languages, distance or on-line enrichment programs and collegial support for classroom teachers.
52. That DET in partnership with the NSW AECG and Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) establish alliances with industry sectors to improve sustainable pathways from education to employment for Aboriginal students. To this end, that the Premier be approached to establish a high level not-for-profit foundation of New South Wales corporate leaders with a strong commitment to Aboriginal education and employment to promote the creation of viable and lasting employment of Aboriginal people in the private sector and to encourage the private sector to fund cadetships and scholarships for Aboriginal students.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Probably the strongest message of the Review was that most Aboriginal families and communities want to be consulted about and involved in the education of their children, teenagers and young people.

The Review heard of collaborations between individual schools, TAFE campuses or offices and their local Aboriginal communities that made valuable and lasting contributions to improving the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students at school and training. But the Review also heard of examples of attempted collaborations where all the best intentions were frustrated by limited understanding, expectations or experience in working together.

Such experiences prompted some schools, campuses and offices to expend energies on building the capacity of members of their communities to work collaboratively. That is, strategies to build the capacity of DET employees to work genuinely and collaboratively with Aboriginal people as well as strategies to build capacities of Aboriginal people to advise and work with DET workers.

A hallmark of the best strategies to build capacities was that they developed understanding and skills in the context of the practical issues that confronted local communities. For example, assisting Elders of Aboriginal communities to set up and conduct Circle of Friends meetings as an alternative to suspensions actually reduced the number and duration of suspensions while helping school executive members to build capacity for brokering solutions through genuine consensus.

Similarly, by conducting courses about helping young children to read and write at home and the ways schools teach literacy, TAFE teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers assisted Aboriginal community members to develop capacity in supporting their children's learning and for assisting teachers with reading programs at school.

As well as these schooling and training focused capacities, the Review highlighted the important contribution that DET might play in assisting Aboriginal people to build capacities within their own communities and to gain meaningful employment (hopefully locally) through formal training. Capacities that empower Aboriginal parents and carers to encourage and support their children's learning about their traditional heritage as well as the business of

*... a major obstacle to reconciliation is apprehension and reluctance about face-to-face communication. Meaningful communication and personal associations overcome the exaggerated sense of difference which flows from ignorance.*

Helen Deane, in Stevens, T (2002)  
*Sir William Deane: The Things that Matter*, Hodder Headline, Sydney,  
p. 197.



schooling and training. Capacities that develop leaders who can speak with a strong voice and with the trust of their communities about the needs, expectations and aspirations of Aboriginal students in schools and on campuses as well as those of Aboriginal people in Australian society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

53. That TAFE NSW develop for and with Aboriginal communities an Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Learning which will support community capacity-building at all levels of administration, leadership, governance and advocacy for policy change. Each Institute should establish a key centre for Aboriginal Leadership and Learning which will provide a focus for resource development, and will facilitate diffusion of the course through communities, according to the specific needs of different communities. The course should be flexible and have multiple entry and exit points, with appropriate levels of course accreditation. It will have experiential learning as its underpinning instructional foundation, and it will include opportunity for intensive literacy and numeracy support.
54. That DET, in consultation with DoCS, the NSW AECG Inc and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group (ATSIECSAG):
  - a) develop and promote an Aboriginal family education program which leads to accredited course outcomes through TAFE NSW. This would include programs for young parents to support them in their own learning and basic education, to assist them to support their children educationally and to provide them with the skills to act as volunteer literacy and numeracy tutors in schools as appropriate
  - b) develop and implement a pilot pre-Kindergarten literacy program. This program would focus on literacy intervention prior to school and the development of a literacy partnership between the home and reading teachers.
55. That TAFE Institutes offer programs in targeted areas designed to develop foundation skills in office administration and related areas for Aboriginal community members to better prepare them to apply for School Administrative Support Staff (SASS) positions in schools. DET will designate SASS positions that become available in schools with a significant number of Aboriginal students as identified positions (requiring Aboriginality). The application of this initiative and resultant employment outcomes should be reviewed annually and extended as required.
56. That, excluding exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, priority placement be given to Aboriginal teachers and SAS staff over all other priority teacher or SASS transfer/placement categories.

57. That external funding for the expansion of inter-agency programs such as Schools as Community Centres be directed to sites with high Aboriginal populations as the target areas for these new locations.
58. That an inter-agency program involving the provision of specific support for Aboriginal students particularly through local role models (eg homework assistance, developing community connections, leadership programs, mentoring) be piloted on some identified secondary school sites with high Aboriginal enrolments.
59. That the recently commissioned interactive distance learning resources in rural and remote schools be fully utilised to operate after-hours training in parenting and childcare and other relevant information sessions for Aboriginal parents.
60. That the New South Wales Government develop an *Aboriginal Employment Strategy* to improve the employment prospects of Aboriginal people and coordinate existing employment strategies, programs and resources into a holistic strategic framework.

## CHALLENGING RACISM

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents, students, workers and community members, teachers, principals, academics, researchers and submission writers made it clear that Aboriginal students continue to encounter both *overt* and *covert* influences of racism. The overt influences include name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying. Subtler, covert influences are rarely brought into conscious awareness but stereotype Aboriginal people, constrain expectations of Aboriginal students and induce reluctance within Departmental offices, schools and campuses to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

Suspension of Aboriginal students highlights many of the claims and counterclaims about racism in schools. Some contributors suggested that the over-representation of Aboriginal students in suspension lists is an indicator of the difficulty that schools face in dealing with non-compliant, challenging or disruptive behaviours among students. Other contributors suggested that the higher proportion of Aboriginal students of all ages being suspended demonstrates racism in action. The Department was urged to find out the validity of these alternative interpretations.

Turning to the Department's *Anti-Racism Policy Statement* and *Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations*, most Aboriginal parents support the words of the policies and simply want their concerns taken seriously. Many believe that far from being treated seriously, their complaints are disregarded or not fully understood.

A number of factors were suggested as barriers to eradicating racism from school and campus communities:

- the “fear factor”, especially of “the racism card”, that can emerge when Aboriginal parents raise issues or offer suggestions
- the Department not collecting adequate data on complaints about racism and suspensions
- the lack of mechanisms and discipline strategies to resolve complaints about racism involving staff members
- the limited understanding among staff about how their attitudes and behaviours contribute to the bias, prejudice and racism perceived by Aboriginal people

*Make no mistake, racism is a terrible burden. It attacks the spirit. It attacks self esteem and the soul in ways that those who are not subjected to it would have not an inkling of understanding about.*

– Pearson, N. (2000). *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, p. 34.

- the absence of an appeal mechanism to settle matters that local management of conflicts failed to satisfactorily settle.

In this context it is no wonder that making a complaint can escalate into conflict and irreconcilable breakdown in relationships between the family and the school or campus.

These factors suggest that Departmental offices, schools and campuses require skill development in implementing the *Anti-Racism Policy Statement* and *Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations* and training in handling complaints, mediation and the management of conflicts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

61. That DET, in collaboration with the NSW AECG, NSW Teachers Federation and the NSW Public Service Association:
  - a) identify anti-racism education as a strategic priority and provide support to schools to recognise and counter the effects of racism, in particular for Aboriginal students, on the formation of cultural identity, engagement in schooling, behaviour, student attendance and retention, and academic performance
  - b) continue to support schools and regions through the development and dissemination of anti-racism education information and resources.
  
62. That regions:
  - a) provide professional learning opportunities for school staff to understand racism and its effects and to acquire skills for teaching anti-racism strategies in the classroom
  - b) identify schools to participate in targeted anti-racism projects which address local need utilising existing resources such as *Racism. No way!* <http://www.racismnoway.com.au> and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Website <http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au>
  - c) identify key schools to participate in the *Cooling Conflicts Program* in order to assist students, in particular Aboriginal students, to develop skills in managing conflict
  - d) promote successful school anti-racism projects, practice and outcomes to other schools in the region
  - e) report on school anti-racism strategies and the incidence of the complaints of racism in their annual *Aboriginal Education and Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement* reports.
  
63. That schools:
  - a) include strategies to counter racism as a part of their school plan
  - b) ensure that an Anti Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) is appointed and receives training
  - c) ensure that all executive understand their responsibilities under the *Anti-Racism Policy* and the *Responding to Suggestions, Complaints and Allegations* procedures (in particular the role of principals and

- school executive members, as chief agents in resolving complaints about racism)
- d) explain the appeals mechanism available to the complainant and the respondent.
64. That the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force evaluate current programs in countering racism, assess the degree and nature of racist incidents and develop further recommendations based on this work.

## ADVANCING LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Department’s principals, directors, general managers and the Board of Management are critical leaders but they are not the only leaders in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices of DET. For example, faculty heads, grade supervisors, unit managers, team leaders, senior school assistants and office managers all make important contributions to leadership in their workplaces.

Contributors to the Review spoke of the extraordinary influence that educational leaders can exert within their school or campus communities through inspiring others to share their *vision* for improvements in Aboriginal education and by their *determination* to bring their vision into practical reality.

In some places, Reconciliation and improvements in the retention, attendance and academic performance of Aboriginal students are essential parts of leaders’ visions. They are consequently built into operational plans that drive local level decision-making, priorities and action. Progress is closely watched. Explicit accountability measures are established so that all members of the school or campus community can monitor progress and judge success. Failures are seen as mistakes that identify areas for improvement.

In other places, however, leadership has a reputation for failure on both the “vision” and “determination” dimensions of educational leadership. The leadership potential of visions outlined in policy statements and strategic plans withers from the lack of resolve to watch what happens and make things work. If Reconciliation and improvements in the retention, attendance and academic performance of Aboriginal students feature at all in operational plans in these places, they are more often than not awkwardly or feebly bolted on to plans focusing on other students. Monitoring and reporting of implementation is usually “overlooked” or left to committed individuals or staff in specialist units who do not have the necessary clout to influence priorities. Accountability measures are often non-existent or so “flexible” they are meaningless.

The Review suggests that to bring about the shifts in awareness and practice that are required, the Department must establish a dynamic vision for the future and demonstrate both courage and determination to bring the vision of improved attendance, retention and academic

*The things that pushed us forward were clear targets with tough monitoring of our progress, the resources, but most of all we believed that the kids would succeed and together our community could make things better”*

– Principal

performance of Aboriginal students into reality.

To bring these shifts into reality, the Department was urged to provide professional development programs for current and new leaders at all levels of the organisation, to require accountability from those charged with responsibility for keeping an eye on progress, and promote opportunities for staff committed to making quality contributions to Aboriginal education to be in the right places at the right time.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

65. That a set of ongoing leadership development programs be provided for all principals by:
  - a) supporting and building on programs such as *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*
  - b) incorporating a comprehensive Aboriginal education focus in induction programs for new principals and school executive
  - c) requiring attendance at targeted courses as determined in consultation with their School Education Directors.
66. That TAFE NSW Institutes include an Aboriginal education focus in all leadership and professional development programs for managers, including faculty directors.
67. That a targeted leadership mentoring and support program be developed to better assist the welfare and development of leaders within school and TAFE, particularly in remote and isolated locations.
68. That the performance agreements, where applicable, of all executive (eg Senior Executive Service and management positions within DET) include requirements targeting improvements in Aboriginal education, including the implementation of the *Aboriginal Education Policy* and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
69. That selection criteria for all school-based and non-school-based promotions positions within DET include specific reference to knowledge of, and demonstrated commitment to, the implementation of DET's *Aboriginal Education Policy* and *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*.
70. That performance indicators be developed, in consultation with the Aboriginal Education and Training Task Force, to monitor implementation of the *Aboriginal Education and Training Action Plan*, including:
  - a) identification of students requiring early intervention
  - b) the number of suspensions of Aboriginal students and the range of reasons given for these
  - c) the post-training destinations of Aboriginal students undertaking TAFE

d) the number of complaints about racism (the total number of complaints about racism, the number resolved and the number yet to be resolved).

This information should be published each year in DET's *Annual Report*.

71. That principals of schools (through the School Plan), regional directors and directors of TAFE NSW Institutes be required to report annually on educational outcomes against their *Aboriginal Education Development Plan*.



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# **Review of Aboriginal Education**

**Juun-biin**

***APPENDICES***

*The Aboriginal translation in the Gumbaynggirr language is:*  
Tail – lots

## ***Appendix A: Membership of the Review Reference Group***

Dr Alan Laughlin	Deputy Director-General NSW Department of Education and Training
Charles Davison	President NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated
Chris Bonnor	President, Secondary Principals Council Principal, Davidson High School
Sharryn Brownlee	President Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW
Louise Bye	Coordinator, Schools Aboriginal Programs Unit NSW Department of Education and Training
Andrew Cappie- Wood	Managing Director, TAFE NSW Director-General, NSW Department of Education and Training
Lindon Coombes	Senior Policy Advisor Office of the Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Terry Denzil	Local Member NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated
Dennis Dunkley	Chief Finance Officer NSW Department of Education and Training
Dave Ella	Vice-President NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated
Charline Emzin- Boyd	Aboriginal Education Coordinator NSW Teachers Federation
Ros Field	Indigenous Education Manager Department of Education, Science and Training
Denis Fitzgerald	Director Equity Programs NSW Department of Education and Training
Brian Giles-Brown	Primary Principals Association representative Principal, Moruya Public School

Pam Gill	AITAC, NSW Representative NSW Department of Education and Training
Steve Gordon	Commissioner ATSIS
Barry Johnson	Deputy State Manager ATSIS
Phil Lambert	Regional Director Sydney Region NSW Department of Education and Training
Danny Lester	Coordinator, VET Services (TAFE NSW) Aboriginal Programs Unit NSW Department of Education and Training
Kevin Lowe	Chief Education Officer Aboriginal Curriculum Unit NSW Board of Studies
Jan McClelland	Managing Director, TAFE NSW Director-General, NSW Department of Education and Training (until January 2004)
Carol McDiarmid	Regional Director Western Region NSW Department of Education and Training
Ray McMinn	Regional President NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated
Will Mead	Principal Griffith High School
Professor Bob Meyenn	Dean Faculty of Education Charles Sturt University
Katrina Morgan (nee Vincent)	Senior Coordinator Aboriginal Community Programs NSW Department of Education and Training
Marie Persson	Director Sydney Institute of Technology
Brent Riley	Policy Administrative Support ATSIS
Lynette Riley- Mundine	Manager Aboriginal Programs NSW Department of Education and Training



Robin Shreeve	Deputy Director-General (TAFE NSW) NSW Department of Education and Training
John Stone	State Manager ATSIS
Carlo Svagelli	A/Manager Policy and Research Unit Department of Aboriginal Affairs

## Appendix B: Membership of the Review Secretariat

Alan Pratt	Executive Officer	from July 2003
Gloria Provest	Senior Project Officer	from July 2003
Rosemary Livingstone	Senior Project Officer	from July 2003
Louise Bye	Senior Project Officer	P/T from August 2003 F/T from May 2004
Lynette Bolt	Administrative Assistant	from August 2003
Cindy Berwick	Senior Project Officer	from August 2003
Bill Muir	Submission coding	P/T from September 2003
Barry Barnes	Data Management	P/T from October 2003 F/T from January 2004
Anne McKay	Administrative Assistant	from January 2004
Anne-Marie Mulder	Administrative Assistant	from March 2004
Sharon Grose	Senior Project Officer	P/T from November 2003 F/T from May 2004
Doug Cole	R/Executive Officer	from April 2004
Ray Mead	R/Executive Officer	from April 2004
Joanne Jackson	Administrative Assistant	from May 2004
Marilyn Walker	Office Manager	from June 2004

## Appendix C: Review Reference Group Meetings

### DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING ADVISORY GROUP (DGAETAG) – AUGUST MEETING

Annexe to the William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7, 35 Bridge Street  
9.00 am – 12.30 pm  
Wednesday, 20 August 2003

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#### AGENDA

*Welcome to Country – Lynette Riley-Mundine*

**1. Introductions and Apologies**

Alan Laughlin

Deputy Director-General  
(Schools)

**2. The Review of Aboriginal Education**

Jan McClelland  
Charles Davison  
Maree O'Halloran

Introductory comments  
Director-General  
President, NSW AECG Inc  
President, NSW Teachers  
Federation

**3. The proposed scope of the Review and  
Review methodology, including:**

Denis Fitzgerald

- Terms of Reference (Paper 3.1)
- The consultation process (Paper 3.2)
- The submission process (Paper 3.3)
- Field trips (Paper 3.4)
- Role of Review Reference Group (Paper 3.5)

**4. Comments and discussion from Review members.**

#### Morning Tea

**5. Performance data**

Chris Carroll  
R/Director SASAD

**6. Confirmation of responsibilities**

**7. General business**

**8. Timetable of future meetings and working parties**

#### Lunch

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Annexe to the William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7, 35 Bridge Street  
9.00 am – 12.30 pm  
Friday, 19 September 2003

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**AGENDA**

*Acknowledgement of Country*

- 9.00 Introductions and Apologies** Dr Laughlin  
Deputy Director-General  
(Schools)
- 9.05 Introductory Comments** **The Hon Andrew Refshauge**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education  
and Training  
Minister for Aboriginal  
Affairs
- 9.20 Matters arising from the Minutes** Dr Laughlin
- Minutes of the 20 August 2003 Meeting
- 9.30 The Literature Critique** Professor John Lester
- Themes emerging from the Literature Critique  
(Prepared by Strategic Research Directorate)
  - Proposed research focus – Professor Lester
  - Proposed Discussion Paper – to precede Field Trips
- 10.00 Programs and Outcomes relating to Aboriginal People in NSW** Denis Fitzgerald
- Issues emerging from NSW Premier’s Department report – March 2003
  - Issues emerging from parallel research and planning

**Morning Tea**

- 10.45 Consultation** Charles Davison
- A proposed methodology
  - Media strategy, media release
  - The web site

11.15 Submissions **Executive Officer**

- A proposed methodology

11.45 Field Trips **Executive Officer**

- Planning

**12.15 Working Parties** Executive Officer

- Confirm and schedule meetings
- Data Working Party
- Personnel Working Party
- Curriculum and Pedagogy Working Party

**12.25 General Business** Denis Fitzgerald

- Report on Consultants' Workshop
  - Proposed workshop for Aboriginal Development Managers
  - Early Childhood issues
  - Date of next meeting(s)

### **Luncheon**

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Tuesday, 18 November 2003  
Offices of the NSW AECG Inc  
37 Cavendish Street, STANMORE  
Phone 9550 5666

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**AGENDA**

*Acknowledgement of Country*

- |                    |   |  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| <b>9.00</b>        | <b>Introductions and Apologies</b>  | Dr Laughlin<br>Deputy Director-General<br>(Schools)                                      |
| <b>9.05</b>        | <b>Matters arising from the Minutes</b><br>- Minutes of the 19 September 2003 Meeting | Dr Laughlin  |
| <b>9.15</b>        | <b>Revised Terms of Reference for the Review</b><br>- The Minister's Media Release    | Dr Laughlin  |
| <b>9.30</b>        | <b>Status Report on Review Processes</b>  | Executive Officer  |
|                    | Proposed strategies : Attendance  | Alan Pratt   |
|                    | Suspension  | Alan Pratt   |
|                    | Performance   | Data Group   |
|                    | Liaison with other planning processes   | Denis Fitzgerald<br>Rosemary Livingstone   |
|                    | Proposed research   | AEP. John Lester<br>Districts Alan Pratt<br>Schools Alan Pratt<br>TAFE NSW Marie Persson |
| <b>10.45</b>       | <b>“Dare to Lead” – Status Report</b>   | Denis Fitzgerald<br>Brian Giles-Brown  |
| <b>Morning Tea</b> |   |  |
| <b>11.10</b>       | <b>Reports from:</b>  |  |
|                    | - Field Trips   | Charles Davison  |
|                    | - Personnel Issues  | Gloria Provost   |
|                    | - Data Working Party  | Cindy Berwick  |
|                    | - Early Childhood   | Rosemary Livingstone   |
|                    | - Review of the APU   | Alan Pratt   |
|                    | - Submissions   | Rosemary Livingstone   |
|                    | - Review Activities (November)  | Alan Pratt   |

**12.25 Date of November Meeting**

Dr Laughlin

**12.30 Luncheon**

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Minutes of the Meeting of 9 September 2003
2. Proposed Revised Terms of Reference
3. Media Release – 20 October 2003
4. Review Status Report
5. List of consultations undertaken:
  - Letter inviting consultation with Peak Groups
6. Issues arising from formal submissions:
  - Media strategy to invite submissions
7. Attendance – proposed data collection
8. Suspensions – proposed data collection
9. Performance data – Data Committee
10. Liaison with other planning processes
11. Research proposal – Professor Lester
12. Survey proposal – Districts
13. Survey proposal – Schools
14. Status Report – Dare to Lead
15. Field Trips – Western Sydney Field Trip (Overview)
16. Working Party Report – Personnel
17. Working Party Report – Early Childhood
18. Working Party Report – Curriculum and Pedagogy
19. Review of the APU – overview

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Thursday, 18 December 2003  
William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7  
Department of Education and Training  
Bridge Street Sydney

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**AGENDA**

*Acknowledgement of Country*

- 9.00 Introductions and Apologies** Dr Laughlin  
Deputy Director-General  
(Schools)
- 9.05 The Hon. Andrew Reshaug, Deputy-Premier, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Education and Training** will attend the meeting until 10.30 am.

**Review Strategies** – the main strategies used in the review.

Charles Davison  
Denis Fitzgerald

**“Indigenous Profile”** – issues emerging from the Profile Alan Pratt

**Addressing the Terms of Reference:**

**Attendance**

- Case studies and audit of attendance in schools in Term 1, 2004
- Examples of a District initiatives - case studies

**Suspension**

- Case studies
- Comparison with data collected until mid-2002

**Performance Data**

- Data in Indigenous Profile
- Data collected in field trips

**Field Trips/Case Studies**

- Field trips – issues emerging  
Charles/Alan/Sharon
- Addressing Case Studies Cindy

**Submissions**

- Numbers collected , issues emerging Rosemary



**Research and literature**

- Academic Reference Group John Lester
- Other reports studied Bill Muir

**Working Parties – Status reports**

- Curriculum and Pedagogy Louise/Sharon
- Early Childhood Rosemary
- Data Cindy
- Personnel Gloria

**10.30 Ms Jody Broun, Director General, Department of Aboriginal Affairs** will address the meeting about the Aboriginal Affairs Plan and Partnership Agreement.

**Morning Tea****11.15 Workshop meetings:**

*What issues are emerging from the work of the working parties?*

- Personnel Issues Gloria Provest
- Data Working Party Cindy Berwick/Alan
- Early Childhood Rosemary Livingstone
- Curriculum and Pedagogy Louise/Sharon

*Reporting back – one reporter per group to outline issues discussed.*

**12.20 Field trip program – 2004** Cindy Berwick

**12.25 Dates of meetings for 2004** Dr Laughlin

**12.31 Luncheon**

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Tuesday, 2 March 2004  
Annexe to the William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7, Department of Education and Training  
35 Bridge Street Sydney

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**AGENDA**

*Acknowledgement of Country*

- |              |  |   |
|--------------|--|---|
| <b>9:30</b>  | <b>Introductions and Apologies</b>   | (Dr) Alan Laughlin<br>Deputy Director-General<br>Teaching and Learning  |
| <b>9:35</b>  | <b>Review Progress since December<br/>Targets for Term One, 2004</b>             | Alan Pratt<br>Executive Officer   |
| <b>10:00</b> | <b>The Role of ACE in delivering quality<br/>Programs to Aboriginal Learners</b> | Amanda Moore<br>Director, Adult and<br>Community<br>Education   |
| <b>10:15</b> | <b>Early Childhood Working Group</b>   | Co-presenters<br><br>Sharon Perkins,<br>A/Director, Early Childhood<br>and Primary Education<br><br>Robyn Dundas, A&TSI<br>Early Childhood Sector<br>Advisory Group |
| <b>10:30</b> | <b>Submission: The NSW Board of Studies</b>                                      | Kevin Lowe<br>Chief Education Officer<br>Aboriginal Curriculum Unit<br>NSW Board of Studies   |
| <b>10.45</b> | <b>Academic Reference Group Report</b>   | Prof. John Lester<br>Head of School and<br>Director of Umulliko<br>University of Newcastle  |
| <b>11:00</b> | <b>Cabinet meeting on Aboriginal Affairs</b>                                     | (Dr) Phil Lambert<br>Regional Director<br>Teaching and Learning   |
| <b>11:10</b> | <b>Update on submissions received</b>  | Bill Muir<br>Secretariat  |

**11.20 Field trips – Status Report**

Cindy Berwick  
Secretariat

**11.30 Progressing the review – Plans for  
Review Reference Group Meeting #6**

Alan Laughlin and  
Charles Davison  
President, NSW AECG

**11:40 Morning tea** at the conclusion of the meeting.

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  
REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP and SECRETARIAT WORKSHOP**

Monday 22 – Wednesday 24 March 2004  
Citigate Hotel  
Albion Street, Sydney

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Following the completion of the series of field trips, the Secretariat met with members of the Review Reference Group who had served on field trip teams to identify the key issues emerging from the data collected.

The process of considering the contents of the field trip notes was undertaken over three days. Dr Barry Barnes facilitated the program, which identified key issues or themes that were then further developed in Chapter 3 of the Report.

## **REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Tuesday, 30 March 2004, 08:45 – 16:50  
Rooms 2038 & 2039 – Conservatorium High School  
Macquarie Street (Top of Bridge Street – enter through Government House Gates)  
Sydney 2000

### **AGENDA**

#### *Acknowledgement of Country*

<b>08:45 – 10:30</b>	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>	(Dr) Alan Laughlin Deputy Director-General Teaching and Learning
	<b>Session 1 Academic Reference Group</b> Presentation of papers and discussion	Prof. John Lester Head of School and Director of Umuliko University of Newcastle
<b>10:30 – 10:50</b>	<b>Morning Tea</b>	
<b>10:50 – 11:20</b>	<b>Session 2 TAFE NSW Overview</b> Presentation and discussion	Marty Burgess Director Padstow Campus
<b>11:20 – 12:50</b>	<b>Curriculum &amp; Pedagogy Personnel Working Groups</b> Status report and discussion	Louise Bye Secretariat Gloria Provest Secretariat
<b>12:50 – 13:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
<b>13:30 – 14:00</b>	<b>Session 3 Early Childhood Working Group and DET Early Childhood Unit</b> Panel and discussion	Rosemary Livingstone Secretariat Sharon Perkins A/Director, Early Childhood and Primary Education
<b>14:00 – 15:30</b>	<b>Secretariat Briefing</b> An approach to best using field trip data	(Dr) Barry Barnes Secretariat
<b>15:30 – 15:50</b>	<b>Afternoon Tea</b>	
<b>15:50 – 16:50</b>	<b>Session 4 Board of Management</b>	(Dr) Alan Laughlin Charles Davison President, NSW AECG

## REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, 18 May 2004  
14:00 – 16:15  
William Wilkins Annexe  
Level 7, Bridge Street, Sydney

### AGENDA

	<b>Acknowledgement of Country Welcome and purpose of meeting</b>	Charles Davison President NSW AECG Inc
<b>14:00—15:15</b>	<b>Session 1</b> <b>1.1 Emerging Themes</b> PowerPoint presentation and discussion	(Dr) Alan Laughlin Deputy Director-General, Futures & Charles Davison President NSW AECG Inc
	<b>1.2 Structure of the Report</b> PowerPoint presentation	Ray Mead A/Executive Officer AER Secretariat
<b>15:15—15:30</b>	<b>Afternoon Tea</b>	
<b>15:30—16:15</b>	<b>Session 2</b> <b>2.1 Changes to Commonwealth Funding Priorities</b> Implications for Aboriginal Education in NSW	Ros Field Director, Indigenous Education Unit Department of Education, Science and Training

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION REVIEW  
REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Tuesday, 27 July 2004  
William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7  
Department of Education and Training  
33 Bridge Street, Sydney

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**AGENDA**

<b>1.00 pm</b>	<b><i>Acknowledgement of Country</i></b>	<b>Charles Davison</b> President NSW AECG Inc
<b>1.05 pm</b>	<b>Welcome, Introduction</b>	<b>Dr Alan Laughlin</b> Deputy Director- General
<b>1.15 pm</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Dr Alan Laughlin</b> Deputy Director- General
<b>1.45 pm.</b>	<b>Discussion around Recommendations related to Themes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy and Planning</li><li>• Quality Teaching and Learning</li><li>• Partnerships</li><li>• Community Capacity Building</li><li>• Leadership and Accountability</li><li>• Identity</li><li>• Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge</li><li>• Aboriginal Students</li></ul>	
<b>3.30 pm.</b>	<b>Plenary</b>	

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION REVIEW  
REFERENCE GROUP MEETING**

Friday, 6 August 2004  
William Wilkins Gallery  
Level 7  
Department of Education and Training  
33 Bridge Street, Sydney

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**AGENDA**

**This meeting was an extension of the meeting of 27 July and addressed the proposed Recommendations of the Report.**

<b>9.00 am</b>	<b><i>Acknowledgement of Country</i></b>	<b>Charles Davison</b> President NSW AECG Inc
<b>9.05 am</b>	<b>Welcome, Introduction</b>	<b>Dr Alan Laughlin</b> Deputy Director- General
<b>9.15 am</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Dr Alan Laughlin</b> Deputy Director- General
<b>10.30 am</b>	<b>Morning Tea</b>	
<b>10.45 pm.</b>	<b>Discussion around Recommendations related to Themes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy and Planning</li><li>• Quality Teaching and Learning</li><li>• Partnerships</li><li>• Community Capacity Building</li><li>• Leadership and Accountability</li><li>• Identity</li><li>• Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge</li><li>• Aboriginal Students</li></ul>	
<b>1.30pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	



**2.00pm**      ***Clarification of the outcomes  
of the meeting and further actions***

***Dr Alan Laughlin***  
*Deputy Director  
General*

**3.00 pm**      ***Closure of Meeting***

## ***Appendix D: Consultations with Key Groups***

Aboriginal Education Council Conference  
Aboriginal Education Groups Meeting  
Aboriginal Education Reference Group – Primary Principals Association  
Aboriginal Education Reference Group – Secondary Principals Council  
Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council  
Aboriginal Medical Service, Walgett  
Aboriginal Principals  
Aboriginal School Principals Meeting  
Aboriginal Studies Association – at Annual Conference  
Aboriginal Teachers Reference Group – NSW  
Access and General Education Curriculum Centre  
ACLO Meeting  
Adult and Community Education Department  
AEA – Network Meeting  
AEVETI, Carol Crennan and David Gould, AECG – State Executive and  
Regional Reps at Pittwater, Newcastle  
Catholic Education Commission, NSW  
CEOs Riverina, North Coast and North West  
CEOs School Improvement – Riverina and South Coast  
CEOs School Improvement – Western Sydney  
CEOs School Improvement – Western Team  
CEO, VET in Schools Directorate  
Corrective Services Adult Education and Vocational Training Department  
DET – Chief Finance Officer  
DET – Child Protection Directorate, Director  
DET – Corporate Staffing, Director  
DET – District Superintendents  
DET – Early Childhood, Relieving Manager  
DET – Equity, Manager  
DET – Industry Programs Directorate  
DET – Information Warehouse, Manager  
DET – Juvenile Justice Centres, Principals of Schools

DET – Literacy Consultants Conference  
DET – Personnel, Director  
DET – Personnel Services, Manager  
DET – Public Relations, Manager  
DET – Research, Student Assessment School Accountability, Manager  
DET – Residential Conference, AERTS and their Principals  
DET – Schools – Field Staff, Consultants, ACLOs, ASLOs  
DET – School Safety and Security, Manager and CEO  
DET – State Office, Directors and Managers  
DET – Strategic Information Directorate, Acting Director  
DET – Strategic Research, Director  
DET – Student Assessment School Accountability, Acting Director  
DET – Student Service and Equity, District SEO2s  
DET – VET in Schools Directorate, Director  
DET – Website, Manager  
Dharriwaa Elders Group, Walgett  
Independent Education Union  
NSW AECG Inc, Inner City (Marrickville HS)  
NSW AECG Inc – Executive  
NSW AECG Inc – State Executive  
NSW AECG Inc – State Network  
NSW Federation of P & Cs – President and Executive  
NSW Teachers Federation, Inner City Branch  
NSW Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Bill Healey  
OTEN – Director and staff  
OTEN Workshop with teachers of Certificate III Diploma in Aboriginal Studies  
Outreach staff re Corrective Services and Juvenile Justice Centres  
Public Education Council  
TAFE NSW Central West Planning Workshop, Dubbo  
TAFE NSW Commission Board  
TAFE NSW Focus Group on Curriculum and Pedagogy  
TAFE NSW North Sydney – School Regional Director and TAFE NSW  
College Director

TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Planning Workshop

TAFE NSW – Equity Managers

TAFE NSW – Field Staff – ADMs Residential Conference and two Regional Conferences

TAFE NSW – Institute Directors – 2 meetings

TAFE NSW – Teachers of Certificate III Diploma in Aboriginal Studies

Vocational Education and Training Board

## ***Appendix E: List of Submission Contributors***

Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society, Frank Gorrel  
Aboriginal Communities in South-Western NSW, Rob Healy  
Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) Inc  
Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program, Cynthia Briggs  
Adult & Community Education, North Coast, Principal, Jim Nicholls  
Adult Education Vocational Training Institute  
AEC Conference, Parent  
AECG Hawkesbury, Da Murrytoola, Melissa Stubbings  
AECG Inc, NSW, Charles Davison  
AECG Inc, NSW, Ron Jackson  
AECG, Griffith  
AECG, Lower North Coast, President, Denise Williams  
AECG, Metropolitan East Regional  
AECG, Murwillumbah, President, Russell Logan  
AECG, Narrandera, Ron Williams and Brenda Poole  
AECG, Nowra, Kim Hill for Margaret Simoes  
AECG, Wagga Wagga NSW  
AEVTI Bathurst Campus, Allan Hill  
Albury-Wodonga Area Consultative Committee, Ray Hortle and J Walsh  
Alexandria Park Community School, Coordinator, Cathie Burgess  
Anon (Tamworth Public Meeting)  
Anon (Aboriginal Education Assistants)  
Ashcroft Public School, Liverpool School Education Area Office, Student  
Welfare Consultant, Donna Bensch  
ATSIS NSW State Office, Johnson, B.  
Australian Hearing, Christine Burton and Sharon Page (Submission Authors),  
Anthea Green (MD)  
Ballina High School, Principal, Ms RA Mayberry  
Ballina/CTI LAEGG, Lynette Buchanan  
Batemans Bay High School, ASSPA Chairperson, Vicki Simon  
Bates-Hannah, Alma

Bathurst Community Meeting, Laurie Crawford  
Bathurst High School, ASSPA Committee, Maureen Bates-McKay  
Bathurst High School, Jenny Stirling  
Baulkam Hills High School, Dennett, B  
Beddoe, Noel  
Bega Families First Meeting, Aboriginal Community Development Officer,  
Kerry Avery  
Board of Studies NSW, Professor Gordon Stanley  
Booroongen Djugun College, Val March  
Briggs, Cynthia  
Bulgarr Ngaru Aboriginal Medical Centre  
Canobolas Rural Technology High School, Fiona Prentice  
Carmichael, Dr Beryl  
Casino grandparent  
Casino Public School, John Vallely  
Catholic Education Commission, Crichton Smith  
Centrelink, Daley Bronkhorst-Jannay  
Cherbourg State School, Queensland, Principal Chris Sarra  
Charles Sturt University, Health Careers Workshop  
Chick, Edward  
Chifley Zone RFS Community Education Committee, Greg Standen  
Child Studies Coffs Harbour Education Campus, Head Teacher Child Studies  
Christian Brothers, John Giacon  
Cobar High School, AEA, Brenda Harvey  
Coffs Harbour High School ASSPA, Mervyn Bolt CDEP Worker,  
Coffs Harbour High School, ASSPA Committee, Vicki Filewood  
Coonabarabran Gamilaraay Language Circle, Suellyn Tighe  
Coonamble Public School ASSPA Committee, Allan Hall  
Council of Social Service of NSW, Gary Moore  
Craddock, Laurie  
Curran Public School, AEA, Lee Ann Thompson  
Dareton PS, Geoff Broadfoot

Department of Environment & Conservation (DEC) (NSW), Dr Lynn Webber,  
Fleming, Tony Dr  
DET Clarence/Coffs Harbour District Office, Joanne Randall  
DET Orange, Nigel Irvine  
DET Student Services and Equity Programs, Manager Behaviour and  
Attendance, Sara Thorley-Smith  
Dianne Paton  
Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party, Co-ordinator, Anne Cobb  
Early Childhood Education Council of NSW, Karen Buck  
Echuca Counselling Service, Brian Walker  
Edwards, Chick  
Evans River K–12 School Council, President, Paul McKendrick  
Evans River K–12 School, Andrew Gordon  
Fairfull, Liz  
Farrands, Jenni  
Fischer, J  
Floyd, Marina  
Fowler Road SSP, Principal, Cath Laws  
Gibalee Advisory Committee, Dr Wendy Hanlen  
Giles Brown, Brian  
Gilgandra High School, Principal, Peter Whalan  
Glassop, Irene  
Goorie Research and Study Program (GRASP), Lismore TAFE, Klara  
Marosszeky and Lindy Suttor  
Gorokan High School , HT History, Peter Ryall  
Grace Colleen  
Grafton High School ASSPA, Secretary, Cindy Lesley  
Greater Murray Area Health Service, CSU Health Careers Workshop, Sue  
Sutherland  
Grimshaw, Warren, Coffs Harbour Education Campus  
Gunnedah High School, Brian Jeffrey  
Gunnedah High School, Deputy Principal, Lyn Thomas  
Gunther, Barry

Guy, Harold  
Hampton, Allen  
Haywood Farm  
Healy R  
Hodges, Sue  
Hourigan, Geoff and Lisa  
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Hume Public School, Kay Jell and Catherine Kembrey  
James, Chris  
Jeremy, June  
Jewell, Mark  
Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, Chris Evans  
Kamilaroi Regional Council, Lyall Munro  
Kemmis, Stephen, Charles Sturt University, School of Education  
Kempsey Shire Council, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Debra Morris, (for Trevor Hannam, Director Corporate & Community Services)  
Kennedy, Faye  
Khymenko, L  
Leeton AECG  
Lloyd, Robbie  
Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, Staff  
Maclean High School, Glenn Brown  
Macleay Vocational College, Principal, Jann Eason  
Macquarie University Institute of Early Childhood, Jenny Nicholls (for Jennifer Bowes), Department of Indigenous Studies, Warawara  
Many Rivers Aboriginal Legal Services, Manager, Julie Perkins  
Marrickville High School, Kerri Forewood  
Matraville Soldiers' Settlement  
Mid North Coast High School, Teacher, Peter Swan  
Milliken, Noelene and Bauer, Ros  
Minchinbury, Teacher, Tracey Southam  
Mirriwinni Gardens , Rex Marshall OAM, Aboriginal Chairman School Board  
Moree TAFE Campus, Ralph Westley



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Murray, Beatrice  
Narrandera Public Schools, Don Mackenzie (on behalf of Principals)  
National Rural Health Alliance Inc, Chairperson NRHA, Sue McAlpin  
Norman, H  
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North Coast Institute of TAFE NSW, Teacher/Consultant Deaf/Hearing Impaired Students, Bronwyn Watson  
Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, Karmi Dunn and Barbara Weis  
Nowra Community of Schools, Circle of Friends,  
Nowra High School (Nowra Community), Deputy Principal, Suzi Williams  
NSW Aboriginal Land Council, William Johnstone  
NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, Ian Balcomb  
NSW Board of Community Education, Helen da Silva  
NSW DET Aboriginal Programs Unit, Lynette Riley Mundine  
NSW DET Multicultural Programs Unit  
NSW DET, School Counsellors, Christina Gibbeson  
NSW DET, Selective Schools Unit, Cynthia Wearne  
NSW DET, Shellharbour District Office, Leonie Ardler  
NSW Primary Principals' Association, Blacktown South Public School, President, Mr G Scott  
NSW Primary Principals Association, Steve Stuart  
NSW Secondary Principals Council, Phil Hirst  
NSW/ACT Independent Education Union, Gloria Taylor  
NT Music School, Graham Chadwick  
Nyngan High School, Lorraine Haddon  
Nyngan High School, Steve Cavanagh  
Olive, Sandra  
Orange District School Counsellors, Pam Ryan  
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Pearson, Therese  
Percival, Bob and Townsend, Renette

Pittman, Mick  
Port Macquarie Aboriginal Education Assistants  
Primary Principals Association, Brian Giles-Brown  
Professional Teachers Council, NSW  
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Quirindi High School, Greg Marshall  
Robinson, Aunty Mae  
Robinson, Christine  
Sampson, Glenda and Clayton, Dallas  
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South Sydney High School, Rose Varughese  
St Agatha's Primary School, Helen White  
St Kevin's Catholic Primary School, Mary Anne Marles  
Standon, G  
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Sue Dockett  
Sussex Inlet Public School, Principal, Mary Hughes  
TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre  
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Taskforce Aboriginal Liaison Committee, Kempsey Shire Council, Trevor  
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Thirroul teacher, David McAlister  
Tony McCartney  
Toormina Public School ASSPA Committee  
Tweed River High School, Carol Chambers  
Tweed River High School, Teacher Aboriginal Studies, Jan Ryan  
Tyalla Public School, Glenda Perkins  
University of Newcastle, Postgraduate student, Jason McGrath  
University of NSW, International School of Mining Engineering, Dr Mike Katz

University of Sydney, Faculty of Education & Social Work, Gerard Sullivan  
University of Sydney, Faculty of Education and Koori Centre, Dr David Rose  
University of Sydney, Professor Tony Vinson  
Uralla Aniwana Corporation, Clare Townsend (and Anne Heffernan, Kathy  
Baraclough, Les Townsend)  
Varughese, R  
Walgett Teachers Association, Rose Fernando  
Wentworth Public School, Principal, Jim Wilton, (on behalf of staff)  
Western Australia, DET, Perth Community College for Aboriginal Education  
Westport High School, Deputy Principal, Guy Pitkin  
Whiffen, Neville OAM  
Wilcannia Central School, Gary Barton  
Willyama High School  
Yamuloong Incorporated, Rayleene Gordon  
Yarradamarra Centre, Western Institute of TAFE NSW, Rachel Carney  
Yinarr Health and Wellbeing Group of Tamworth, Chairperson, Donna  
Creighton

## Appendix F: Schedule of Field Trips

In excess of 4000 persons were involved in interviews or meetings on approximately 400 sites in the course of 14 field trips.

The Secretariat members responsible for the management of the field trips were:

Central West Region	2–5 March 2004	Gloria Provest
Lake Cargelligo	25–6 May 2004	Gloria Provest
Lower North Coast	17–20 February 2004	Gloria Provest
North Sydney Region	25, 31 May & 1 June	Doug Cole
Metropolitan East (Sydney Region)	16–19 March 2004	Sharon Grose
Hunter/Central Coast Region	23–26 March 2004	Sharon Grose
Metropolitan South West Region	8–12 March 2004	Cindy Berwick
Metropolitan West Region	11–14 November 2003	Alan Pratt
New England Region	23–27 February 2004	Alan Pratt
Western Region	1–4 December 2003	Sharon Grose
North West Region	15–19 March 2004	Gloria Provest
Riverina Region	2–5 March 2004	Rosemary Livingstone
South Coast Region	2–5 March 2004	Alan Pratt
Upper North Coast Region	17–20 March 2004	Rosemary Livingstone

### Central West Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Erambie Preschool	Regional Presentation Glenroi Heights PS
Nanima Preschool, Wellington	
	<b>TAFE NSW Campuses</b>
<b>Schools</b>	
	Bathurst
Bathurst PS	Orange
Bathurst West PS	Warren
Buninyong PS	Yarradamarra Dubbo
Canobolas Rural Technology HS	
Condoblin HS	<b>Gaol</b>
Condoblin PS	
Cowra HS	Bathurst Gaol
Cowra PS	
Dubbo Senior College	<b>Community organisations</b>
Dubbo West PS	
Forbes North HS	BBREETAC (Indigenous Employment Agency)
Glenroi Heights PS	
Kelso HS	THUBBO AMS
Lithgow HS	
Narromine HS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Narromine PS	
Oberon HS	Bathurst Land Council
Orange HS	Community Meeting Bathurst 1
Peak Hill CS	Community Meeting Bowen PS, Orange
Senior College Delroy Campus	Community Meeting Buninyong PS
Warren Central School	Community Meeting Condoblin PS
Wellington HS	Gordon Centre, West Dubbo
	Gumbya Land Council, Cowra

<b>Hunter/Central Coast Region Field Trip</b>	
<b>Schools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Biraban PS	Central Coast SEA
Brisbane Waters College	Lake Macquarie SEA
Gorokan HS	
Irrawang PS	<b>TAFE NSW Campuses</b>
Lake Macquarie HS	
Muswellbrook Sth PS	Ourimbah
Narara Valley HS	Tighes Hill
Rutherford Technology HS	
Telarah PS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Tighes Hill PS	
Tuggerah Lakes HS	Windale SACC
Waratah HS	Yamuloong
Woy Woy Sth PS	
Wyoming PS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Wyong HS	
Wyong PS	Central Coast Community Meeting

### Lake Cargelligo Field Trip

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Community organisations</b>
Eubalong West PS	AECG
Lake Cargelligo CS	CDEP/Murrinbridge
<b>TAFE NSW Riverina Institute</b>	<b>Community meetings</b>
	Lake Cargelligo Community Meeting
Lake Cargelligo Campus	Murrinbridge Community Meeting

<b>Lower North Coast Region Field Trip</b>	
<b>Preschools</b>	<b>TAFE NSW North Coast Institute:</b>
	<b>Campuses</b>
Dalaigur Aboriginal Preschool	Coffs Harbour Education Campus(CHEC)
Nambucca Aboriginal Language Centre and Preschool	Great Lakes
	Kempsey
<b>Schools</b>	Macksville
	Port Macquarie
Bellbrook PS	Taree
Bellingen HS	
Bowraville CS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Forster PS	
Green Hills PS	Coffs Harbour Education Centre
Kempsey HS	Durri Medical Service
Kempsey South PS	Kempsey Mums Group
Kempsey West PS	
Macksville HS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Macksville PS	
Manning Gardens PS	Cabarita
Nambucca HS	Kempsey Community Meeting
Taree HS	Nambucca Community Meeting
Taree PS	
Westport HS	
Westport PS	
<b>DET</b>	
Port Macquarie SEA	
Taree SEA	



### Metropolitan East (Sydney Region) Field Trips

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Murrawina Preschool	Bondi SEA
Waninbiri Preschool	Port Jackson SEA
<b>Schools</b>	<b>TAFE NSW Sydney Institute</b>
Alexandria Park Community School	
Blaxcell Street PS	
Bridge Road SSP	<b>Community organisations</b>
Camdenville PS	
Canterbury Boys HS	Aboriginal Medical Service
Canterbury Girls HS	AECG Stanmore
Darlington PS	Glebe Youth Centre
Dulwich Hill PS	Kirrinari Hostel
Endeavour Sports HS	South Sydney Youth Service
Glebe PS	Yarra Bay House
Gymea HS	
La Perouse PS	
Matraville Soldiers Settlement PS	
Matraville Sports HS	
Sunning Hill School	
Sydney Secondary College – Blackwattle Bay Campus	
Tranby College	

## **Metropolitan South West Region Field Trip**

### **Preschool**

Cootagulla Preschool

### **Schools**

Ashcroft HS  
Ashcroft PS  
Banksia Road PS  
Bass High School  
Bonnyrigg PS  
Briar Road PS  
Busby West PS  
Campbell Field PS  
Dorchester  
Fowler Road SSP  
Sahah Redfern HS  
Tahmoor PS

### **DET**

Campbelltown SEA  
Liverpool SEA

### **TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute:**

Miller Campus

### **Gaol**

Mullawa Detention Centre

### **Community organisation**

Tharrawal LALC

### **Community meetings**

Bankstown Community Meeting  
Campbelltown Community Meeting  
Fairfield/Liverpool Community Meeting

<b>Metropolitan West Region Field Trip</b>	
<b>Preschool</b>	<b>DET</b>
Doonside Preschool	Blacktown DO
	Brewongle EEC
<b>Schools</b>	Mt Druitt DO
	Penrith DO
Blacktown Girls HS	
Cambridge Park HS	<b>TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute:</b>
Crawford PS	
Dunheved HS	Mt Druitt Campus
Emerton PS	
Hebersham PS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Kingswood Park PS	
Marayong PS	Aboriginal Medical Service Mt Druitt
St Clair HS	Holy Family + Elders
St Marys North PS	
St Marys PS	<b>Community meeting</b>
Tregear PS	
Willmot PS	Mt Druitt Community Meeting
Windsor HS	
Windsor South PS	

### New England Region Field Trip

Schools	TAFE NSW New England Institute: Campuses
Black Mountain PS	Armidale
Drummond Memorial PS	Inverell
Drummond PS	Tamworth
Gunnedah HS	
Gunnedah PS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Hillvue PS	
Inverell HS	Aboriginal Employment Strategy
McIntyre HS	DOCS
Oxley HS	Health
Oxley Vale PS	Police
Peel HS	
Quirindi HS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Tingha PS	
Uralla CS	
Walhallow PS	Armidale Community Meeting
Westdale PS	Coledale Community Meeting
	Gunnedah Community Meeting
<b>DET</b>	Inverell Community Meeting
Armidale SEA	
Tamworth SEA	

### Northern Sydney Region Field Trip

**Schools**

Cromer HS  
Mackellar Girls HS  
Marsden HS  
Narrabeen North PS  
Royal Far West School

**TAFE NSW Northern Sydney  
Institute: Campuses**

Brookvale  
Ryde

**University**

University of Technology Sydney, Lindfield Campus

**DET**

Northern Sydney Region  
Stewart House

**Community meeting**  
Manly Community Meeting

**Community organisations**

Bialla Hostel  
Gurringai Local AECG

## North West Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>TAFE NSW Western Institute:</b>
Koolyangarra Preschool	Bourke Campus
Walgett Preschool	
	<b>Community organisations</b>
<b>Schools</b>	
	Barrickneil CDEP
Bourke HS	Walgett AMS
Bourke PS	Walgett CDEP
Brewarrina CS	
Cobar HS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Cobar PS	
Collarenebri CS	Bourke Community Meeting
Coonabarabran HS	Brewarrina Community Meeting
Coonabarabran PS	Coonabarabran Community Meeting
Coonamble HS	Coonamble Community Meeting
Enngonia PS	Walgett Community Meeting
Gilgandra PS	
Goodooga CS	
Gulargambone CS	
Lightning Ridge CS	
Nyngan HS	
Nyngan PS	
Walgett HS	
Walgett PS	
Weilmoringle PS	

## Riverina Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>TAFE NSW Riverina Institute Campuses</b>
Moama Preschool	Albury
	Deniliquin
<b>Schools</b>	Cootamundra (Harden Outreach Program)
	Griffith
Albury North PS	Narrandera
Albury West PS	Wagga
Ashmont PS	Tumut
Brungle PS	
Glenroy PS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Griffith HS	
Griffith PS	AECG Meeting
Hume PS and Preschool James Fallon HS	Albury LAECG
Moama PS	Black Son's & Co
Mt Austin HS	Charles Sturt University – Wagga Campus
Murrumburrah PS	Community Working Party
Narrandera HS	Mitchell Place
Narrandera PS	PAT Centre
Shepherds Park School	Tumut LAECG
Tolland PS	
Tumut HS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Tumut PS	
Young HS	Brungle Community Meeting
	Deniliquin Community Meeting
<b>DET</b>	Griffith Community Meeting
	Leeton Community Meeting
Albury SEA	Narrandera Community Meeting
Griffith SEA	Wagga Community Meeting
Wagga SEA	

### South Coast Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Little Yuin Aboriginal Preschool	Batemans Bay SEA
Mogo Aboriginal Preschool	Shell Harbour SEA
Nowra East Preschool	Wollongong SEA
	<b>TAFE NSW Illawarra Institute</b>
<b>Schools</b>	<b>Community organisations</b>
Batemans Bay HS	Booderee National Park
Batemans Bay PS	Gudu Wondjer
Bega HS	Jigamy Farm
Bermagui PS	Re Connect Moruya
Bomaderry HS	University of Wollongong
Bomaderry PS	
Broulee PS	<b>Community meetings</b>
Eden PS	
Illawarra Senior College	Batemans Bay Community Meeting
Kemblawarra PS	Bega Community Meeting
Mogo PS	Community Forum Wallaga Lake
Moruya HS	Community Forum Wollongong
Moruya PS	Dharawal Community Meeting,
Narooma HS	Sanctuary Point
Nowra East PS	Moruya Community Meeting
Nowra HS	Narooma/Bodalla Community Meeting
Nowra PS	Nowra Community Meeting
Sanctuary Point PS	
Shoalhaven HS	
Warilla HS	

## Upper North Coast Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Casino Preschool	Ballina SEA
Centaur Preschool	Clarence SEA
	Coffs Harbour SEA
<b>Schools</b>	Lismore SEA
	Tweed Heads SEA
Ballina HS	
Ballina PS	<b>TAFE NSW North Coast Institute Campuses</b>
Banora Point PS	
Bonalbo CS	Casino
Cabbage Tree Island PS	Grafton
Casino HS	Kingscliff
Centaur PS	Lismore
Coffs Harbour HS	Macleay
Goonellabah PS	Woolongbar
Induna ETC	
Kadina HS	<b>Community organisation</b>
Macleay HS	
Richmond River HS	Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation
South Grafton HS	
Tabulum PS	<b>Community meetings</b> Chairman School Board
Toormina PS	
Tweed River HS	Ballina Community Meeting
Tyalla PS	Baryugul Community Meeting
Woodenbong CS	Bonalbo Community Meeting
Woolgoolga HS	Coffs Harbour Community Meeting
Yamba PS	Grafton Community Meeting
	Lismore Community Meeting
	Macleay Community Meeting
	Tweed Heads Community Meeting
	Yamba Community Meeting



### Western Region Field Trip

<b>Preschools</b>	<b>DET</b>
Bugdlie Preschool	Broken Hill DO
Gyndarna Preschool	
Menindee Community Preschool	<b>TAFE NSW Western Institute Campuses</b>
Wilcannia Preschool	
	Broken Hill
<b>Schools</b>	Coomealla
	Menindee
Alma PS	Wilcannia
Balranald CS	
Broken Hill HS	<b>Community organisations</b>
Broken Hill PS	
Buronga PS	Balranald LAECG
Coomealla HS	Community Working Party, Wentworth Shire
Dareton PS	Maari Ma Health Service
Menindee CS	
Wentworth PS	
Wilcannia CS	
Willyama HS	

## ***Appendix G: Writers and Researchers***

<b>Charles Davison</b> <b>Dr Alan Laughlin</b>	President NSW AECG Inc (until October 2004) Deputy Director-General NSW Department of Education and Training
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The Review Team would like to acknowledge the following contributions to this Report:

- Terry Mason, Rosalie Neve and Bill Muir for their reading and analysis of the submissions
- Jenni Ridley for her diligence in proofreading and assistance with the Report's artwork
- the Executive of the NSW AECG Inc for their support, encouragement and guidance
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- Professor Martin Nakata for his role as "critical friend" to the writers
- Professor John Lester for his stewardship of the Academic Reference Group and his commissioned research
- Noel Beddoe for the action research conducted for the Personnel Working Party
- Jacquelin Hochmuth for editing the Report.



NEW SOUTH WALES  
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