

**Bruce Wilson, The Education Business**

# **Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory**

***DRAFT REPORT***



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## Overview

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

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

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

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

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

This review has made a decision to focus on the English language skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system. Some people will find this a challenging position. The recommendation is based on the view that Indigenous children learn English in the way that other children learn English: through rigorous and relentless attention to the foundations of the language and the skills that support participation in a modern democracy and economy. The review does not support continued efforts to use biliteracy approaches, or to teach the content of the curriculum through first languages other than English. This report recommends the explicit teaching and assessment of foundational elements of English literacy, including phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary.

The Collins review mounted a strong argument to extend secondary education to remote and very remote schools. In the years since that report, the Northern Territory has spent hundreds of millions of dollars establishing and supporting secondary provision in these schools. The effort has attracted dedicated teachers and gained the support of many communities. This review's visits to schools and



analysis of data demonstrate that the initiative has largely failed. NAPLAN literacy rates for very remote students in Year 9 are about 10%. Almost none of these students gain a certificate at the end of their schooling.

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

Young people engaged in these programs are fulfilling the legal requirement that they remain at school without benefiting from the moral requirement that they gain something worth having from this experience. Accordingly, the review recommends a dramatic shift in how secondary education is provided. This report proposes that secondary education should, with a few exceptions, be delivered in the Territory's towns (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek) with remote students provided with residential accommodation. This will require careful management, dedicated resourcing, sensitive negotiation with families and communities and a continuing effort to maintain home links. It is, however, the only means by which many students can be offered a high quality secondary education. The report argues that it is unsustainable to continue to offer secondary programs that lead nowhere.

There are many reasons for the widespread weaknesses in what the report calls 'bush' schools. They include problems in the management and delivery of education, funding issues (largely to do with the management rather than the amount of funding), poor attendance, inadequate workforce planning, weak community engagement and difficulties in many other areas. The report discusses these issues and proposes ways to address many of them, suggesting ways to make progress in those areas that are subject to control and influence.

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

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

What is missing is a coherent strategic program across all the years of schooling. The recommendations in the review seek to provide the basis for such a program. But even the best strategy is empty if it is not consistently and rigorously pursued over an extended period. The only way to achieve transformational change is to plan for the very long term: in political terms, over the

lives of a succession of Parliaments; in human terms, over a generation or more. Unless the Northern Territory maintains a consistent approach for an extended period, it will not achieve its goals.

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

## Learning Lessons

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

## Discussion and recommendations

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

The approach is evident in three characteristics of the discussion and recommendations in the Draft Report.

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

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

## What we can control

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

Schools and school systems cannot control these issues and should not be blamed when matters beyond their control limit their achievements. Approaches to Indigenous education from the earliest years should take account of those influences and seek to ameliorate, counter and overcome them to the extent possible. But our ambitions for Indigenous children should not be lowered because of these difficulties. Our aim should still be to raise levels of achievement in the Indigenous population so that they match achievement in the population as a whole.

## Demographics

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

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

## Two systems

The review proposes that government schooling in the Northern Territory consists of two education systems. One of these systems is concentrated in the towns (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek). The other system is concentrated in other remote and very remote communities. The report suggests that the 86 identified 'bush'<sup>1</sup> schools (very remote schools and some remote schools with lower enrolments, attendance and student achievement and higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage) should be treated differently from the 65 'town' schools.

A 2010 McKinsey report argued that lower performing systems (like the bush schools) should focus on achieving basic literacy and numeracy levels and should be more tightly controlled than higher performing systems (like the town schools). One key difference is that evidence-based approaches should be mandated in lower performing systems. This approach has been adopted in the review recommendations.

## Recommendation

- 1. Recognise the differing capacities and circumstances of town and bush schools and vary implementation requirements to reflect these differences, including mandating evidence-based approaches for bush schools.**

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'bush' and 'town' schools are defined in Chapter 4.

## The education system

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

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

## Recommendations

- 2. Develop a 10-year strategic plan for Indigenous education with long term goals and interim targets and ensure that it drives action at regional and school level.**
- 3. Establish a strong Indigenous Education unit led by a dedicated senior official to develop the strategic plan, design trials, lead community engagement, support and monitor implementation and report on progress.**
- 4. Plan implementation carefully, aiming for slow and measured approaches to ensure the resolution of technical, financial, legal, structural, governance and staffing issues including organisational and reporting relationships.**
- 5. Conduct formal evaluation of all major initiatives to collect evidence on progress of each initiative, and:**
  - a. report against goals in the strategic plan;**
  - b. specify data required from schools; and**
  - c. ensure that all research including that conducted by external agencies is aligned with Department priorities.**

## Early childhood

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

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

## Recommendations

6. **Maintain Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in its current form pending data from the evaluation, consider additional target communities, improve implementation where weaknesses are identified and improve the training profile of Indigenous staff.**
7. **Strengthen parent engagement by mandating a school-driven transition program from FaFT to pre-school and from pre-school to school that:**
  - a. **provides ongoing support for both children and parents;**
  - b. **supports parents to understand the developmental stages of their children; and**
  - c. **provides opportunities for parents to engage with their child's education.**
8. **Define appropriate phonemic awareness skills and teaching strategies and implement them in pre-schools.**
9. **Seek adequate funding for the implementation and operation of the Child and Family Centres and evaluate their effectiveness as a mode for integrated service delivery.**

## Primary education

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

There are no common approaches to literacy across the Territory, despite well-established research about what works. For bush schools, the department should mandate early literacy approaches including phonemic awareness, leveled readers and assessment programs in these areas, and progressively mandate other literacy and numeracy approaches. These programs should be supported with training and coaching and included in accountability processes for schools, principals and teachers.

The Australian curriculum should be implemented in bush schools only in English and mathematics during the first four years of schooling until satisfactory literacy and numeracy levels are achieved. The Multiple Year Levels materials should be used in bush schools in subsequent years. An internal review should be conducted to advise on the state of EAL/D practice.

## Recommendations

10. **Give priority to ensuring that all Indigenous children gain English literacy by progressively mandating approaches to early literacy and assessment, including:**
  - a. **mandating a phonemic awareness teaching program and assessment instrument in all bush schools;**
  - b. **mandating leveled readers and a general test of reading progress in all bush schools;**
  - c. **from 2015, mandating commonly used programs related to vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in bush schools to ensure a balanced literacy curriculum;**
  - d. **encouraging town schools, especially those with high Indigenous populations, to use programs mandated for remote schools and supporting them to adopt a broader range of evidence-based literacy programs;**
  - e. **establishing Territory-wide age benchmarks for reading level, phonemic awareness**

- and sight words, reporting against these benchmarks and using the data to monitor school effectiveness and program efficacy; and
  - f. including the effective implementation of mandated approaches in teacher and principal appraisal processes, school Annual Operating Plans and school reviews.
11. Implement the Australian curriculum in bush schools only in English and mathematics during the first four years of schooling except as a means of broadening the focus of the literacy curriculum, and use the Multiple Year Levels materials in subsequent years.
  12. Provide support, initially for bush schools, in implementation of mandatory literacy programs including sustained funding for professional learning and coaching.
  13. Conduct an internal review to advise on the state of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) practice and how the area can be effectively supported and improved.
  14. Undertake internal analysis of numeracy teaching to map areas of weakness in numeracy achievement and identify intervention programs with a proven record of success for at-risk students, for mandatory implementation in bush schools from 2016.

## Secondary education

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

The review argues that secondary education for bush students should mainly be provided in towns, with students accommodated in residential facilities. In a small number of larger bush schools, it is proposed to implement remote secondary provision but only in schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria. Other bush schools will teach to Year 6, but in a small number of cases can negotiate with the region to offer one or more years of middle schooling if they satisfy strict criteria. Distance education will be an important element of this set of solutions: the current arrangements should be reviewed to ensure they meet the need.

## Recommendation

15. Offer secondary education for bush students in towns, with students accommodated in residential facilities, and through remote secondary provision in a small number of bush schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria:
  - a. conduct trials of both remote secondary provision and residential arrangements to determine adaptations needed for more widespread delivery;
  - b. offer programs to Year 6 in bush primary schools, and offer one or more years of middle schooling only by negotiation with regional managers if schools satisfy agreed criteria; and
  - c. examine the three-school distance education arrangement and current practice to determine how well they are suited to the changed secondary schooling arrangements proposed in this report.

## Attendance

Attendance patterns in the Northern Territory have declined on the last decade, especially in very remote schools. Despite major programs run by the Australian and Territory Governments in recent years and substantial programs at school level, remote and very remote attendance continues to deteriorate. The evidence is clear that measureable student improvement only occurs once attendance reaches 60% (or three days per week) and that 80% is the minimum for most students to achieve success.

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

## Recommendations

16. **Direct attendance efforts preferentially to early childhood and primary children aiming to establish regular patterns of attendance, and to secondary children attending on average at least three days per week:**
  - a. **focus attendance programs run by primary and secondary schools on children attending at least three days per week;**
  - d. **focus Territory and Australian Government programs preferentially on primary children attending less than three days per week; and**
  - e. **adopt programs of information and incentives in all schools to encourage student, parent and community responsibility for attendance.**
17. **Undertake a whole Department and whole-of-Government initiative to analyse the attendance effect of the range of community activities and initiatives (including football carnivals, rodeos, shows, royalty payments, funerals and ceremonies and community shops) and negotiate to achieve modifications that will reduce their effect on attendance.**
18. **Maintain the Clontarf program but jointly plan for improved achievement outcomes, and seek a similar system-wide program for girls, with the characteristics outlined in the report.**

## Wellbeing and behaviour management

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

The review supports the development and resourcing of a whole-system approach to wellbeing and behaviour management in association with the Behaviour Management Taskforce. Bush schools should be required to use School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS), and other schools advised to adopt it. Now Hear should be used in all bush schools and other schools with students experiencing hearing difficulty. The department should provide professional development programs, coaching and specialist support for these programs. Other initiatives in the review will also assist in improved behaviour and wellbeing.

## Recommendations

19. **Work with the Behaviour Management Taskforce to develop and resource a whole-system approach to wellbeing and behaviour management, including:**
  - a. mandating School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) for bush schools and advising other schools to adopt it;
  - b. requiring all schools to have a school-wide approach to behaviour management and wellbeing including the establishment of a team, led by a member of the leadership group, with responsibility for behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion;
  - c. developing a social and emotional overlay for SWPBS (taking account of trauma experienced by Indigenous students) for trial and evaluation in Central Australia prior to wider implementation;
  - d. ensuring that schools collect and report data on behaviour and related issues and on the implementation of SWPBS;
  - e. mandating the use of Now Hear in all bush schools and other schools with students experiencing hearing difficulty; and
  - f. providing professional development programs, coaching and specialist support for implementation of SWPBS, whole-school approaches and data collection and the implementation of Now Hear.
20. **Ensure through the school review process that schools are aware of the impact of, and plan to deal with, social and emotional problems, cognitive disability and experience of trauma on student learning and behaviour.**

## Community engagement

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

A new charter should be developed to define roles and guide improved engagement. The responsibilities of school staff for community engagement should be clarified and effective training provided to improve engagement. Local communities should be engaged to lead induction and cultural training. Principals should be supported in developing school councils and governance training developed for remote communities. Community engagement should focus on existing agreements and the implementation of department goals. The Indigenous education unit should include staff skilled in supporting community engagement.

## Recommendations

21. **Develop a new community engagement charter setting out the Department's strategy for community engagement, responsibilities of Department work units and the expected involvement of community representatives.**
22. **Clarify the responsibilities of principals and teachers for community engagement, provide effective training in supporting improved engagement and ensure that school review and staff appraisal processes include community engagement as an expectation.**
23. **Engage local communities to lead induction and local cultural training.**



24. **Provide support for principals in building precursor school decision making bodies based on community practice, develop governance training designed to meet the needs of remote communities and review legislation to establish a basis for precursor bodies to School Councils.**
25. **Focus community engagement on existing agreements where these are valued and the implementation of specific Department strategic goals (e.g. residential facilities for secondary students).**
26. **Ensure that the Indigenous education unit has staff skilled and experienced in community engagement and able to support schools and communities in developing school improvement plans and establishing effective governance arrangements.**

### **Workforce planning**

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

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

### **Recommendations**

27. **Engage additional expertise and experience to develop a comprehensive workforce plan as outlined in this report, aligned with the Department's Strategic Plan, the Indigenous Education Strategic Plan proposed in this report and the Early Years Workforce Plan.**
28. **Strengthen programs to increase Indigenous teacher numbers and quality including:**
  - a. **a revised version of the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program meeting the criteria set out in this report; and**
  - b. **a rationalised approach to attracting university graduates and Indigenous members of the general workforce into teaching and supporting them in their training and induction.**
29. **Establish employment and performance management arrangements for assistant teachers consistent with those of other staff and ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and supported by all school staff, particularly classroom teachers.**
30. **Raise the quality of bush principals by:**

- a. strengthening initial training, including cultural competency training;
- b. developing a clear statement of the responsibilities of leadership in bush schools;
- c. establishing mentoring (professional and cultural) and coaching arrangements for all principals;
- d. establishing small groups of bush principals to engage in shared professional learning and instructional rounds in each other's schools;
- e. requiring applicants for senior positions to demonstrate a pattern of relevant professional learning, including specific required programs without which candidates should not be appointed;
- f. exploring the possibility of attracting a small group of outstanding principals to bush schools; and
- g. arranging early appointment and release of new bush appointees to ensure effective handover.

**31. Raise the quality of bush teachers by:**

- a. improving principal quality;
- b. enhancing the role of the local principal in staff selection;
- c. negotiating with Northern Territory teacher education institutions to ensure that courses take account of Department priorities and the requirements for bush teaching;
- d. attracting interstate pre-service teachers to undertake teaching rounds in Northern Territory bush schools;
- e. providing initial cultural training to all appointees; and
- f. ensuring that initiatives proposed in this report are supported with effective professional learning and coaching.

**32. Evaluate the implementation of Visible Learning in Central Region with a view to its implementation initially in all town schools in the Northern Territory, and later in all schools.**

**33. Ensure that allocations of Indigenous staff in ancillary positions (e.g. Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers) are based on need rather than historical practice.**

**34. Investigate the effectiveness of leadership support and development particularly for the provision of leadership support in bush schools.**

**35. Require all applicants for study leave to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.**

## **Finance**

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

The department should allocate funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain it for extended periods. This will support longer-term planning at all levels of the department. The department should also seek a single, integrated long-term funding agreement

with the Australian Government on Indigenous education, based on the goals in the strategic plan and allocated as flexibly as is consistent with effective accountability.

## **Recommendations**

- 36. Allocate long-term funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain a consistent direction across the life of the plan.**
- 37. Seek a single, integrated agreement with the Australian Government on funding for Indigenous education (and more broadly) committing both governments to:**
  - a. long-term goals and targets based on the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended by this review;**
  - b. reasonable certainty in funding over an extended period allowing long-term planning;**
  - c. flexibility in funding allocations by the Territory combined with effective accountability; and**
  - d. longitudinal evaluation of all key initiatives enabling progressive modification of the plan in response to evidence.**

DRAFT

## Chapter One: Introduction

### The scope of the review

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

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

The Review was to:

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

### Process

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

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

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

Requests for data and support from Departmental units imposed a significant workload at a difficult time for many units. The Reviewer wishes to thank those involved for a helpful and thorough response.

## The structure of the report

This report analyses the current state of play in the education of Indigenous young people in the Northern Territory, outlines findings, discusses the basis of those findings and makes recommendations. This introductory section includes a short reference to the *Learning Lessons* review and a list of review recommendations. The rest of the report starts with three preliminary sections intended to set the context for the key findings:

- a caveat about the areas that educators can and cannot control;
- a discussion of the demographics of the Northern Territory; and
- an outline of the review's approach to 'town' and 'bush' schools in the Northern Territory<sup>2</sup>.

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

- the structures and practices of the Department of Education (DoE);
- the early childhood years: the period before children enter school when much of their capacity to benefit from schooling is shaped;
- primary education, where children ought to gain the foundations on which a high quality education is built;
- secondary education, including middle schooling and senior schooling, when young people gain the learning that will shape their opportunities in life and give them power over their lives;
- attendance, which is the principal school-level barrier to improved outcomes;
- wellbeing and behaviour and their links to effective learning;
- community engagement: how schools can most effectively work with parents and communities to benefit the children they serve;
- workforce planning: teacher quality and supply, addressing the core lever for change in schools; and
- the financial basis for Northern Territory Government education, including relationships between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments.

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

This is the draft review report. The final version of the report, due in March 2014, will include further appendices containing more detailed data about some aspects of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory.

## Learning Lessons

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

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

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4 'Two systems' for the definitions of 'town' and 'bush' schools.

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

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

## Community survey

As part of the data-gathering exercise, a survey of attitudes to education was developed and made available online. Appendix 5 provides the results from the data questions. In addition, respondents were invited to provide written responses to a set of open-ended questions. These responses are in the process of being analysed by theme, and will be used in the final report.

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

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

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

## Limitations

The reviewer acknowledges a number of limitations to this report:

- initial data gathering in a small number of areas has not been completed. There is, for example, work still to be done on an examination of the effectiveness of Direct Instruction, closer study of Homeland schools, a further consideration of some aspects of community engagement and workforce planning, and programs for high achievers;
- the situation continues to change as work is undertaken. Recent releases of NAPLAN and NTCET results provide additional data that will be incorporated in the final report. The implications of the recent Australian Government announcement of the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy have not been fully analysed; and
- the timing of completion of this report was not ideal, since it coincided with end-of-year leave for some respondents. Fact checking with some areas of the Department and other agencies is not complete.

Nevertheless, the analysis and recommendations represent a considered, evidence-based position. It will benefit most from a broadly based and thorough consultation process.

## Approach to recommendations

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

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

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

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

## Chapter Two: What we can control

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

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

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

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

- about 50% of Indigenous children are raised in ‘community and family environments which are replete with early childhood adversity’ (ibid.: 3);
- high levels of family stress, sub-optimal nutrition and recurrent infection;
- higher rates of drug and alcohol use by Indigenous Australians;
- Indigenous women have a higher birth rate, have children at a younger age, are twice as likely to die in childbirth and markedly more likely to experience pregnancy complications and stress during pregnancy;
- about half of Indigenous women smoke during pregnancy;
- twice as many Indigenous babies (12%) are of low birth weight;
- Indigenous children are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to die before the age of 5 and 1.4 times as likely to be hospitalised;
- Indigenous children have higher rates of stunting, both underweight and obesity in urban areas, and nutritional anemia (AMA, 2013); and
- Indigenous children are dramatically more likely to suffer from hearing loss.

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

- the median personal weekly income of Indigenous Territorians 15 years and over is \$269, compared with \$925 for non-Indigenous residents (ABS, 2011); and
- the employment to population ratio<sup>3</sup> in the Northern Territory was 33 per cent for Indigenous and 77% for non-Indigenous people in 2011. In very remote locations it is below 30%.

McKenzie compared very remote schools in the Northern Territory with those in Queensland and Western Australia that the MySchool website lists as ‘similar’. The research found that Northern Territory had many more non-English speaking households and a much less educated adult population. These factors are among the best predictors of school attendance and reading and writing scores (McKenzie, J, discussed in Silburn et al, 2011: 100-101).

<sup>3</sup> The ratio refers to the number of employed people expressed as a percentage of those aged 15 years and over



Clear evidence of the extent of the resulting disadvantage is provided in the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), a population measure of how children are developing in communities across Australia<sup>4</sup>. In summary terms:

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

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

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

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<sup>4</sup> More detailed analysis of the AEDI is provided in Chapter 6: Early Childhood.

## Chapter Three: Demographics<sup>5</sup>

To a substantial extent, the policies, practices, structures and traditions of education are a function of geography and demography. The Northern Territory has a small, diverse population spread over an area of 1.35 million square kilometres, 1.7 times larger than New South Wales and six times the size of Victoria, but with a population at the time of the 2011 census of only 228,265.

The clearest measure of the geographic challenge facing the jurisdiction is its population density of 0.17 people per km<sup>2</sup> or 5.7 km<sup>2</sup> per person. Victoria is 147 times more densely populated and New South Wales 54 times.

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

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

### Economic factors

This population includes the most disadvantaged groups of Australians. The median personal weekly income of Indigenous Territorians 15 years and over is \$269, compared with \$925 for non-Indigenous residents. Indigenous households made up 34% of households with the lowest household income, but only 12% of households with the highest household income<sup>6</sup>.

The employment to population ratio<sup>7</sup> in the Northern Territory was 33% for Indigenous and 77% for non-Indigenous people in 2011. For the Indigenous population, the ratio in remote and very remote Northern Territory is below 30%.

### Location and mobility

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

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, data are derived from the ABS Census figures for 2011, 2006 and 2001.

<sup>6</sup> 'Lowest household income' is defined as the lowest four bands of income in the 2011 census, between \$0 and \$399 household income per week. 'Highest household income' is defined as the four highest bands in the census, from \$1500 per week to over \$3000 per week.

<sup>7</sup> The ratio refers to employed people expressed as a percentage of those aged 15 years and over.

Northern Territory, with approximately 40,000 in very remote areas, 15,000 in remote areas and 14,000 in the Darwin area.

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

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

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

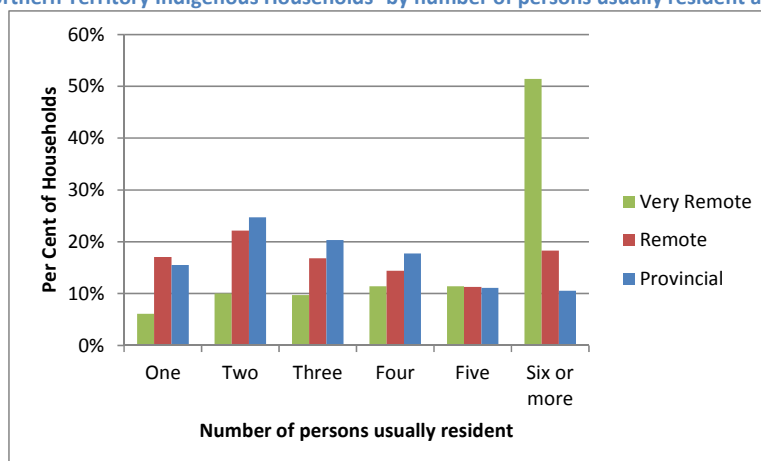
Table 1 – Student numbers by geolocation and Indigeneity

Indigenous Status	Geolocation	Enrolments
Indigenous	Provincial	3436
	Remote	2962
	Very Remote	8351
	Total	14,749
Total	Provincial	17530
	Remote	6283
	Very Remote	9610
	Total	33,423

## Social structures

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

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

Figure 1 – Northern Territory Indigenous Households<sup>8</sup> by number of persons usually resident and Geolocation

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

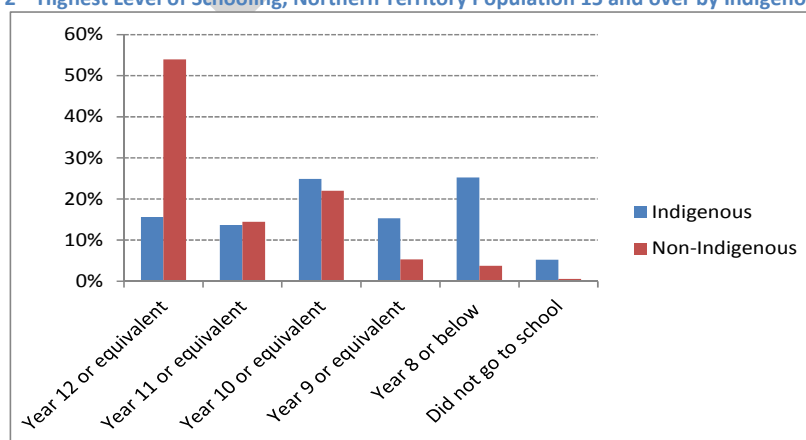
## Internet connectivity

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

## Schooling

Only 29% of the Northern Territory Indigenous population attends school beyond Year 10. The majority (54%) of the non-Indigenous population complete Year 12.

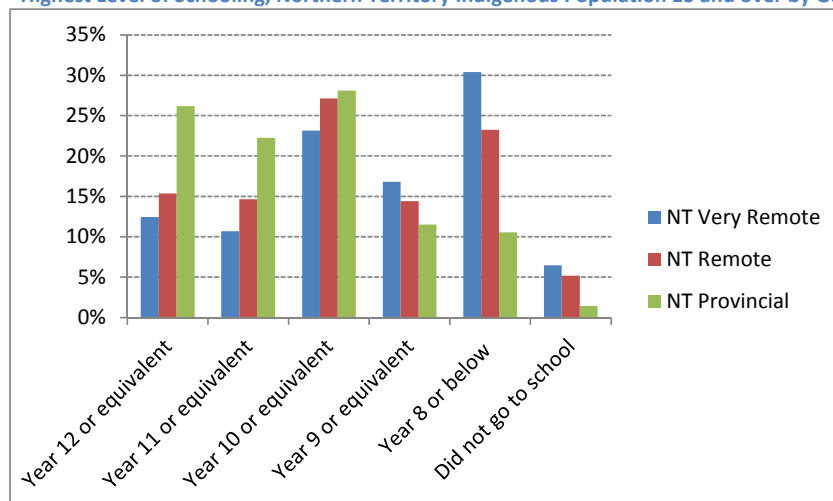
Figure 2 – Highest Level of Schooling, Northern Territory Population 15 and over by Indigenous Status



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

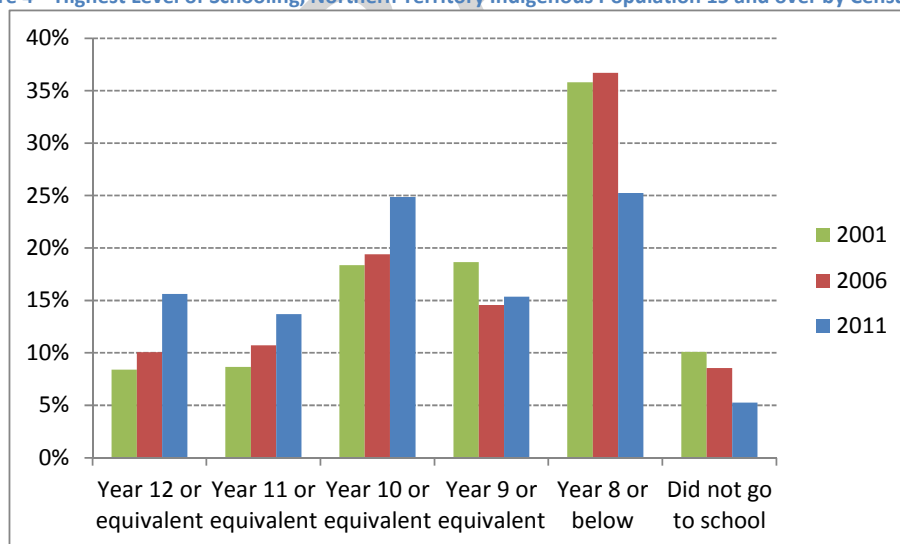
The level of schooling completed for the Northern Territory Indigenous population is higher for the provincial cohort than for the remote and very remote cohorts.

Figure 3 – Highest Level of Schooling, Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over by Geolocation



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

Figure 4 – Highest Level of Schooling, Northern Territory Indigenous Population 15 and over by Census Year



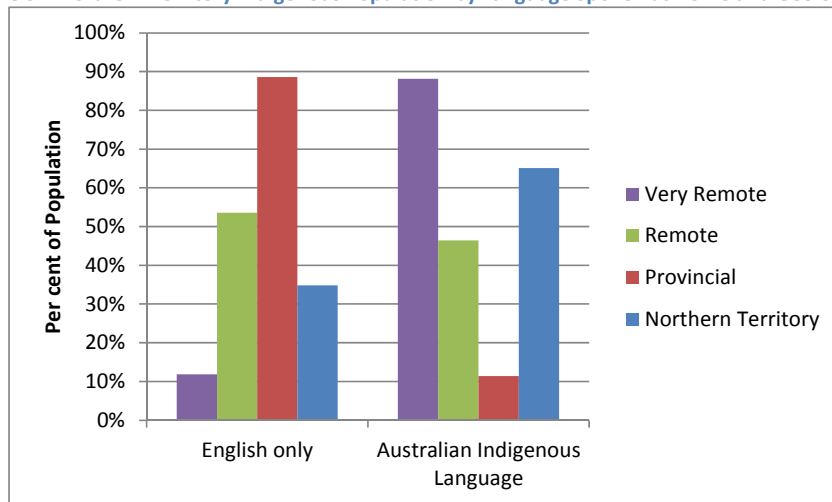
There are also substantial differences in attainment of formal qualifications and levels of achievement on such measures as National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores. These are discussed elsewhere in the report (see Chapters 7 and 8).

## Language use

Language use is also a factor. A minority (35%) of the Northern Territory Indigenous population speak English at home, with the majority (65%) speaking an Australian Indigenous language. While

almost 36% of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory speak English only, more than 13% report speaking at least one Indigenous language and English not well or not at all (ABS, 2006). Many people speak more than one Indigenous language. This is, however, strongly differentiated by remoteness. Of the provincial Indigenous population 89% predominately speak English in the home compared to only 12% of the very remote Indigenous population.

Figure 5 – Northern Territory Indigenous Population by Language Spoken at Home and Geolocation



## Chapter Four: Two systems

One of the striking outcomes of the review's analysis is the understanding that Government schooling in the Northern Territory consists in effect of two education systems. One of these systems is concentrated in the towns (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek). The other is concentrated in other remote and very remote communities. A list of schools notionally distributed across the two categories is at Appendix 6. The argument for two systems is based on dramatically different patterns of enrolment, attendance and achievement across the two groups of schools, matched by patterns of socio-economic disadvantage. In this chapter and throughout the report, the largely urban system is described as 'town' and the largely remote and very remote system is described as 'bush'. The term 'bush schools' may not be considered appropriate, but no alternative term has yet been identified.

### Terminology used in the report

Although the categories 'town' and 'bush' cut across geolocations, much of the discussion in this chapter is based on geolocations. This is because key data are collected by geolocation, and there is considerable overlap between the very remote geolocation and bush schools. The review report uses several different forms of terminology to refer to schools and those who work and learn in them:

- where the report concerns data collected by geolocation, it uses the language of geolocation: 'provincial', 'remote' and 'very remote';
- where the discussion concerns analysis or recommendations for the two 'systems', the terms 'bush' and 'town' are used to define them. The basis for allocation of schools to these categories is outlined in this chapter; and
- where the report makes general points about schools in relatively isolated locations (ie all remote and very remote schools), it sometimes uses the term 'remote' as a generic descriptor. Where 'remote' is used alone, it is always used in this broad, generic sense (and not to refer specifically to the remote geolocation).

### Schools

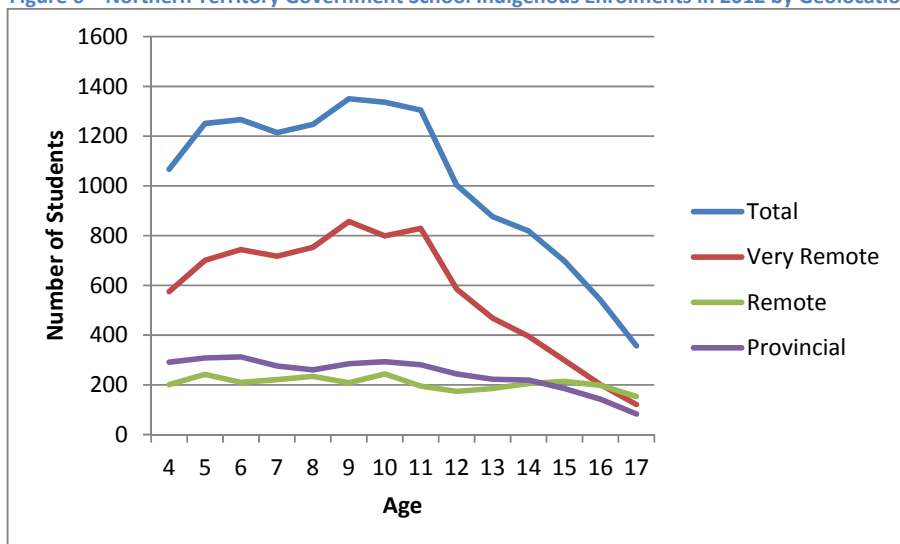
Northern Territory schools are classified by geolocation. Leaving aside distance education providers there are 151 schools, of which 43 are provincial (all in Darwin and Palmerston), 28 remote and 80 very remote. This review uses the characteristics discussed in this chapter to allocate these schools to the two categories, town schools and bush schools. Schools demonstrating the characteristics associated with greater remoteness (lower enrolment, attendance and achievement and higher socio-economic disadvantage) are classed as bush schools.

The report identifies 86 bush schools, consisting of 76 of the 80 very remote schools (the four schools in Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek are categorised as town schools) along with 10 remote schools. It also identifies 65 town schools. As explained in Appendix 6, there are some schools that sit on the cusp between these two classifications. The three distance education providers are unclassified.

## Enrolments

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

Figure 6 – Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2012 by Geolocation

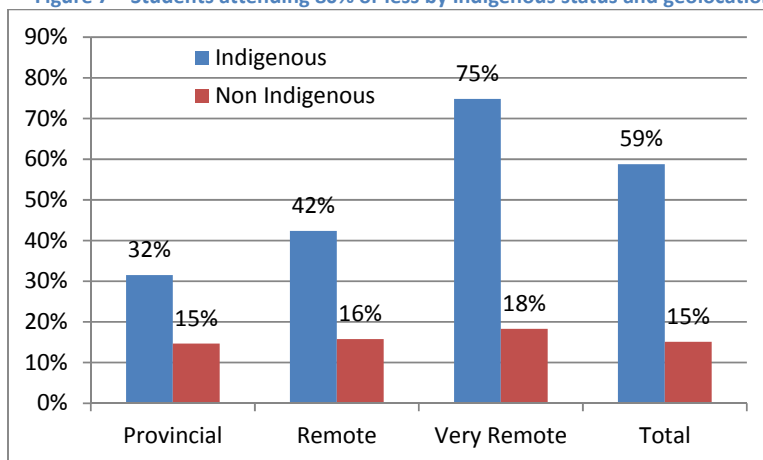


Source: Schools Age Grade Census data

## Attendance

There is an equivalent difference in patterns of attendance. The average Indigenous attendance rate in very remote schools is about 58%, compared with almost 83% in provincial areas and 78% in remote schools. The review has taken the view (see Chapter 9) that an attendance rate of at least 80% is the condition for a student to achieve effective learning. In very remote settings, 75% of Indigenous students do not meet this benchmark.

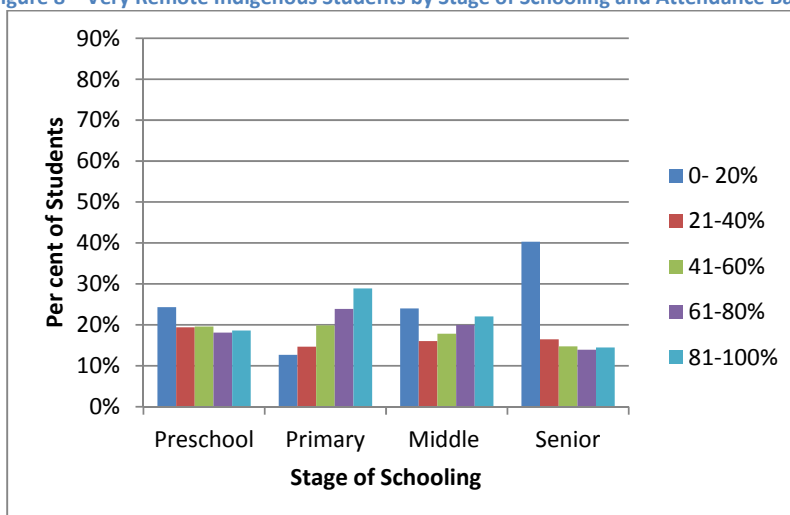
Figure 7 – Students attending 80% or less by Indigenous status and geolocation





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

Figure 8 – Very Remote Indigenous Students by Stage of Schooling and Attendance Band<sup>9</sup>



Source: DoE data from Student Activity v3.0 database

## Achievement

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

Figure 4 represents the results. The red cells are those where the Northern Territory does worse than the rest of Australia; the green cells represent better performance in the Northern Territory: the darker the colour, the greater the difference in achievement. Each cell shows the result for a specific cohort (e.g. very remote Indigenous Year 3 students) on a specific NAPLAN domain compared with equivalent students in the rest of Australia.

The top half of Figure 9 refers to comparisons of Indigenous student performance. It shows that the Northern Territory Indigenous cohort performs worse than equivalent cohorts in the rest of Australia across all geolocations, year levels and domains. No group of Indigenous students in the Northern Territory does as well as its equivalent in the rest of Australia.

By geolocation, however, some stark differences emerge. In provincial and remote settings, the underperformance of Northern Territory students is relatively minor. While the difference amounts to up to a year of schooling in a small number of cells, it is mostly within a few months of schooling.

<sup>9</sup> Note data is for the 2013 school year with partial results for term 4

The largest gaps are for the very remote Indigenous cohort. Here the variations are dramatically negative. To give a rough sense of the significance of these numbers, and taking the writing results as the sample case, a difference of 113 points at Year 3 is a difference equivalent to more than two years of schooling. A difference of 137 points at Year 9 is equivalent to about five years of schooling. So very remote Indigenous Year 9 students are five years behind very remote Indigenous students in the rest of Australia in development of their writing.

**Figure 9 – NAPLAN data by geolocation, Indigeneity, Year level and NAPLAN domain, comparing Northern Territory with the rest of Australian minus Northern Territory**

Geolocation	Indigenous Status	Year Level	Domain				
			Reading	Writing	Spelling	G&P	Numeracy
Provincial	Indigenous	3	-10	-20	-8	-23	-12
Provincial	Indigenous	5	-13	-16	-12	-15	-14
Provincial	Indigenous	7	-10	-15	-22	-11	-13
Provincial	Indigenous	9	-38	-37	-49	-33	-30
Remote	Indigenous	3	-22	-33	-17	-33	-20
Remote	Indigenous	5	-15	-10	-16	-8	-8
Remote	Indigenous	7	-26	-58	-41	-28	-23
Remote	Indigenous	9	-25	-39	-32	-20	-9
Very Remote	Indigenous	3	-86	-113	-72	-123	-54
Very Remote	Indigenous	5	-93	-97	-92	-95	-48
Very Remote	Indigenous	7	-79	-120	-121	-88	-54
Very Remote	Indigenous	9	-76	-137	-120	-65	-36
Provincial	Non-Indigenous	3	-13	-12	-7	-16	-10
Provincial	Non-Indigenous	5	-11	-3	-8	-12	-10
Provincial	Non-Indigenous	7	-8	7	-6	-4	-7
Provincial	Non-Indigenous	9	-5	1	-10	-7	-6
Remote	Non-Indigenous	3	17	7	12	17	6
Remote	Non-Indigenous	5	30	20	21	27	17
Remote	Non-Indigenous	7	13	9	8	16	8
Remote	Non-Indigenous	9	16	15	11	14	14
Very Remote	Non-Indigenous	3	14	4	11	10	25
Very Remote	Non-Indigenous	5	32	35	22	33	31
Very Remote	Non-Indigenous	7	9	-1	-1	6	10
Very Remote	Non-Indigenous	9	14	-3	-10	-2	16

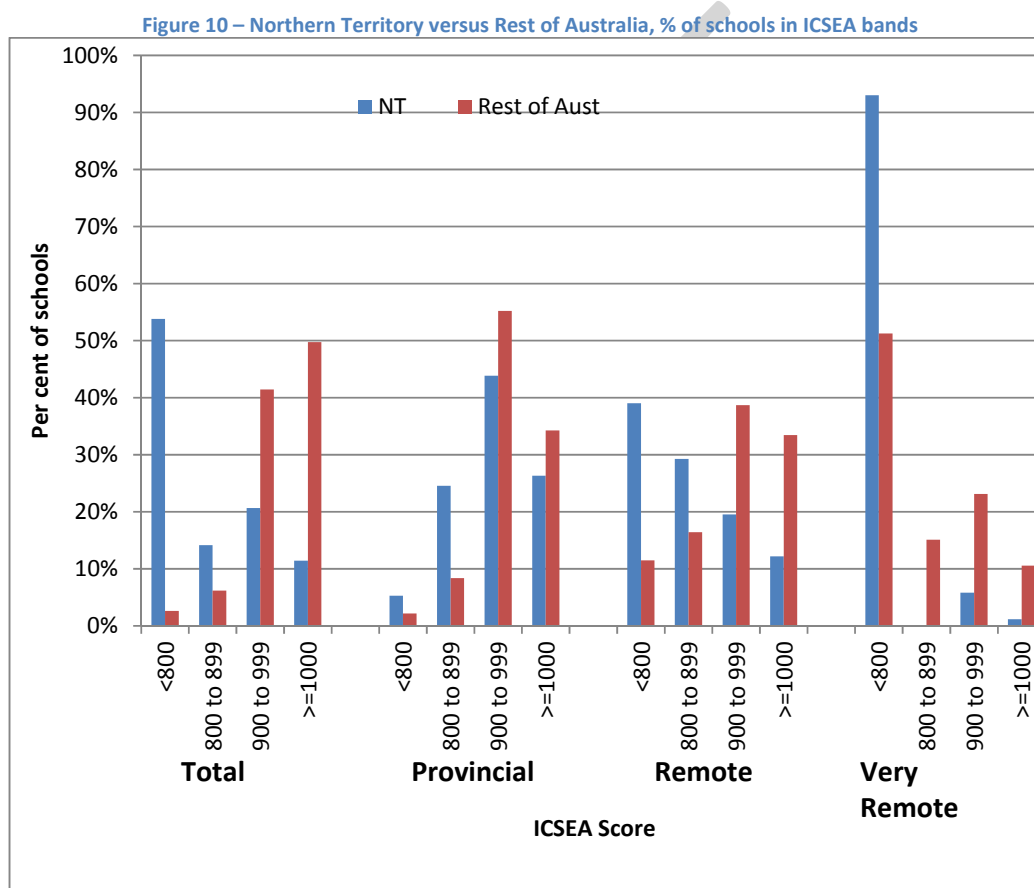
The bottom half of the graphic shows results for non-Indigenous students. On balance, Northern Territory non-Indigenous students in provincial settings (i.e. Darwin) are slightly behind their national counterparts, while remote and very remote non-Indigenous Northern Territory students are mostly somewhat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

This snapshot of data about enrolment, attendance and achievement provides a summary of the evidence that the Northern Territory has two systems of education, broadly broken down into town schools, which are not doing badly by comparison with the rest of Australia,

and bush schools which are doing dramatically worse. When the data discussed here are compared with Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, it is clear that very remote Indigenous students in the Northern Territory would perform below the bottom of the PISA scale, in achievement territory that would normally be seen only in third world countries (ACER, 2011).

## Socio-economic disadvantage

Northern Territory schools are disproportionately represented in the lower ranges of scores on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). The graph below indicates that over 50% of schools as a whole are in the bottom category (below 800) by comparison with a national proportion of about 2%. This is principally the result of the fact that 93% of very remote schools in the Northern Territory fall into this category. In addition to the other factors already discussed, very remote schools in the Northern Territory are dealing with Australia's most disadvantaged population.



## Conclusion

Why is the argument about two systems important? The answer is provided by a significant report released by McKinsey & Company in 2010. This was an attempt to identify how to improve education systems. It examined 20 education systems from around the world, seeking how to 'raise the bar and close the gap' for all students (Mourshed et al, 2010: 6).

For the purposes of this review, the key finding in the report concerned the distinction between reform approaches found to be effective in low- and high-performing systems. In summary, poorer performing systems (including bush schools in the Northern Territory) do best when they tighten control and provide technical training. As the report argues:

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

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

This is a useful way of thinking about how to take action for improvement in the 'two systems'. While the Northern Territory has a dramatically different economic background from the kinds of countries that generate levels of school achievement seen among Indigenous children in bush schools in the Territory, this economic advantage has not flowed through into educational achievement. The various phases of reform in recent years in the Northern Territory have not achieved the kinds of outcomes that sponsors were hoping for, or the kinds of improvements catalogued in the McKinsey report, among Indigenous children in bush locations.

It is the argument of this review that different forms of performance improvement are likely to be effective in the different school settings within the Northern Territory. Poorer performing systems in the McKinsey sample focused first on achieving basic literacy and numeracy levels. Only when those goals were achieved did they focus on:

how to configure the foundations of their system, including the creation of systems for data tracking, teacher accountability, finance, organization, and pedagogy (ibid.: 34).

Schools are not entirely responsible for the situation described in this chapter. As was noted earlier, there are multiple factors of disadvantage that affect their capacity to generate substantial educational outcomes. But the current state of affairs for bush students must change, and this will require changes in the way the Department of Education and its schools are organised and operate.

It is not suggested that prescriptions for improvement in the bush regions of the Northern Territory should be identical with those for third world countries. But approaches should also differ from those for higher performing systems, such as the other system represented in town schools in the Northern Territory. This report seeks to propose initiatives that will take account of this critical difference.

## **Recommendation**

- 1. Recognise the differing capacities and circumstances of town and bush schools and vary implementation requirements to reflect these differences, including mandating evidence-based approaches for bush schools.**

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## Chapter Five: The education system

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

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

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

### ***Learning Lessons***

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

### **A clear strategic direction**

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

The document would be better if it next identified a few big strategies that the system is going to pursue to improve literacy and numeracy performances across the Northern Territory....My first recommendation would be to focus strategic planning for improved literacy numeracy on what the system is going to do...identifying a few major ways in which the system can make a difference (system 'strategies') and

elaborating in more detail how the system will pursue these strategic priorities (Masters, 2011: 16).

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

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

The present review has, however, identified the continuing absence of a clear strategic direction in the area of Indigenous education. Department strategy in the area of Indigenous education, as reflected, for example, in the 2006-2009 Indigenous Education Strategic Plan (DEET, 2006) is comprehensive. The goals in the plan cover effectively all possible action that the Department might take. Because of this, they do not make clear what will not be done, or where resources will be differentially allocated. Although there is no current strategic plan for Indigenous education the new Department of Education Strategic Plan 2013-2015 (DoE, 2013A) is similar. While targets and measures are in the process of being set, and will go some way to focus the plan, the goals seem to give free rein to almost any approach that someone thinks might work.

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

A key requirement for effective system leadership is a set of clear goals that make clear what matters. These will be whole-organisation goals that drive activity at every level of the system. Actions at central office, regional, school and classroom levels should be driven by this framework of goals. When a new strategic direction is set, some activities should stop or change direction. Others should be strengthened. Resources should be reallocated, and in some cases resourcing should cease for some areas. Unless strategy is followed through into resourcing, staff responsibilities, implementation, monitoring and accountability, nothing is likely to change.

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

Strategy should also define, even if by implication, what will not be done. The present review, for example, is clear that literacy should be the priority in primary schools. It argues that numeracy can wait. In secondary schools, the review would resolve the tension

between quality of delivery and provision in every town by opting for quality. These are difficult and challenging proposals. That is the purpose of strategy.

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

## Long term planning

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

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

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

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

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

## Departmental structure

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

The alignment of effort from central office to regions to schools and classrooms will be essential to the success of the regional model. Over-delegation to regional offices is a potential risk. So is unnecessary duplication of effort across regions. The regional model is likely to be most effective if it includes a strong role for the centre in setting



Territory-wide learning expectations, providing high-quality classroom resources, providing access to high-quality professional development, and closely monitoring trends and performances across all schools (Masters, 2011: 33-34).

There remain unresolved issues in the relationship between regions/directorates and the centre. Some regions have, for example, supported particular approaches to literacy. The Barkly has moved towards the adoption of *Scaffolded Literacy* (which is a rebadged Accelerated Literacy); Alice Springs has reached agreement with schools about the use of *PM Benchmarks*; Katherine has focused on phonemic awareness. Within the current framework, the review supports decisions like this as a legitimate effort to achieve consistency and economies of scale in the delivery of support, at least at regional level. A clear Department strategy would, however, make such approaches redundant.

The whole education system should adopt a consistent approach to key areas for action in Indigenous education. The Department should provide regions with both a clear policy framework and a clearly defined role in working with schools to reach agreement on how agreed approaches will be pursued.

This should take account of differences between schools: as proposed above in the discussion of the 'two systems' idea, small and remote schools need a different program from town schools. But these variations are mostly system-wide, not regional: a bush primary school in Alice Springs region is likely to share more with a bush school in Katherine region than it does with a large primary school in Alice Springs township. So the Department could specify mandatory elements for bush schools, and different elements, some mandatory, for town schools, to reflect the differences between kinds of schools in policy implementation. But it should ignore the regularly expressed view that each school is its own micro-climate, requiring every decision to be made locally.

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

## **Management of Indigenous education**

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

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

The management of Indigenous education in the Department is a key issue for the future. Following this review there is a need for a strong unit to lead the area and monitor progress with implementation. The unit should be responsible for development and implementation of a strategic plan in the area, development of policy and guidelines for schools, supporting the conduct of a number of reviews and trials as outlined in this report, leading community engagement initiatives, monitoring and reporting on progress and identifying areas for further improvement across the Department.

Because this is a key area for strategy in the Department and for Government, a dedicated senior official should lead the unit. This leadership role will take responsibility for developing the plan and ensuring that its intentions are effectively delivered. It will be essential that the official has status and authority within the department equivalent to leaders of other major units because the responsibilities fall across policy and operational units, regions and schools. For these reasons the position should be in the Executive Contract Officer scale.

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

## Implementation

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

This is true at the level of the whole Department. The mandatory adoption of Accelerated Literacy, then its termination as a Department priority, offers a clear example. More recently, the implementation of the College model is instructive. The Department of Education and Training announced in 2010 its intention to establish a College model to support educational reform and improvement. An evaluation report published in 2013 drew attention to limited successes and a long list of problems and issues. The College experiment now seems to have been abandoned. The key lesson from this experience is the need to take the time for careful, detailed planning and consultation on major reforms so that their potential can be captured and problems can be identified and managed ahead of implementation. This cuts across the desire for early announcements and quick results.

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

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

In a transformed human service system, services are program-centered or practice-centered rather than practitioner-centered. That is, well-specified practices and

programs...are chosen to solve particular problems and are implemented with fidelity in organizations and systems designed to facilitate the implementation of those practices and programs (Fixsen et al, 2005: 72).

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

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

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

The research indicates that funding is required for:

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

Implementation can be improved through:

- a clear strategy that limits the range and number of initiatives;
- explicit statements of responsibilities at each level of the system;
- clarity about which programs and approaches are mandatory;
- phasing of implementation (through trials and introduction of initiatives over time) to ensure that implementation load is managed;
- providing substantial support for priority programs including training, coaching and continuing funding (and not supporting other programs);
- providing clear program specification in priority areas and identified areas of weakness;
- aligning appraisal to delivery of required programs; and
- treating bush schools and town schools differently, consistent with the 'two systems' approach.

## Support for schools

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Data and evidence**

Measuring achievement against strategic goals depends on good data and evidence. The Northern Territory Department has struggled for years with the challenges of distributed schools systems, poor data quality and incomplete data. It now has in place a sophisticated, flexible, robust and user-centred data system and high quality validated data in many areas

including enrolment, attendance and significant areas of student achievement. It also has a systemic commitment to develop additional datasets and use data for monitoring and planning.

There remain areas, however, in which the Department has yet to accept a collective responsibility for data management. One pressing area concerns data about what is happening in schools. This report noted above that there were many key areas in which there were no common expectations or requirements of schools. Similarly, in some core areas, the system still has no common expectations about the categories of data that schools should collect and report on. The Department does not have systematic, comprehensive data about core issues in schools including for example, curriculum and assessment. The engine is now in place to manage these categories of data; what is required is a management decision to collect and use data categories that are critical to the enterprise.

The review has also identified a consistent view that despite continuing efforts to undertake evaluation, there are many program areas lacking clear and unambiguous evidence to measure success. This was certainly the impression of the reviewer. In many key areas data about effectiveness were uneven, unreliable or absent. This reflects the difficulty in collecting data and conducting robust evaluation in the Northern Territory: the same constraints and barriers that inhibit the delivery of education to Indigenous children also impede data collection and the management of effective evaluation. As the Australian Medical Association (AMA) notes, the common problem with the evaluation of intervention programs designed for Indigenous people is 'high rates of attrition, casting doubt on [their] effectiveness and wider applicability' (AMA, 2013: 7). Similarly, the Maximising Improvements in Literacy and Numeracy (MILaN) review referred to 'the shortage of large scale assessments' giving school leaders reliable evidence about what works (Tremblay, 2012: 25).

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

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

## Recommendations

- 2. Develop a 10-year strategic plan for Indigenous education with long term goals and interim targets and ensure that it drives action at regional and school level.**
- 3. Establish a strong Indigenous Education unit led by a dedicated senior official to develop the strategic plan, design trials, lead community engagement, support and monitor implementation and report on progress.**

4. Plan implementation carefully, aiming for slow and measured approaches to ensure the resolution of technical, financial, legal, structural, governance and staffing issues including organisational and reporting relationships.
5. Conduct formal evaluation of all major initiatives to collect evidence on progress of each initiative, and:
  - a. report against goals in the strategic plan;
  - b. specify data required from schools; and
  - c. ensure that all research including that conducted by external agencies is aligned with Department priorities.

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## Chapter Six: Early childhood

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

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

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

### ***Learning Lessons***

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

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

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

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

By 2005 the Australian and Northern Territory Governments were funding initiatives to increase access to early years programs throughout the Northern Territory. The *Learning*

*Lessons Implementation Status Report* described the mobile preschools initiative and a rollout of childcare facilities and community initiatives to provide health promotion, care and early learning (LLISC, 2005).

## Measures of early childhood disadvantage

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

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

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

Just over 38% of Northern Territory Indigenous children were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (11.8% across Australia, 9.6% of non-Indigenous children in the Northern Territory, 26% of Indigenous children nationally). This means that these children are highly likely to need some kind of special support to keep up with their Year 1 classmates.

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

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



Table 2 – Northern Territory student vulnerability by Geolocation

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

Indigenous children are particularly vulnerable in language and cognitive skills.

Table 3 – Northern Territory Indigenous and non-Indigenous developmental vulnerability by domain

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

## Early childhood programs in the Northern Territory

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

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

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

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

Silburn et al, in a major review of the literature on English language acquisition and instructional approaches, offer insights into the complexity of early language learning in the kinds of contexts typical of the Northern Territory. The paper notes that better levels of English on entry to school lead to better educational outcomes:

This...highlights the importance of promoting early language and cognitive stimulation for all children from birth, through infancy and through their pre- and primary school years (Silburn et al 2011: 47).

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

...the optimum time for children to commence second language learning is the same time they begin learning their first language ....[E]xposure to two languages from early in childhood has cognitive, social and educational benefits (ibid.).

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

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

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

Integrating services continues to be a priority to ensure young children and families are engaged in early learning and care programs. Key initiatives include Families as First Teachers, mobile pre-schools and integrated service delivery through the Child and Family Centre initiative. The Northern Territory Government will need to work closely with the Australian Government to streamline and guarantee targeted and ongoing funding if the success of these early years programs is to be sustained.

### **Families as First Teachers**

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

In 2012 the program engaged 2455 children and 2294 adults in the 45 communities it serves. Given that there are fewer than 6000 Indigenous children aged 0-4 in the Northern Territory (ABS, 2011), and that the program is only available in very remote settings, this suggests that

approximately 70% of eligible children in serviced communities are involved to some extent in FaFT.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Despite the evidence for success, we note two significant issues that were raised by respondents in the review process. In a number of interviews conducted by the review there were comments about uneven implementation of FaFT. One respondent estimated that the program was being implemented fully effectively in about 50% of cases. It was beyond the scope of the review to collect sufficiently fine-grained data to determine the truth of these suggestions, but weak or uneven implementation of programs was a strong theme in the review. The critical factors are likely to be the support of school leadership and staff capacity and training. Some respondents claimed that a significant proportion of Indigenous program staff did not have access to accredited training, although they were offered substantial professional development. The development by the Department of the Early Childhood Workforce Plan 2011–2021, reflecting the research indication that early childhood reforms will be ineffective 'unless workforce training issues are addressed' (Moss et al: 4).

The review supports the rollout of FaFT. It is my view that the current implementation program has probably reached almost as many sites as is feasible in Northern Territory very remote settings. In urban schools with a high Indigenous population, where FaFT is not supported, it is important to ensure that there is an evidence-based early childhood program with the characteristics of FaFT. An internal review should be undertaken to determine:

- whether there are any remaining communities with a target group large enough to support extension of FaFT;
- whether there are sites that have not yet achieved effective implementation or staff training and what remedial action is required; and
- how early childhood programs linked with urban schools with a high Indigenous population can be supported to access the evidence-based approaches and resources of FaFT.

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

### **Pre-schools**

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

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

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

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

leadership of the importance of managing the transition to preschool is seen as a fundamental issue in supporting children and families to engage with school.

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

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

The second issue concerns the content of pre-school programs. A number of respondents noted that the play-based approach supported by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) could be ineffective in developing early English literacy in young Indigenous children who do not speak English and have not had the kinds of pre-literacy experiences characteristic of more advantaged children. This reflects one finding in a review of mobile pre-schools, which used a classroom observation approach to measure teacher skills in mobile pre-school literacy teaching. The review found that literacy knowledge was the lowest represented skill set, with a score of only 26% (compared with 83% for 'respect'). The report notes:

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

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

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

It is notable that the document makes no mention of more formal or technical aspects of literacy, which are likely to be a key part (though only part) of what young Indigenous children need. For these children, more formal exposure to phonemic awareness and early

literacy experiences would be beneficial in addition to informal and play-based and child-driven approaches and a rich language environment.

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

This review proposes that work be undertaken by the Department, using the services of experts in pre-schooling and early literacy, to develop advice to pre-school teachers about the content and sequencing of a more explicit phonemic awareness program in pre-schools, along with approaches to delivering the program that sit within the EYLF. The program should be designed with Indigenous children in mind, and specifically Indigenous non-literate children without oral English. It should be designed for delivery to and by assistant teachers as well as teachers principally, but not only, in bush schools. The work should be reviewed by the early years team, curriculum literacy personnel and School Operations prior to use. It should be implemented with professional learning support for pre-school teachers and assistant teachers.

## Child and Family Centres

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We understand that there is at present no certainty about the availability of operational funding to ensure the effective implementation of the CFCs. The Department and the Australian Government should work together to ensure that this funding is secured. The review proposes that the five CFCs be the site of trials to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of an integrated model of service delivery involving at least health and education, with the potential to further integrate children's services.

## Recommendations

- 6. Maintain Families as First Teachers (FaFT) in its current form pending data from the evaluation consider additional target communities, improve implementation where weaknesses are identified and improve the training profile of Indigenous staff.**
- 7. Strengthen parent engagement by mandating a school-driven transition program from FaFT to pre-school and from pre-school to school that:**
  - a. provides ongoing support for both children and parents;**
  - b. supports parents to understand the developmental stages of their children; and**
  - c. provides opportunities for parents to engage with their child's education.**
- 8. Define appropriate phonemic awareness skills and teaching strategies and implement them in pre-schools.**



9. **Seek adequate funding for the implementation and operation of the Child and Family Centres and evaluate their effectiveness as a mode for integrated service delivery.**

DRAFT

## Chapter Seven: Primary education

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

Work undertaken by the review indicates that factors contributing to the difficulty in providing primary education in remote and very remote schools include:

- matters that schools cannot control, such as poor attendance, lack of an English or literacy home environment, health issues and social dislocation in the communities from which children come;
- the failure of the Department of Education to make clear and implement the non-negotiables in primary education;
- no common approach to systematically measuring and teaching phonemic awareness and associated decoding concepts; and
- a desire to support first language maintenance or cultural matters at the expense of English literacy.

### ***Learning Lessons***

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

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

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

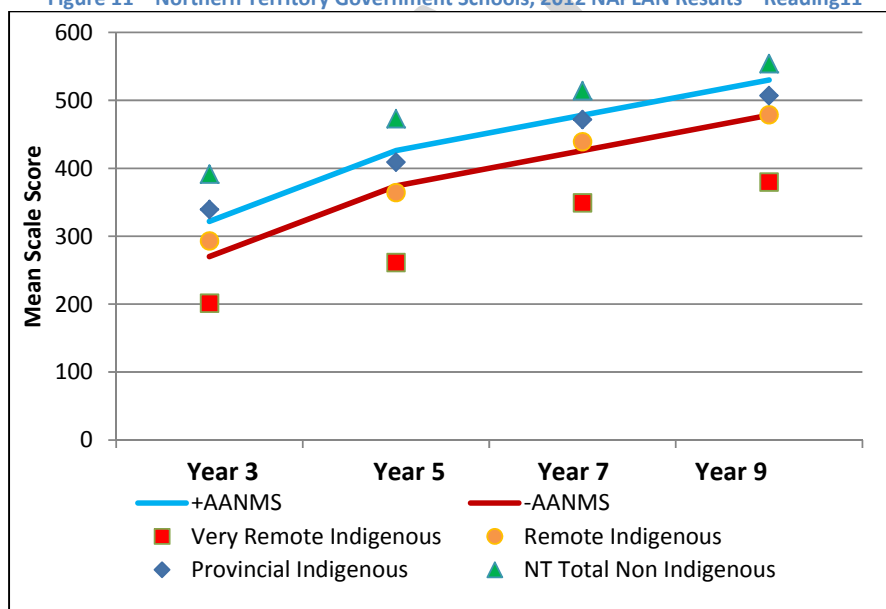
The LLISC report (LLISC, 2005) indicated that ESL was a priority and the Accelerated Literacy program (which Collins had noted positively) was being rolled out to urban and remote schools. The Department claimed that the development of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) ‘ensures consistency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

## The situation now

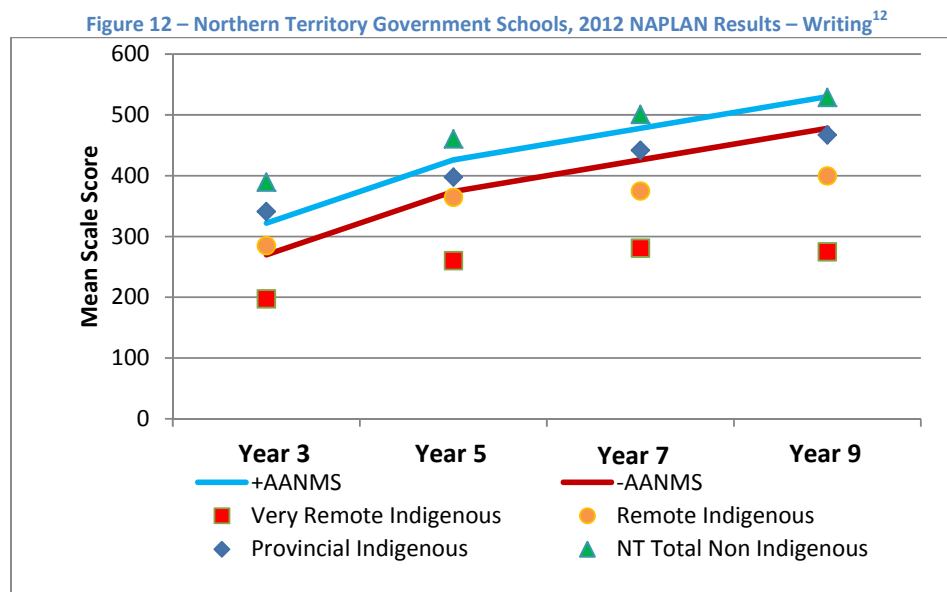
NAPLAN results for recent years mirror those reported by Collins, suggesting that initiatives in the intervening years have not had the anticipated effect. Figure 11 and Figure 12 show the average 2012 NAPLAN Mean Scale Scores for Indigenous students by geolocation (and non-Indigenous students across the Territory for comparison purposes) in reading and writing (more detailed information is provided in Appendix 4: Students). The key points to be made are:

- the non-Indigenous student cohort tends to sit above the national minimum standards (with the exception of Year 9 writing);
- the provincial Indigenous student cohort tends to sit within the at-national-minimum-standard band (with the exception of Year 3 reading and writing which were higher and Year 9 writing which was lower);
- the remote Indigenous student cohort tends to sit close to the bottom of the at-national-minimum-standard band (except for Years 7 and 9 writing which are significantly lower); and
- the very remote Indigenous student cohort is well below national minimum standards for each year level and domain, and in the case of writing the gap widens dramatically over time.

Figure 11 – Northern Territory Government Schools, 2012 NAPLAN Results – Reading<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> +AANMS represents the line above which students are achieving results above national minimum standards.  
 -AANMS represents the line below which students are failing to achieve national minimum standards.  
 Results between -AANMS and +AANMS indicate achievement at national minimum standards.



Source: DECS NAPLAN School Summary Results data

Figure 13 shows the percentage of Year 3 and 5 students achieving AANMS (at or above national minimum standard) from 2008-2012. About 90% of non-Indigenous students achieve AANMS in each domain. Provincial Indigenous students are between 70% and 80% in both domains in Year 3 and between 60% and 70% in Year 5. Remote students average just over 60% at Year 3 and between 40% and 50% in Year 5. Year 3 very remote students average around 30% in reading and 20-30% in writing, dropping to about 10% in both domains at Year 5.

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

Figure 13 – Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Indigenous students by Geolocation<sup>13</sup>



Source: DoE NAPLAN School Summary Results data

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

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

## Literacy in the Northern Territory

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

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

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

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

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

One literacy approach that has been tried in the Territory over a long period is bilingual education (or, more correctly, biliteracy education): the use of first language instruction to access curriculum content and to learn the structures of literacy, as a means of access to English literacy. This review does not support the continuation of biliteracy programs. While there is evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches in some settings, the evidence does not support a continued focus in the Northern Territory. The lack of trained first-language teachers reduces its likely effectiveness and the level of resourcing required for effectiveness means it is not sustainable.

The teaching by schools of students’ first languages in oral form is supported by the review,

but only where it is feasible and appropriate (i.e. where there is an extant, practiced language and where trained teachers are available). This should, however, be regarded as part of the Languages component of the Australian Curriculum, not as part of the general literacy program. It should not occupy time usually given to literacy.

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

The review is concerned that the EAL/D area in the Northern Territory has strayed some distance from its origins, and is now associated with cultural and first language maintenance as much as with the explicit teaching of English to children who arrive at school not speaking English.

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

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

## What we already know

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

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

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

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

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

## How to proceed

Effective whole-school literacy approaches for the Northern Territory would need to include all of the essential curriculum elements: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and oral language. Recommended changes in approach will require significant professional development, coaching and feedback. Approaches recommended for bush schools, however, should be easy to implement and require relatively limited training loads for teachers. The experience of Accelerated Literacy and other programs is that complex programs requiring high fidelity in implementation are likely to fail.

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

During this period, it is recommended that implementation of the Australian Curriculum should be undertaken only cautiously in the first four years of schooling. The priority should be literacy development, and additional learning areas should be introduced only to broaden the literacy program. Beyond Year 3, the Multiple Year Level materials, which were developed specifically for remote schools, should be used as the means of implementation of the first four learning areas in the Australian Curriculum in bush schools. Schools using these materials were positive about them but in remote and very remote locations usually



felt that there was too much material to cover. This is a function of the Australian Curriculum, rather than a problem specifically of the materials. It will in part be addressed by improvements in student literacy. The review argues that using these materials will make the task more realistic, but will not solve the underlying problem of excessive volume in the primary years of the Australian Curriculum.

### **Which literacy programs should be mandatory?**

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

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

Failures of programs like Accelerated Literacy (AL) are probably related to the fact that only 12% of the very remote Indigenous population speaks English in the home, compared with 89% of the provincial Indigenous population (ABS, 2013). These children come from cultures that have always been non-literate.

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

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

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

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

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

Early evidence from the Northern Territory supports this view. A number of schools in the

Darwin and Katherine regions took part in an Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (ILNPN) project designed to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- developing syntactic awareness (knowing what is likely to come next grammatically in the English language);

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

In the area of phonics and phonemic awareness there are two broad approaches that could be pursued. One approach is to adopt a whole literacy program that includes explicit attention to phonics and phonemic awareness within the context of a broader program. In this area, one of the variations of Direct Instruction is probably the approach with the best research base. The second approach is to adopt one or more of those programs that explicitly address phonemic awareness and phonics in a self-contained way, but do not claim to provide solutions for a whole literacy program. The two programs of this kind that the review identified as in use in some schools and likely to be effective were *Jolly Phonics* and *Crack the Code*. While these programs do not fall explicitly under the heading of Direct Instruction, they do involve explicit skills-based teaching. The review is still collecting data about these options, and the final report will make a definitive recommendation.

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

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

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

## Assessment

The absence of a common approach to literacy assessment apart from NAPLAN was noted above. This gap should be filled, initially with a mandatory dedicated early literacy test used to identify initial weakness in phonemic awareness. Instruments such as ACER's *Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test* (SPAT-R) or the *Phonological Awareness Skills Test* (PAST) are in use in some schools in the Territory. Both can also be used to measure progress over time. One such instrument should be used in all bush schools and, by preference, in all Northern Territory schools.

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

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

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

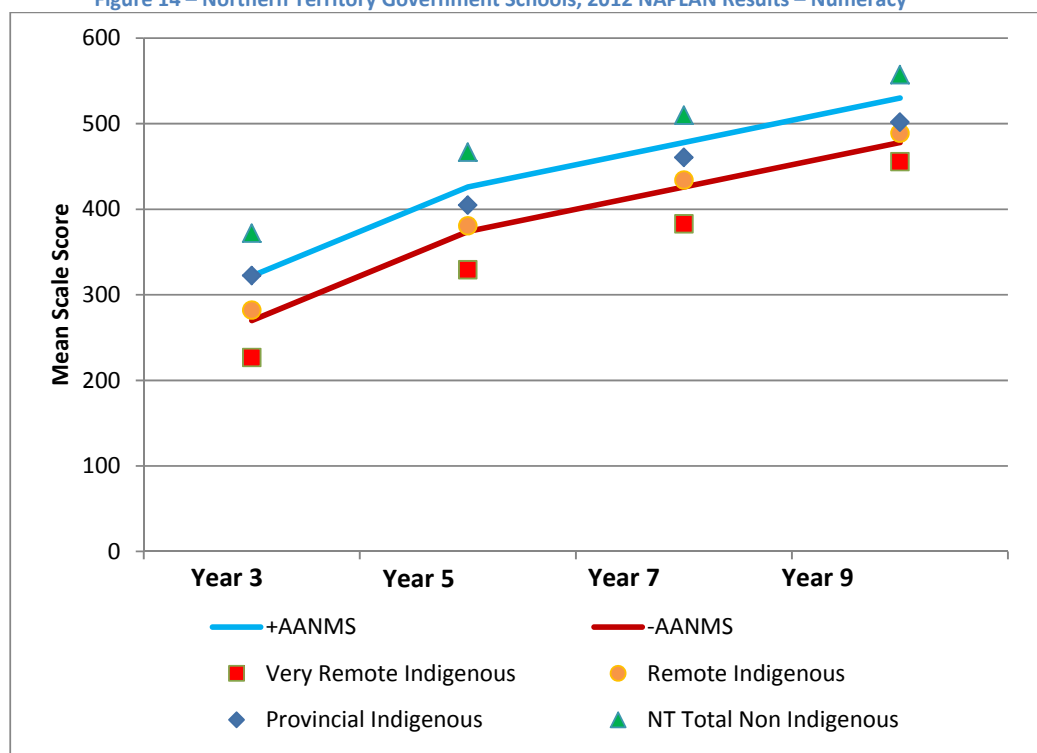
- the use of a mandatory phonemic awareness test to diagnose student starting points and to monitor progress through the early years of schooling (T-3); and
- the use of a mandatory general reading test to map student progress over time, set goals and report progress to parents.

## Numeracy

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

The evidence for the view that numeracy is a less urgent task is presented in summary form in Figure 14. This is equivalent to the reading and writing graphs presented earlier in this chapter. The key points are:

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

Figure 14 – Northern Territory Government Schools, 2012 NAPLAN Results – Numeracy<sup>14</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup> +AANMS represents the line above which students are achieving results above national minimum standards.

-AANMS represents the line below which students are failing to achieve national minimum standards.

Results between –AANMS and +AANMS indicate achievement at national minimum standards.

## Recommendations

10. Give priority to ensuring that all Indigenous children gain English literacy by progressively mandating approaches to early literacy and assessment, including:
  - a. mandating a phonemic awareness teaching program and assessment instrument in all bush schools;
  - b. mandating leveled readers and a general test of reading progress in all bush schools;
  - c. from 2015, mandating commonly used programs related to vocabulary, fluency and comprehension in bush schools to ensure a balanced literacy curriculum;
  - d. encouraging town schools, especially those with high Indigenous populations, to use programs mandated for bush schools and supporting them to adopt a broader range of evidence-based literacy programs;
  - e. establishing Territory-wide age benchmarks for reading level, phonemic awareness and sight words, reporting against these benchmarks and using the data to monitor school effectiveness and program efficacy; and
  - f. including the effective implementation of mandated approaches in teacher and principal appraisal processes, school Annual Operating Plans and school reviews.
11. Implement the Australian curriculum in bush schools only in English and mathematics during the first four years of schooling except as a means of broadening the focus of the literacy curriculum, and use the Multiple Year Levels materials in subsequent years.
12. Provide support, initially for bush schools, in implementation of mandatory literacy programs including sustained funding for professional learning and coaching.
13. Conduct an internal review to advise on the state of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) practice and how the area can be effectively supported and improved.
14. Undertake internal analysis of numeracy teaching to map areas of weakness in numeracy achievement and identify intervention programs with a proven record of success for at-risk students, for mandatory implementation in bush schools from 2016.

## Chapter Eight: Secondary education

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

The review has identified a number of factors contributing to the difficulty in delivering secondary education in remote areas:

- factors that secondary schools cannot control: poor attendance; cultural and social factors affecting the attitudes to schooling of young Indigenous people; disengagement and disruptive behaviour; weakly developed literacy skills; poor local employment opportunities; and social dislocation and negative community attitudes to schooling;
- shortage of staff and resources needed to deliver high quality programs in remote locations and to take advantage of distance education to broaden curriculum options;
- limited curriculum options available with small student numbers; and
- secondary programs that do not lead to further education and training or articulate with jobs.

### ***Learning Lessons***

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

This effort took place, however, in the most difficult circumstances. The 2003 review of secondary education commissioned by the Northern Territory Government reported that:

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

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

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

Despite this, in 2005, workshops designed to shape Indigenous education again argued for stronger secondary education in remote schools (SOCOM, 2005: 3). The *Indigenous*

*Education Strategic Plan 2006–2009* reinforced this trend. It committed the Department to ‘continue to invest in secondary programs for remote communities’ with the goal of ‘increased numbers of schools providing an accredited secondary program’ (DEET, 2006: 29–30).

## **The situation now**

Since that time the position has changed somewhat, and in some ways for the worse. The most recent count shows that there are 66 very remote schools offering middle years programs and 47 offering senior secondary programs (or more than 60% of very remote schools). By contrast, there are only six provincial schools and eight remote schools offering senior programs. Average very remote middle school enrolments are 26 students, while average senior enrolments are 17 students, and there are 16 schools with an average enrolment of five students.

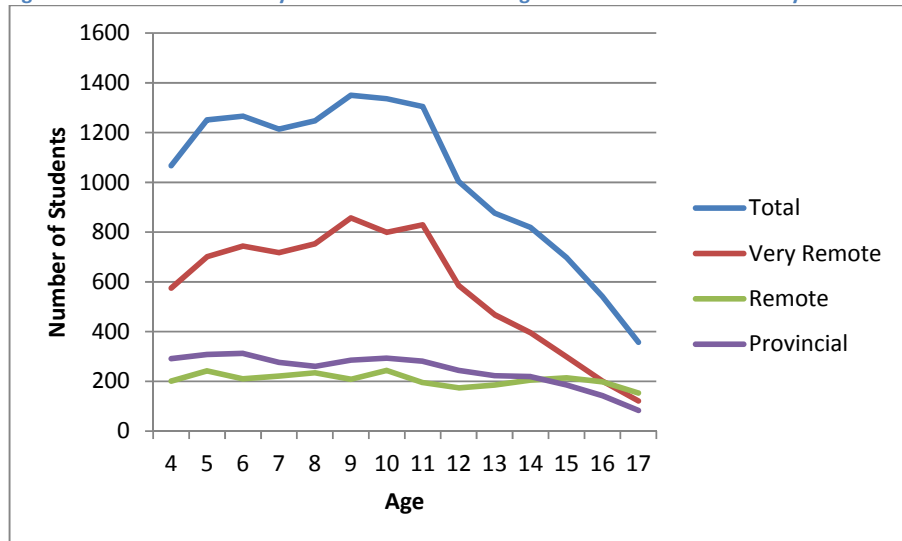
The average attendance of senior years students in very remote schools is about 30%. On a given day, therefore, an average of about five students is attending each of the 47 remote schools offering senior secondary programs. These numbers suggest that resources are stretched extremely thinly outside the towns, and that most very remote schools cannot offer programs with breadth to meet student needs.

In 2012 there were 4329 Indigenous students enrolled in secondary schooling across the Territory. This represented an annual average growth rate of 3.8% since 2002, dramatically faster than for other phases of schooling. Despite this growth rate, apparent retention from Year 7 to Year 12 remains low. While non-Indigenous rates hover in the mid-70% range (and reflect some transfer to non-Government schools), those for Indigenous students are in the mid- to high-30% range. For very remote students they are in the 20% range.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts have markedly different enrolment profiles. While non-Indigenous enrolments are highest at the beginning of schooling and gradually trend down through schooling, Indigenous enrolments increase gradually through the primary years and then drop rapidly at the start of secondary school. This pattern is, however, almost entirely a function of very remote enrolment patterns. Where provincial and remote schools show a gradual decline in the secondary years, very remote enrolments fall dramatically after primary school.



Figure 15 – Northern Territory Government School Indigenous Enrolments in 2012 by Geolocation



Source: Schools Age Grade Census data

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

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

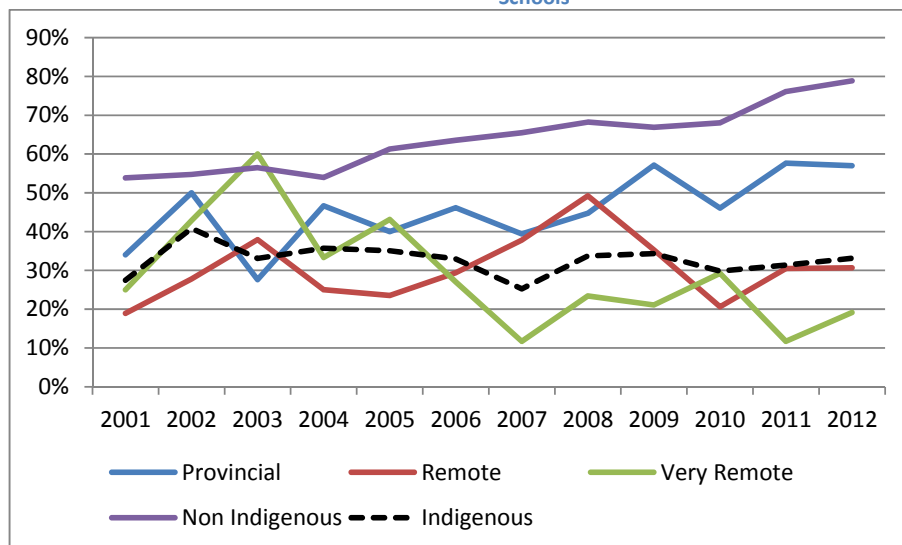
Figure 16 – Northern Territory Government Schools NAPLAN AANMS results for Year 9 Indigenous students by Geolocation<sup>15</sup>

Source: DoE NAPLAN School Summary Results data

Results in the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) for Indigenous young people across the Territory confirm flat performance over time, with NTCET completion rates fluctuating just above 30%. Completions in provincial schools, however are on an increasing trajectory from below 40% to almost 60%. Remote school completions are volatile but average about 30%. But in very remote schools the graph heads down, with the trend line at 20% in 2012.

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

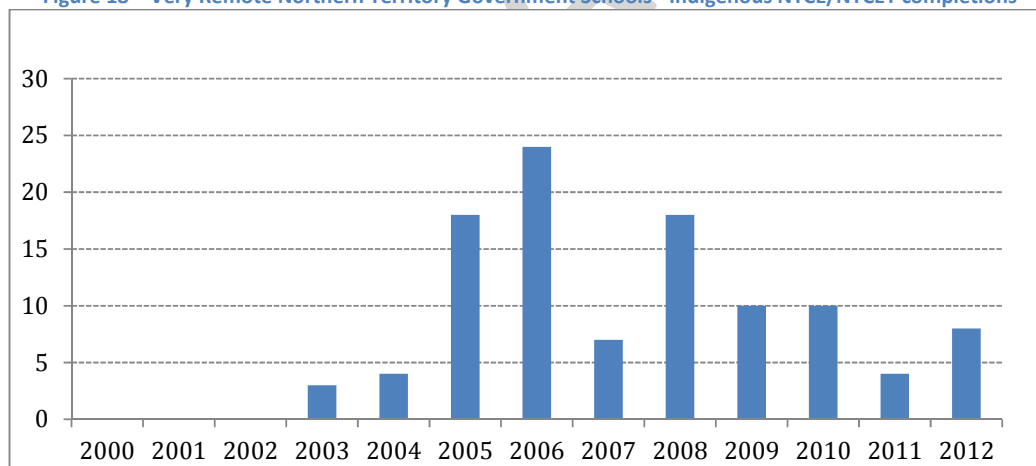
Figure 17 – NTCE/NTCET Indigenous Year 12 Student Completion rate at Northern Territory Government Schools



Source: SACE Board Datex 2010–2012

The raw numbers confirm this pattern. In very remote locations, the growth in completions from 2003–2006 has reversed and numbers have been steadily declining in trend terms from 2006–2012.

Figure 18 – Very Remote Northern Territory Government Schools - Indigenous NTCE/NTCET completions



Nevertheless, there are examples of small-scale successes. A few very remote schools generate programs, usually based on Vocational Education and Training (VET), that offer the chance for students to complete a qualification. These small successes are encouraging, but do not provide a firm basis for system provision.

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

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

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

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

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

If the capacity of the remote Indigenous student population is normally distributed, there should be as many teachers, carpenters, nurses, doctors, veterinarians, plumbers and computer programmers emerging from these communities as from all communities. But as Figure 17 above shows, there are not.

One response to this situation has been to accept the limited horizon of the local community and initiate VET programs based on local employment opportunities. The weakness of this approach is that it limits the aspirations of whole communities of children to community work or rural operations, or whatever else is available within the boundaries of small communities. VET options are clearly important in engagement and as pointers and pathways to career options. But they should not be limited solely to the local horizon. Students need a strong and realistic sense that they could gain materially from continuing their education, that there are future options beyond what they can see in their local community. For many students in bush settings, this is far from the case now.

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

## How to proceed

In circumstances of constrained resources, it makes little sense to go on throwing scarce resources at the unequal struggle to provide secondary education in bush schools with tiny numbers of attending secondary students. It would be more rational to allocate resources to a limited number of settings in which there are enough students to generate a high quality program covering a range of education and training needs.

Education beyond Year 6 should only be provided in settings that can offer a secondary education including attention to the range of the Australian Curriculum and a suite of VET offerings. The expansion of the range of offerings even in these more populated settings will inevitably require a contribution from distance education providers, along with other forms of flexible provision, but this will only be effective where there are secondary-trained teachers and trainers able to provide supervision, support and advice to students studying by distance and other flexible modes.

Given the wide and thin distribution of remote students in the Territory, the only way to meet these needs is to aggregate students seeking a secondary education into larger groups. The review has identified two models for provision, both of which should be trialled:

- Remote secondary provision: the provision in a small number of larger bush schools of a program based around VET programs and a coverage of the Australian Curriculum that builds on the VET core. The programs would include significant components of online and distance provision, in turn requiring the development of resources to meet that need. These schools would seek to retain their own students and attract students from smaller nearby schools, homelands and outstations to create a critical mass.
- Residential facilities: the development of boarding or other residential facilities (or use of existing underused facilities) located close to regional centres (possibly only Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy), bringing students from bush locations to existing schools offering a viable middle years and senior secondary program. A proposal of this kind must recognise and manage the history of boarding and residential arrangements for remote students, a history which, despite some notable successes, has not been generally effective.

## Remote secondary provision

The first option has been the subject of considerable developmental work by staff in the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team in the Department of Education. A detailed trial proposal is at Appendix 4. The proposal is to conduct a trial in four schools, two in smaller towns and two in larger bush communities. The trial will run from Year 7 in those schools and progressively engage older students. The proposal is intended to improve NTCET achievement levels and increase qualified job outcomes for students. It aims to provide students with a clear pathway through school to a job and an answer to the question 'Why come to school?'.

Students staying at school through to Year 12 now have three possible pathways. The academic pathway is well understood by educators and determined by rules driven by the need to achieve an Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank (ATAR). The vocational pathway, while less understood, allows a student to achieve compulsory Stage One subjects and then to fill their educational pattern with VET programs. To achieve an NTCET, students will need to

undertake a Certificate III level VET program which is deemed the equivalent of Stage 2 subject requirements. The third path is a mixture of pathways one and two.

***Proposed trial***

The trial proposal would deliver both the second and third options. It will consist of the following elements:

- a pre-VET program preparing students for the world of work supported by online resources from the Pre-VET™;
- an employment focused VET program;
- a VET based leadership program;
- an industry engagement process;
- an industry placement program; and
- online resources for Stage One and Two subjects.

The basis for the trial of this approach is that using online and distance delivery offers the opportunity to maintain secondary provision in a small number of larger bush schools. This will allow the realistic provision of secondary education closer to a larger number of communities. If successful it could be linked with the residential option, enabling larger numbers of students to take advantage of the opportunity and supporting the provision of the program in bush schools. This approach could also be used to provide an alternative pathway in town schools.

Criteria will need to be developed to determine how widely this approach can be delivered. It is probably appropriate for only a small number of bush schools. These should be schools with a substantial existing secondary population, a realistic prospect of attracting a number of additional students from nearby communities, a relatively strong pattern of attendance, an existing senior program with some experience of success and a moderately well-developed job market with different options for students. It is proposed that while the trial is conducted, modeling of school populations should be conducted across bush communities to determine specific criteria for the establishment of remote service delivery.

**Residential facilities**

The second option is the establishment of residential facilities, which would link with town schools to provide access to each of the three pathways outlined above. There is a history of uneven outcomes from boarding arrangements for secondary Indigenous students. The Secondary Review pointed out in 2003 that some boarding schools in urban centres were catering for remote Indigenous students but that:

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

The review noted that one reason for the failure of young people to maintain enrolment at boarding schools might be homesickness, along with social issues in a new setting. Another is the fact that they have not been effectively prepared for the level of work required in secondary school (Ibid.: 166).

The present review's analysis and data gathering has demonstrated that while some boarding options have generated a degree of success, there are continuing difficulties with student attendance, engagement and retention. There were many anecdotal accounts of students from bush locations being overawed by their first contact with a large school. They

quickly felt lost in its social and educational environment, and either reacted against the school with behaviour that schools find difficult to manage, or choosing to leave the school early in their time there.

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

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

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

- a boarding facility has to be close enough to the communities so students can visit their homes and parents can realistically visit: a travelling time up to three hours, perhaps. It would also be valuable if students had family members in the town where the school is located;
- there must be an extensive transition process with contact between Year 5 and 6 primary students from potential feeder schools, the residential facility and the school;
- the facility must engage closely with communities and parents (e.g. an outreach program to ensure a regular flow of information to families and communities and to encourage visits and participation in activities);
- the facility should house both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students;
- the boarding school or hostel must be closely involved in the schooling process and focused on outcomes and educational aspirations;
- school staff have to talk to principals and teachers in the communities from which the students come;
- the facilities must have access to Indigenous staff members, preferably drawn from communities with which some students are familiar, and including staff members with a responsibility to support the engagement of parents and home communities; and
- they must include residential accommodation for parents and community members during visits.

The review proposes that a trial should be conducted to enable an evaluation of the effectiveness of residential approaches to secondary education. There have already been negotiations in the Barkly Region involving Tennant Creek High School and a number of very

remote schools in the area. The review visited Wangkana-Kari Hostel in Tennant Creek, which is significantly under-used at present and could possibly provide 30 places. If this proposal proves viable it should be established on the basis described in this report and evaluated for planning purposes. A second trial is also proposed, possibly associated with the Yirrkala-Nhulunbuy area.

This option could include varying alternatives. One possibility is to build new residential facilities where they are needed. Existing boarding schools with unused spaces might provide accommodation on a commercial basis for students attending Government secondary schools. There are existing residential facilities that are under-used and those that are effective could be extended. Home stays or accommodation with family members living in towns could also be explored. Some smaller residential facilities are already located in town homes with employed house parents. These and other possibilities should be explored to provide as many different options as possible so that the needs of the variety of students can be met.

## **Related issues**

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

### ***Secondary students not taking up residential options***

The proposals in this chapter raise important questions about students who do not choose to take up the residential option. The perception will be that there is likely to be a substantial number of potential students who are denied an accessible opportunity for secondary education. This is a legitimate issue, and it is important that there is an understanding of the impact and options for these students.

With the exception of approximately six schools, most students attending remote (rather than very remote) schools will have a secondary program within a reasonable distance. The 47 very remote schools offering senior secondary programs have a total enrolment in these years of about 800 students. The two town high schools (Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek) have about 170 of these students, who will continue to be accommodated in those schools. The four largest very remote schools apart from the two town schools have a total senior enrolment of about 214. It is likely that these students will be supported in their schools by the remote secondary provision model discussed above.

The remaining 41 schools have an average attendance of about four students each day. Some of these students are attending too infrequently to gain any significant benefit, and in any case these schools are largely unable to offer programs that provide access to further education, training and employment. For these reasons, virtually none of these students now gains a schooling qualification. The review proposes that these and many other students could be accommodated in residential facilities and offered substantial programs articulating with future opportunities. A small number of schools classified as very remote are also close enough to a town school or larger very remote school to take advantage of the secondary offerings available in those settings without the requirement for residential accommodation. There will be a major effort required to attract and retain the remaining students (and others not currently attending) under the new arrangements, but that effort will result in a significant improvement in educational opportunity.



The position for middle years students in these schools is similar. NAPLAN literacy rates among Year 9 students in very remote schools are around 10%, with almost none of them achieving the writing national minimum standard. The review's proposal is that this outcome is unacceptable. There are 66 very remote schools offering middle years programs, with an average enrolment of 26 students. Of these, two are town schools and a further eight schools have a significant middle years population, which would probably be sustained under the recommendations in this review, either through remote secondary provision or by negotiation at the regional level. A small number of additional very remote schools are close enough to a school likely to offer secondary schooling to take advantage of that opportunity.

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

Some young people in bush communities will have the option of participating in the VET based options outlined in this report. The new Remote School Attendance Strategy will assist in ensuring that students not participating are identified and assisted in making the transition to the new arrangements. The strategy is intended to work closely with families and communities to support better attendance and engagement, and the presence of attendance officers in 21 towns and communities will be a key element in ensuring that the transition is well managed. The provision of better quality secondary schooling with clear links to future options including employment, albeit in a different location, could provide a further incentive for students and families. Students will also retain options including distance education and home schooling, though these are unlikely on their own to be effective in many cases.

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

### ***Very remote primary schools***

These proposals raise issues about the status of remaining bush schools. It is proposed that regions negotiate with each school to determine what, if any, schooling each is equipped to provide beyond Year 6. Most schools will finish at Year 6. A small number will have the capacity to deliver one year of middle schooling, or possibly up to Year 8 in a very limited number of cases. These decisions should be based on clear criteria to be further developed, but including:

- the likelihood of a continuing viable enrolment base;
- an attendance record that underpins program effectiveness;
- explicit community support for attendance measures;
- staff capacity to deliver the Australian Curriculum without above-formula numbers;
- and
- infrastructure capacity to accommodate anticipated student numbers and meet curriculum needs.

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

***Additional uses for facilities***

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

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

**Distance education**

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

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

The Northern Territory Department of Education operates three local distance education providers:

- the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) is a Senior Secondary School providing Northern Territory Board of Studies approved subjects at Years 10, 11 and a limited VET program;
- Katherine School of the Air (KSA) caters for isolated primary school and middle years students in the top half of the Northern Territory as well as residents temporarily traveling or based elsewhere; and
- Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) caters for primary school and middle years students in the southern half of the Northern Territory.

The three Northern Territory distance education schools are clear about the critical conditions for success, including the presence of a literate (and preferably trained) adult on

site with the child, strong support for maintaining participation in the program, good relationships between the distance provider and the local school or family, effective communication, creative use of technology and high quality programs and courses.

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

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

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

## Recommendations

- 15. Offer secondary education for bush students in towns, with students accommodated in residential facilities, and through remote secondary provision in a small number of bush schools that can satisfy secondary enrolment and attendance criteria:**
  - a. conduct trials of both remote secondary provision and residential arrangements to determine adaptations needed for more widespread delivery;**
  - b. offer programs to Year 6 in bush primary schools, and offer one or more years of middle schooling only by negotiation with regional managers if schools satisfy agreed criteria; and**
  - c. examine the three-school distance education arrangement and current practice to determine how well they are suited to the changed secondary schooling arrangements proposed in this report.**

## Chapter Nine: Attendance

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

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

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

### **Learning Lessons**

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

### **The situation now**

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

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

*Every Child Every Day* sets out a five stage process which can lead eventually to prosecution of families. The stages are:

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

The program also has a range of other initiatives to address non-attendance and disengagement from school. It is supported by 46 School Attendance and Truancy Officers (SATO). The staged approach has been used with a substantial number of truants. While fines have been issued, it appears that as many as 75% of those fines have not been paid. One bottleneck in the system concerns the inadequate availability of social workers, who are required at the point where conferences occur with families.

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

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

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

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

Despite all these efforts, the deterioration in attendance has continued in recent years. Table 4 shows that overall Indigenous attendance declined by 2% between 2009 and 2012 while enrolment remained static. While provincial Indigenous attendance improved by 2%, remote attendance declined by 2.2% and very remote by 3.7%. The evident decline in

remote and very remote attendance occurred over the period when the Every Child, Every Day policy might have been expected to begin to show results.

**Table 4 – Northern Territory Government Schools Attendance Rates by Geolocation, 2009 and 2012**

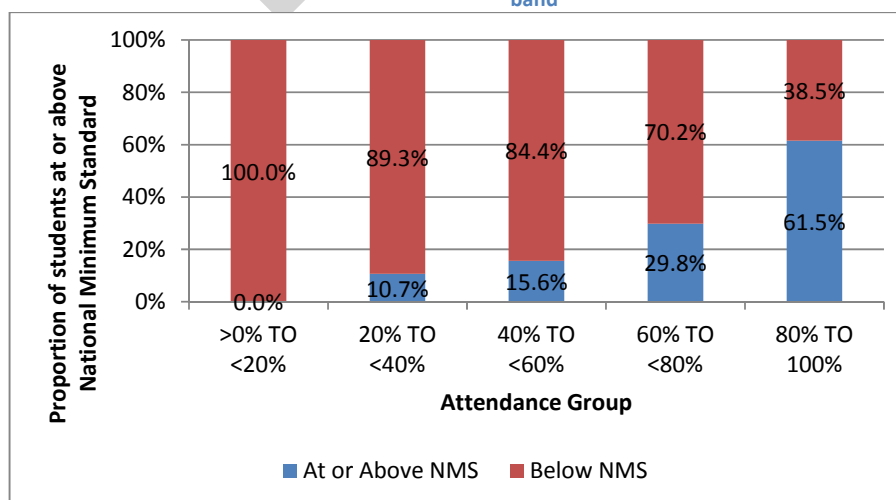
	2009			2012		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Total
Provincial	80.8%	90.6%	88.7%	82.8%	90.7%	89.2%
Remote	80.2%	92.0%	86.6%	78.0%	90.9%	84.8%
Very Remote	61.8%	89.3%	65.5%	58.1%	88.8%	62.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69.7%</b>	<b>90.8%</b>	<b>81.4%</b>	<b>67.8%</b>	<b>90.6%</b>	<b>80.6%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

## Does attendance affect achievement?

The first question addressed by the review is whether it is worth focusing on attendance at all. Little work has been done on inflection points: those levels of attendance that seem to result in improved learning. If there is a pattern, it would make sense to focus effort on getting children to those levels. The attendance effort in schools occupies significant staff time and other resources. If this effort is not well targeted, it is likely that it detracts from the resources available to those students who attend regularly and who are engaged with schooling, without a corresponding benefit.

Figure 19 shows attendance bands for all Northern Territory Indigenous students and their relationship to achievement of the reading national minimum standard in NAPLAN. The graph demonstrates that up to 60% attendance (three days a week) very few students achieve the standard. Above 60% achievement doubles with each additional day of average attendance. The measurable improvement occurs once attendance rises over 60%.

**Figure 19 – NT Government Indigenous students – % at or above national minimum standard by attendance band**



## Where should effort be directed?

The review has proceeded on the assumption that attendance will be substantially improved by the areas in which recommendations have been made. This includes increasing efforts to improve community engagement, engage children and their families during early childhood, ensure effective literacy learning, provide high quality secondary education, manage wellbeing and behaviour issues systematically and improve the quality and effectiveness of school personnel and programs.

In addition, though, there is a need for programs designed to address attendance issues directly. The review proposes that what is missing is a clear strategic focus. At present, efforts have been directed to the full range of children who are not attending schools. Instead, energy should be directed to those children with whom we are likely to achieve the greatest improvement in attendance and student achievement. This suggests that the attendance effort by schools should be mainly directed to those students who are attending three days a week or more. There is likely to be little benefit in schools pursuing children who are attending less than this. By contrast, shifting a student's attendance from three to four days a week roughly doubles the chance of NAPLAN achievement.

### Primary schools

Primary-aged children should be the first focus. The Telethon report on student attendance and educational outcomes notes that 'most achievement disparities are in place at the outset of Year 3' and that these achievement gaps remain in place throughout the school years. The report argues that improving the attendance of disadvantaged students might help to reduce these achievement gaps or prevent them from becoming wider (Hancock et al, 2013: vii).

The role of schools should be to work with all primary-aged children (and families in early childhood), seeking to establish a relationship with each family and an initial attendance pattern. Once attendance patterns are clear, schools should focus their own efforts on children attending at least three days a week, while maintaining regular contact with the families of low-attending students.

In some communities we saw evidence that primary-aged children were uncontrolled in the community, staying up for much of the night, making their own decisions about attendance and failing to engage with schools. If these children are not attending regularly, schools are unlikely to achieve improved attendance. At the primary phase, there is a realistic chance that a child can be re-engaged successfully with schooling and establish a pattern of attendance that offers the chance of normal achievement. The use of stronger measures should be the means by which this is achieved. Where children are attending less than three days per week on average, the Every Child Every Day program and the Australian Government measures should undertake the main effort to manage their attendance. These children should be the principal focus of these stronger measures (rather than secondary students or higher attending primary children).

### Secondary schools

Secondary schools should focus their efforts on young people already attending at least three days per week. In these cases, there is a realistic chance that attendance levels can be progressively improved so that the students gain substantial benefits from their schooling.

Visits to schools indicated that students in the secondary years who have not been regular attenders are unlikely to re-engage effectively and constitute a significant problem for schools. Significant numbers of secondary-aged young people are missing from school in remote communities. Where schools managed to get some non-attenders to come to school, attendance was very sporadic. In many schools, there was evidence of bullying of younger students, disruptive behaviour and role modeling that had a negative effect on primary-aged children.

One potential unintended consequence of very successful implementation of the new Remote School Attendance Strategy could be rapid increases in the number of disaffected and disengaged secondary-aged students attending school. There is a widespread view about the relative ineffectiveness of current efforts through re-engagement centres and other initiatives under Every Child Every Day to work with young people who have substantially disengaged from school. Of the many hundreds of young people who have been involved, it appears very few are re-engaged for any substantial time. The addition of a significant further group of disaffected, largely illiterate secondary students unused to the routines of schooling would constitute a massive disruption. Even larger schools would find it difficult to manage a group like this. The review saw examples of this problem arising from the presence of even small numbers of these students.

This review is focused on the future. The education system has not to date identified a solution for this significant group of disengaged secondary-aged young people and the review has not been able to identify a solution. The approach recommended here is designed to ensure that future generations of students include a much smaller proportion of such students so that re-engagement, if it is needed, is more likely to be successful. In the situation faced by the Northern Territory, resources should be allocated by preference where they are likely to achieve the greatest improvement: to primary children and to secondary children who are attending. As noted above, proposals elsewhere in the report should also have an effect on attendance.

The Northern Territory should aim to ensure that children who are now in their early years become the first recent generation to attend consistently and fully gain the benefits of their education.

## **Who is responsible for attendance?**

The review argues that some current attendance efforts have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the situation in which communities, parents and students fail to take responsibility for attendance. Schools that collect children from home, feed them, offer them school uniforms, wash them and take responsibility for some of their health issues, raise questions about what responsibility is accepted by parents. These measures place no responsibility on students and families and provide no incentive for self-management of attendance. In this respect, they are the equivalent of welfare programs that meet basic needs but provide no incentive for self-efficacy: essential but potentially giving rise to unintended negative consequences.

Communities will not be viable unless they resume responsibility for their own children. For that reason we argue that the success of Australian Government initiatives and the stronger measures under Every Child Every Day are critical to the future not only of the children but also of their families and communities. These measures, combined with the range of other



proposals in this review, have the potential to strengthen community support and responsibility for schooling and improve the benefits gained by children.

The review also recommends that all schools adopt programs of information and incentives to encourage all children and their families and communities to take additional responsibility for attendance. The information might be in the form of regularly updated attendance graphs for each child showing their percentage attendance over time and for the most recent period. This information should be provided to each child, each family and the community if appropriate, and targets set for the achievement of attendance. In each case, the focus of targets should be on improvement as well as absolute attendance. Targets should also be linked to what the research tells us about the level of attendance that is correlated with measurable improvements in student achievement. Children attending below those inflection points should be rewarded for exceeding the key points.

## **Other matters**

### **Non-enrolment**

A number of respondents to the review referred to a disturbing suggestion that there are material numbers of young people in the Northern Territory who have never enrolled in school, or who have been off the rolls for substantial periods of time. More than one respondent offered estimates of the numbers: these estimates clustered round 2000 students, and it was commonly assumed that these students were predominantly Indigenous. There was little empirical evidence to support this contention, although one respondent referred to a 2007 study conducted in one regional area that identified about 110 such students. One assumption was that these young people were largely located in the approximately 470 Homelands that have no educational facility. It is not clear whether these young people are included in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics.

The issue of unenrolled students is one that the review has been unable to resolve. It is recommended that a study be undertaken to map the number and location of unenrolled students with the goal of establishing programs to encourage their enrolment. These programs should focus on primary-aged children, consistent with the approach recommended by the review.

### **Disruptive community programs**

A consistent theme in the review was concern about the negative attendance effect of a range of other activities and initiatives. These included community programs run during school times, such as rodeos, football carnivals and shows including the Darwin Show. Respondents also referred to the timing of royalty payments, timing of funerals and other ceremonial activities and service policies of community shops.

These are largely out of the control of schools and are difficult to influence. There have, however, been Department and Government initiatives to address these issues with communities, agencies and organisations responsible for these activities. There are examples of success in ameliorating some of these influences, such as the Groote Eylandt community program linking attendance to royalty payments, and the Oenpelli effort to manage the timing of funerals. One initiative trialed in recent years is the change to the school year at Gunbalanya. Formal evaluation of these programs is proposed to determine

whether there are measurable outcomes and whether these are likely to be replicable at other sites.

The review proposes that a concerted effort should be undertaken at whole Department and whole of Government level to analyse the effect of these extraneous influences and to address each of them with the relevant communities or organisations. While decisions about attendance rest with families and children, it would assist those decisions if some other negative influences were removed or reduced in effect.

### **Clontarf and programs for girls**

Clontarf Football Academies offer the most prominent program provided to students in part as an attendance incentive. The program is offered to secondary boys only at 15 schools in the Northern Territory, all located in schools with enough students of the appropriate age to sustain the program.

The Clontarf Foundation's Annual Report for 2012 says that the program:

exists to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men and by doing so, equip them to participate meaningfully in society (Clontarf Foundation, 2012: 2).

The program uses football as the vehicle for Indigenous students to experience success and raise their self-esteem. Clontarf planning is based on five areas: leadership, education, employment, wellbeing and football, and all are important. The assumption is that the enthusiasm students feel for the game will attract them to school and keep them there. The evidence suggests that Clontarf does achieve an attendance improvement. There is less evidence about its effect on student behaviour, engagement and achievement in the core schooling program, and in particular on senior completions. In some cases this is part of a deliberate strategy by the Clontarf team: in some schools, they argue that their relationship and effectiveness with the student participants would be damaged if they took a more overt role in linking participation in Clontarf to broader school goals.

Clontarf staff argue, on the other hand, that in some cases it is the schools themselves that have reduced their focus on senior completions in favour of a middle years emphasis. They also suggest that in schools where principals are strongly supportive, and where high quality teachers are allocated to classes attended by the Clontarf boys, results have shown significant improvement. The review was unable either to confirm or dispute this contention. We did see evidence that in at least one senior school there was an unusual pattern of student dropouts early in the program, which the Clontarf staff attributed to poor school support for the program and the students.

Clontarf is doing valuable work and in cases where the program and the school leadership cooperate effectively it is likely to improve achievement and behaviour as well as attendance. The review supports its continuation along with joint planning involving the Department, Clontarf and each school to maximise benefit to student achievement from participation in the program.

There is no system-wide equivalent for Indigenous girls. There has been a range of programs run by the Department, schools and non-government organisations, including Girls' Academies, GEMS, Girls at the Centre and Stronger Smarter Sisters. None of these programs has been present at a substantial number of locations, each has a different funding model

and each requires dedicated attention from Department officers. It is difficult to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of the programs since they have different aims and approaches.

It is important that more Indigenous girls have the opportunity to engage with programs that are likely to keep them at school, both for their own educational and social benefit, and because they are likely to be the mothers of the next generation of children whose health and educational future will be strongly influenced by the levels of literacy and attitudes to education of these young women. The review recommends that the Department seek a common system-wide approach similar to Clontarf. This will enable the achievement of economies of scale and a systematic evaluation and roll-out. It is possible that one or more of the existing program providers might engage in a procurement process, or that a new provider might emerge. The program should have characteristics including:

- a funding model divided between the Department, the Commonwealth and corporate and philanthropic sources;
- high quality management with experience in the field;
- a focus on educational outcomes, health and wellbeing;
- a model specifically aimed at the circumstances of young women (rather than simply replicating Clontarf);
- dedicated, high quality support for the young women involved;
- provision of a range of activities to engage as many students as possible;
- high levels of formal and informal cooperation with the DoE;
- willingness to measure and report attendance, retention, participation, Year 12 outcomes and future destinations of participants; and
- effective accountability for funds and activities conducted.

## Recommendations

16. **Direct attendance efforts preferentially to early childhood and primary children aiming to establish regular patterns of attendance, and to secondary children attending on average at least three days per week:**
  - a. **focus attendance programs run by primary and secondary schools on children attending at least three days per week;**
  - b. **focus Territory and Australian Government programs preferentially on primary children attending less than three days per week; and**
  - c. **adopt programs of information and incentives in all schools to encourage student, parent and community responsibility for attendance.**
17. **Undertake a whole Department and whole-of-Government initiative to analyse the attendance effect of the range of community activities and initiatives (including football carnivals, rodeos, shows, royalty payments, funerals and ceremonies and community shops) and negotiate to achieve modifications that will reduce their effect on attendance.**
18. **Maintain the Clontarf program but jointly plan for improved achievement outcomes, and seek a similar system-wide program for girls with the characteristics outlined in the report.**

## Chapter Ten: Wellbeing and behaviour

Respondents to the review echoed a constant theme, especially but not only in remote schools: problems associated with student behaviour constitute a barrier to effective teaching and learning. In some cases respondents referred to a lack of staff capacity to deal with these problems. They identified hearing loss, lack of sleep, foetal alcohol syndrome, hyperactivity and trauma-associated emotional issues as factors.

As is often the case in education, while teachers noted both the high levels of behavioural issues and also significant factors that affect a student's capacity to engage with school, there was less acknowledgment of the link between the two. It is impossible to manage difficult behaviour without understanding the underlying reasons for those behaviours and engaging in positive efforts to improve wellbeing and engagement as critical first steps.

The review has identified a number of factors contributing to difficulties in improving wellbeing and managing the behaviour of Indigenous students:

- matters that schools and the education system cannot control, such as poor physical or mental health of carers, multiple family life stressors, high residential mobility, poor quality of parenting, poor family and community functioning;
- weak early childhood pre-literacy and school orientation in children;
- poor early literacy achievement;
- inadequate secondary education experiences;
- low attendance levels creating difficulties in re-engaging and a sense of alienation and low self-esteem as a consequence;
- high levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- hearing loss and other areas of disability;
- the absence of a common approach to social and emotional learning and behaviour management across the Territory and of consistent professional development in this area; and
- a shortage of counsellors and psychologists, especially in remote schools, and their focus on clinical and assessment work, leaving little room to support whole school wellbeing models.

### ***Learning Lessons***

*Learning Lessons* does not expand at length on the issue of engagement, wellbeing and behaviour management. The report does refer to the declining authority of parents over their children (not only in Indigenous families) and the consequent 'need for programs offered at school to be relevant, interesting, enjoyable and challenging for students' (Collins, 1999: 28).

The report provided a brief commentary on children with special needs, stating that special education in remote communities was an area that required further attention (Collins, 1999: 115). It also noted that behaviour problems in urban schools were disproportionately associated with hearing loss-affected children (Ibid.: 116) and with overcrowded classrooms (Ibid.: 65).

*Learning Lessons* refers to an impending Student Services Review and recommends that this Review (KPMG, 2000) examines the provision of student services and special education for

Indigenous students. The report also recommends appropriate provision for significant numbers of students with hearing impediments and other physical disabilities (Collins, 1999: 12 and 116).

The KPMG review highlighted disproportionate resources and personnel being devoted to urban schools and a lack of special education teachers in the remotes where the need was highest:

A concerted effort at both the school and systemic levels will be required to redress the inequities that some students may encounter in remote communities. (KPMG, 2000: 2).

One outcome of this review was the placement of special education teachers and additional resources in remote schools.

## **Wellbeing and behaviour management**

There is a growing body of evidence to support the notion that children who have well developed social and emotional skills are more able to participate fully in the classroom and maximise their capacity to learn. Similarly, educators understand that learning cannot happen unless there are effective classroom management strategies in place that create an environment in which students can devote their energies to learning.

Respondents to the review recognised the disproportionately high level of health and mental health issues in the Aboriginal population. This is consistent with the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey research into Indigenous education, health and wellbeing which states that:

Nearly one in four Aboriginal children (24 per cent) are at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. These difficulties are associated with a substantial educational burden (Zubrick et. al. 2006: 503).

The 2012 AEDI data support this view. In the AEDI domains of Social Competence and Emotional Maturity, respectively 27.1% and 28.7% of Indigenous children in very remote locations in the Northern Territory are developmentally vulnerable. From the first days of their schooling lives, more than three times as many Indigenous children as non-Indigenous children are vulnerable in these areas.

Many respondents to the review held that these issues are largely left undiagnosed and untreated (and therefore not supported by the relevant specialist services). Many staff expressed the view that the majority of their students would be classified as requiring specialist support if they were assessed appropriately and that they rarely received the support that they needed from the specialists in the Department. Schools with their own counsellors, hearing specialists or other support staff were better placed, but those specialists seemed overwhelmed with high caseloads: managing a proactive, preventative model was out of the question.

Despite this, many schools have adopted programs designed to address these issues directly. As with many other areas, the review found that there were widely varying approaches to behaviour management. Some schools, but far from all, had a clear whole school approach

to the issue. Schools named (and identified in their Annual Operating Plans) a variety of social and emotional learning programs used to address behavioural issues. These included early intervention programs such as Families and Schools Together and Let's Start, and school-based programs including You Can Do It, Tribes, Friendly Schools Friendly Families, Rock and Water, Bounce Back, School Wide Positive Behaviour Support, and Restorative Practice. Even highly coordinated and effectively delivered programs did not seem to be having the desired effect and some teachers argued that the programs needed to be adapted to meet the needs of their cohort of students.

Over the years there have been many attempts by the department to address the needs of Indigenous students and sometimes issues of mental health and behaviour have become absorbed into other areas. After the release of the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report into ways of protecting Aboriginal children from sexual abuse, the *Keeping Safe* child protection curriculum was rolled out to between 40 and 50 schools (with a focus on remote schools) in 2010–2011 to support students, families and the community to prevent and appropriately address child protection issues. Anecdotal views of recipients of the training were that it failed to meet the needs of Indigenous students, placed too much pressure on the trainer to deliver it with little departmental support beyond the initial training (there was only enough funding for one Keeping Safe trainer to cover the whole of the Northern Territory) and took the focus off wellbeing and behaviour. The initiative has largely vanished since the cessation of Commonwealth funding.

In the 2011–2014 DET Strategic Plan, there was a commitment made to implementing the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) program across the Northern Territory:

We will continue to increase the number of primary and middle years schools utilising School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support processes which ensure a focus on evidence-based practice in schools and will be explicitly included within School Improvement Plans (DET, 2011).

Since 2012 as part of the new government's reform agenda, Student Services was disbanded and is currently undergoing a restructure. Many of the positions responsible for providing support and training to schools in key initiatives in the area of behaviour and mental health will not be continued in 2014, including the team responsible for the implementation of SWPBS. In their place, there is now a Crisis Intervention Coordinator who has responsibilities for the implementation of whole school approaches that promote positive behaviour. In the regional organisation chart, behaviour support is now focused on Positive Learning Centres (where children who are not able to function in mainstream school settings are placed) with centres in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Alice Springs.

SWPBS is promoted as an organisational framework designed to assist schools with a systematic approach to teaching, supporting positive behaviour and preventing problem behaviour that is disruptive to learning. It provides teachers with a clear, consistent and positive approach to dealing with issues and supporting students to learn alternative ways of managing difficult situations. To date, 45 schools across the Territory have received the training and are implementing SWPBS (with varying degrees of success) and a further 11 are on the waiting list. Recent reports suggest that the program, when effectively implemented, is making a difference. We note, however, that the original mandated approach was not universally implemented and that data required was not consistently collected or reported by schools so the department has only limited evidence of effectiveness.

Central Australia has decided to mandate a common approach to wellbeing and behaviour. SWPBS is being examined as a behaviour framework, with the intention of adding an evidence-based social and emotional learning element tailored to meet the needs of students. The main resources required to implement this will be a Manager of Well-being and Behaviour (who works closely with the Manager of School Capacity Building) to support and monitor schools to implement the initiative. Teachers will need to be provided with the skills, time and reflective practice tools so that they have all they need for effective implementation. The region proposes that the school should be the key resource rather than being reliant on external experts.

## **Nutrition**

The review notes the value of the School Nutrition Program (SNP), introduced in 2007 as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and administered by the Australian Government. In 2013 the program delivered breakfast and/or lunch and in some cases additional snacks at 67 very remote schools (62 of them government schools). Only 17 of the programs are offered by schools, others being delivered by shire councils, health services, community stores, women's centres and NGOs. The majority of employees (73%) are Indigenous. It is delivered as part of the SFNT national partnership. There is a view that funding and delivery arrangements should be more consistent. The Australian and Territory Governments are yet to reach agreement about future delivery of the program, although a reducing level of funding is available through to 2021-22.

The SNP shares goals with the intentions of the review, since it is aimed at improving school engagement and learning, although there seem to be no clear data measuring its effect. While this program is somewhat outside scope for the review, it appears to be useful and the review supports its continuation.

## **The way forward**

The review supports the adoption of a common approach to behaviour management and social and emotional learning across all schools as one means of ensuring that mobile students and teachers see a greater degree of consistency in behaviour management across the Territory. It also reflects the view that programs in bush schools should be mandated. The SWPBS program is a sound model and has the advantage of being well-supported in a number of schools already. In recommending the adoption of this program, the key criteria are the adoption of a common, evidence-based approach in all bush schools (and by preference in all schools) and the provision of effective support through both professional learning and access to coaching. Other programs with a similar focus should not be supported. The review recommends that the conduct of this work may require putting resources back into the delivery of initiatives that have recently been disbanded.

The department has recently established a Behaviour Management Taskforce involving all the key stakeholders in education and chaired by an independent clinical psychologist and expert in wellbeing in schools. The purpose of this taskforce is to provide advice about the most appropriate behaviour management strategies. The review supports this initiative, which together with the outcomes of this review should form a coherent and consistent approach to the area.

A common behaviour management framework is not, however, the key mechanism for resolving behaviour issues in schools. The strategy adopted throughout this review has been based on the view that each element of the educational experience of students should be

coherent and consistent. Each element contributes to effective outcomes and helps students understand why they are at school and what they gain from the experience, which in turn is likely to improve behaviour.

Poor behaviours have a wide range of causes, some of which (as was noted above) are out of the control of schools, but everything a school does in its relationship with a student makes a difference. This report argues that behaviour is likely to be improved by consistent attendance, early orientation to the routines and expectations of schools, early literacy achievement, success in primary schooling, the delivery of a high quality secondary education and improving the quality of principals and teachers. Children who are comfortable in schools, who experience success and who see their education leading somewhere are more likely to engage with educational offerings and work within the social framework of the school. This is what engagement means: a focus on positive relationships and actions, which is the counterbalance to poor behaviour and loss of attachment to schooling.

The review argues that addressing the range of improvements to engagement proposed in this report will be the main contributor to reducing behaviour issues in schools. Once these initiatives are in place, the Department and schools will have a better picture of the real level of behaviour problems.

Even after this, however, there will remain behaviour and wellbeing problems among the Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) student population. Some of these will be effectively addressed by a common approach to behaviour management, such as the SWPBS model. Others will require more specific interventions. These fall into several categories. Some are to do with physical health issues (notably hearing) that affect a child's capacity to engage with education. Others involve social and emotional problems that are deeper seated or more serious than a school can effectively manage. Others arise from cognitive and intellectual difficulties that hamper effective engagement with learning.

In each of these areas there are existing initiatives in the Northern Territory. There is, for example, the work undertaken by the DoE Special Education Program Manager in developing online courses in Introduction to Special Education, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Speech, language and communication needs, and managing behaviour. We have not reviewed the broad area of disability services or the provision of specialist expertise in these areas. These matters are whole-system issues that impact on Indigenous education but are not specific to it. Review respondents have consistently argued that such services are provided less effectively outside the towns, that there is a shortage of specialists in these areas (notably counsellors and psychologists), and that there are significant numbers of undiagnosed cases (and even more who have not been effectively treated) in some or all of these areas.

The hearing issue, however, is of a different order. A report of the Australian Government-funded Child Health Check Initiative and follow-up audiology and ear, nose and throat (ENT) services found that between 2007 and 2011, almost 5000 children received audiology services and almost 4000 ENT services. About 66% of these children were diagnosed with a middle ear condition. Of those receiving audiology services, 53% had some kind of hearing loss and 33% had hearing impairment (AIHW, 2011: vii). The prevalence of chronic suppurative Otitis media (OM) among Indigenous Australians is among the highest in the world, while the World Health Organisation states that the incidence of perforation rates is the highest of all populations studied. As the report notes:



Research has found that Indigenous children with OM have lower phonological awareness, and poorer reading and spelling skills than Indigenous children without OM...This is especially a problem for children learning English as a second language (Ibid.: 2).

The Now Hear program was designed specifically for the Northern Territory to support children with hearing loss. The program was run as a trial in six remote schools with a high proportion of children with conductive hearing loss in 2013. The aims of Now Hear are:

to improve teacher and system capacity to provide effective learning opportunities to the large number of Indigenous students with Conductive Hearing Loss (CHL) in order to improve these students' learning outcomes (AIH, 2013).

The Now Hear continuum is a tool that provides schools with a guide to maximise the learning environment for students with conductive hearing loss. The continuum addresses acoustics and amplification, classroom support, ear health, identification and management of hearing loss and program sustainability. This informs teachers about the elements required for students to access learning, participate in class and be successful learners. The tool can also be used as a school audit to help form the basis of an action plan with a built-in evaluation capacity.

The Disability Services unit of the department has seen excellent results with the Now Hear program and consequently recommends that schools use the Now Hear tools as part of their wellbeing framework wherever there are high levels of hearing issues among students. The department can provide training, support and advice on these strategies. Where schools are using Now Hear well, they have noted significant improvements.

While there is a general reduction in central office services in many of the other areas referred to, the review does not have the capacity to address or resolve these issues, and they fall somewhat outside the terms of reference.

## Recommendations

### **19. Work with the Behaviour Management Taskforce to develop and resource a whole-system approach to wellbeing and behaviour management, including:**

- a. mandating School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) for bush schools and advising other schools to adopt it;
- b. requiring all schools to have a school-wide approach to behaviour management and wellbeing including the establishment of a team, led by a member of the leadership group, with responsibility for behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion;
- c. developing a social and emotional overlay for SWPBS (taking account of trauma experienced by Indigenous students) for trial and evaluation in Central Australia prior to wider implementation;
- d. ensuring that schools collect and report data on behaviour and related issues and on the implementation of SWPBS;
- e. mandating the use of Now Hear in all bush schools and other schools with students experiencing hearing difficulty; and
- f. providing professional development programs, coaching and specialist support

for implementation of SWPBS, whole-school approaches and data collection and the implementation of Now Hear.

20. Ensure through the school review process that schools are aware of the impact of, and plan to deal with, social and emotional problems, cognitive disability and experience of trauma on student learning and behaviour.

DRAFT

## Chapter Eleven: Community engagement

There is a widespread view in the Northern Territory that the engagement of communities in the education of Indigenous children is critical to their success. Community engagement is seen as both a right and a condition for the effective governance of schools and their capacity to respond to local culture and meet local expectations. This view has led to a long series of initiatives designed to establish stronger community engagement. Despite determined efforts, however, engagement remains uneven.

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

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

### **Learning Lessons**

*Learning Lessons* recommendations on partnerships and the self-managing schools program focused on the authority of the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory (IECNT). *Learning Lessons* explored options to break down the barriers between schools and communities and proposed the piloting of local and regional partnerships, under the auspice of the IECNT (Collins, 1999: 164). Negotiated agreements were to include components such as attendance, retention, flexible schooling, goals for improved education outcomes, improved facilities and professional development/staffing programs.

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

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

## The situation now

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

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

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

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

There is also a need to address the current situation. The review has identified three approaches to community engagement with a history in the Northern Territory: School Councils, formal agreements between the Department (or the school) and the community, and efforts to engage communities through integrated services arrangements.

## School Councils

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

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

In the 2011 – 2014 Strategic Plan, the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training outlined a strategy for developing school governance models:

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

The Department has acknowledged that there has been a lack of training in governance for School Council members and in 2012 introduced annual School Council governance training, aimed at building the capacity of School Council members to fulfil their roles and responsibilities under the Education Act. In conjunction with this the Department has funded COGSO to develop and deliver school governance training to all government schools in the Northern Territory. The aim of the training is to work with School Council members and their communities to increase their awareness and understanding of governance processes. Thus all government School Councils have the opportunity to attend the annual Department of Education training and then receive follow-up COGSO training, which can be tailored to meet the needs of their communities.

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

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

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

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

Secondly, there is a clear need for governance training and support designed for remote communities. The current arrangements for School Council training are based on the needs of non-Indigenous English-speaking communities. The Department should establish a project to design a governance training model that reflects the needs of remote communities, and that takes account of the proposal above that remote School Councils might begin with a much more informal arrangement built on existing community processes and structures.

## Partnership agreements between schools and communities

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

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

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

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

The changes were not long lasting. As one contributor to the review indicated:

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

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

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

Initially seven Remote Managers of Indigenous Education (RMIEs) were funded (although two positions were not filled). Their role was to act as advisors on appropriate and culturally inclusive protocols and processes and to assist in communicating and engaging with the broader community. An Indigenous Community Engagement Team (CET) was established to provide training, advice and support to Directors of School Performance (DSPs), RMIEs and School Principals. 55 focus schools were identified in

NATSIEAP and the CET were tasked with working with School Operations, schools and local Indigenous stakeholders to support them to establish, implement and maintain SCPAs in accordance with the goals of the NATSIEAP.

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

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

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

It would be preferable to adopt a model that builds specifically on Department strategy in Indigenous education, which ought to assist in maintaining a consistent approach and focusing the engagement effort. A new round of community engagement should build on existing agreements where these are valued, ensuring that these models provide examples of success from planning through to implementation and outcomes. A new round should also focus on specific initiatives in this report and in the resulting strategic plan. It will, for example, be essential to work closely with communities affected by secondary education provision trials of residential facilities. This work should aim to ensure common understanding of what is proposed (including service changes that will directly affect each community and the benefits their children will receive as a result), establish common expectations, identify requirements of both communities and the Department, and set criteria and reporting arrangements to ensure continuing communication and engagement. In this model, community engagement is a key service to ensure the effective implementation of strategic goals, and will help ensure that communities are supported in shaping initiatives to their own expectations and needs.

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

## **Integrated services**

The third area related to community engagement is the development of integrated family services. This report briefly discusses LIPs as one existing model. Chapter 6: Early Childhood, discussed the development of Child and Family Centres as a specific integrated initiative.

LIPs were developed in 15 remote communities (Remote Service Delivery Priority Sites). Plans set out agreed priorities, actions, responsibilities and commitments for each location for government and the

community. They cover areas including early childhood, schooling, health, housing, safe communities, governance and leadership, planning and infrastructure and youth sport and recreation. The LIPs have been established and are in the process of implementation. The intention is that they will be revised over time as progress is made and as a result of negotiation and discussion with each community.

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

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

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

This review supports the principle of integrated service delivery, but the evidence suggests that the LIPs have not provided a broadly effective response to this need. The development of Child and Family Centres might provide a more effective model (see Chapter 6).

## Local cultural training

All schools should be sensitive to their cultural contexts, and should seek to reflect local culture in their physical and educational environments. It is important, however, to recognise that the purpose of this is to enhance the effectiveness of schools in teaching students and gaining the support and participation of parents and the community. The review does not support the view, articulated by some respondents, that schools should be a source of cultural maintenance, or that schools in remote communities should have different purposes from those in other parts of the Territory or Australia. Cultural responsiveness should not deflect schools from their core purposes.

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

The Gleeson report recommends that:



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

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

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

## Recommendations

- 21. Develop a new community engagement charter setting out the Department's strategy for community engagement, responsibilities of Department work units and the expected involvement of community representatives.**
- 22. Clarify the responsibilities of principals and teachers for community engagement, provide effective training in supporting improved engagement and ensure that school review and staff appraisal processes include community engagement as an expectation.**
- 23. Engage local communities to lead induction and local cultural training.**
- 24. Provide support for principals in building precursor school decision making bodies based on community practice, develop governance training designed to meet the needs of remote communities and review legislation to establish a basis for precursor bodies to School Councils.**
- 25. Focus community engagement on existing agreements where these are valued and the implementation of specific Department strategic goals (e.g. residential facilities for secondary students).**
- 26. Ensure that the Indigenous education unit has staff skilled and experienced in community engagement and able to support schools and communities in developing school improvement plans and establishing effective governance arrangements.**

## Chapter Twelve: Workforce planning<sup>16</sup>

The Department of Education spends 52% of its budget on employee expenses. Teachers represent the bulk of this expenditure, and as Hattie demonstrates, teachers constitute the single largest variable in student learning where levers for improvement are available (Hattie 2003: 1-2). Effectively resourcing, planning for, managing and training teachers and other employees is a key factor in achieving educational goals. Yet the Department has no current workforce plan, and there is as yet no effective strategy for the achievement of a number of key workforce goals impacting on Indigenous education.

Work undertaken by the review has identified factors contributing to workforce issues facing the Department:

- the unforgiving geography and demographics of the Northern Territory, and their effect on the capacity to staff remote schools;
- lack of expertise and experience in workforce planning;
- uncoordinated and fragmented programs and widely distributed responsibilities for areas of human resource management; and
- varied and uneven arrangements for the recruitment, training, induction and promotion of Indigenous staff.

### ***Learning Lessons***

The *Learning Lessons* report identified the high level of reliance on local Indigenous staff in remote schools and the very high turnover of non-Indigenous staff (Collins 1999:71). Critically, the report identified a lack of policy and strategy to support Indigenous staff, and called for the expansion of the mentoring arrangement to increase the number of Indigenous people in leadership positions (Ibid: 89).

‘Bums on seats’ was the recruitment strategy of that time, and was cited as a key issue impacting on good teaching practice in remote schools. The report argued that improvements needed to be made in recruitment, retention and development of personnel working throughout the education system. Collins pointed out that ‘all things point to the need for a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy aimed at improving Indigenous education across urban and remote area schools’. Preparation and training, including ongoing professional renewal for teachers and school leaders was a missing area of strategy.

By 2005 the Learning Lessons status report described the implementation of a range of initiatives targeting professional development for ESL, cross-cultural awareness and orientation for staff taking up positions in a remote community school. The Report noted, however, that many of the same issues still existed, that the Indigenous teaching workforce was declining and that there was little progress on developing and implementing a comprehensive workforce plan (LLISC: 2005).

### **The workforce now**

In September 2013 the Department had 4435 average paid full time equivalent staff. This was a drop of 163, or 3.6% from the period 12 months earlier. The bulk of the reduction was represented in 115 non-school-based staff, while schools lost 48. Total employees (i.e. individuals rather than FTEs) numbered 4669, down by 4.2%. School based staff were 85.8% of the total employee base and teaching staff 63.9% of the total (DoE, 2013E).

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<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise stated, data in this chapter come from the September 2013 workforce report (DoE, 2013E).

The reductions were concentrated among fixed period employees (those on term contracts). The year saw a reduction in their proportion of the workforce from 30.5% to 25.5%. Among classroom teachers the proportion dropped from 28% to 17.7%. Overall there was a drop in contract employees from 1,434 to 1,159, a reduction of 275, or substantially more than the overall employee loss. The year appears to have seen a significant shift from contract to permanent employment.

Indigenous employees represent 12% of the workforce, while the Indigenous student cohort is around 40%. The majority of Indigenous employees are in the administrative and assistant teacher streams. The number of Indigenous employees decreased from 595 to 560 from a year earlier, a reduction of 5.9%. In addition, the age-grade census for 2013 shows 187 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Indigenous staff employed through school councils (246 by head count). There is a noticeable increase in the average age of the Indigenous workforce over the years. In the period between 2007 and 2012, there were significant increases in the number and percentage aged over 50.

Average length of service of Department employees was 7.4 years, up from 7.0 the previous year, but slightly lower for teachers (6.9 years) and assistant teachers (5.7 years). The year-to-year retention rate for all employees was 83.7% (down from 84.5% the previous year). The rate for principals decreased from 96.7% to 86.7%, for assistant principals from 98.3% to 91.7% and for senior teachers from 93.1% to 88.1%. The classroom teacher retention rate slightly increased from 85.2% to 86.3%, though lower in more remote regions.

The unexpected absence rate for all employees fell slightly to 7.1%. Assistant teachers had a much higher absence rate at 25.4%, up from 24.4% in the previous year.

Of the 42 Executive Contract Officer positions, only one is occupied by an Indigenous employee. A similar picture is provided for Executive Contract Principal positions, with two Indigenous officers out of a total of 106. Indigenous staff make up 3.3% of Senior Teachers 3.3% and 3.5% of teachers.

## Remote Area Workforce

The quality of the remote area workforce is one key to addressing the 'two systems' issues discussed in Chapter 4. From the days of *Learning Lessons*, a broad range of programs and resourcing has been put in place to improve recruitment and development opportunities for the general remote workforce and for Indigenous employees. The workforce issues still requiring attention include increasing Indigenous staffing numbers and quality, and the quality and longer-term tenure of employees working in bush schools.

## Indigenous employees

As part of the Strategic Plan, and derived from the Smarter Schools National Partnership, the Northern Territory Government has a target of 200 Indigenous teachers by 2018. Nutton et al note that:

A radically improved and better supported strategy will be needed to achieve the NTG target of 200 Indigenous teachers by 2018, especially if this number is to include a significant proportion of remote Indigenous staff (Nutton et al: 60).

Effort has been applied to articulate career pathways for Indigenous employees, but the resourcing and design of initiatives to achieve progression along the pathway are less clear. High profile initiatives such as the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program have faltered, and there is a lack of coordination and consistency across the human resources domain.

***Principals***

The number and proportion of Indigenous staff at Principal level in the system has declined in recent years. This is a function partly of low levels of promotion across the Indigenous workforce in general, although some respondents to the review argued that there were employment decisions based on performance issues in some cases. It is difficult to overcome this problem at present, until there are more qualified Indigenous teachers occupying more senior roles. The apparent success of the co-principalship in place at Gunbalanya is notable, and extension of this model is supported if there are available and appropriately qualified candidates.

***Teachers***

In September 2013 there were 603 senior teachers and 2046 teachers employed by the department. Of these, 22 senior teachers and 83 teachers were Indigenous. Various models for providing teacher education courses in a remote delivery mode have been in place in the Territory over the years. The Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program, commencing in its initial form in the 1970s and in place until the 1990s is responsible for producing many of the Indigenous teachers in schools today. The RATE program was designed to provide a mode of study largely delivered on site in communities, with a workshop component at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. The current teacher education model is the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program, which was trialled in a small number of settings but was regarded as unsuccessful.

The department has invested heavily in its More Indigenous Teachers (MIT) Program by offering a range of scholarships, fellowships and cadetships, with each program offering a different support structure. The data for the programs since their initiation in 2007 indicate that a total of 138 people have commenced, with 40 graduating by 2013. There are 43 current recipients, of whom only 16 are in remote or very remote locations. Of the 40 graduates, 15 were in remote or very remote schools.

The low uptake and/or success of programs, particularly for remote employees, has been attributed in part to the low level of literacy of candidates: many potential candidates are not ready to undertake tertiary level study. The Menzies report on the remote workforce highlighted low literacy and numeracy competencies in the department's remote Indigenous workforce (Nutton et al, 2012: 6 and 17). Other difficulties include very high levels of costs and support required to sustain programs. Tertiary preparation programs are available, but success relies on high levels of support.

Candidates for teaching qualifications have traditionally come from the ranks of assistant teachers (ATs). There has been considerable work done on defining pathways to teaching for ATs and providing incentives for completion, although the completion rate has not been encouraging. The ageing of the AT workforce (Ibid.) suggests that future teachers are less likely to come from this source, although the review encourages this approach.

The recommended option for AT advancement to teaching is to re-establish the RITE program or its equivalent in a form similar to the Catholic sector-Charles Darwin University (CDU) program Growing Our Own, with external CDU lecturers supported by school-based staff. This is expensive, but it reflects a high government priority. Its expense demands that it achieve a high proportion of successful graduates. To achieve this, the program should meet criteria based on the following list:

- candidate selection should be rigorous, aiming to ensure that all candidates are tertiary-ready or can be supported through a limited, short-term readiness program with high confidence of success;
- programs for school-based personnel should largely be delivered in the school by allocated tertiary lecturers supported by a local coordinator with appropriate expertise;

- instruction should be principally face-to-face, though it can be supplemented online to a limited extent;
- each school should be funded to appoint a coordinator with time release to support candidates;
- essential school support arrangements should be documented by the Department, including time allocations for study, physical arrangements to support study (e.g. a location in the school and IT access) and support responsibilities of school staff;
- requirements of candidates should be clearly stated including expectations about attendance, completion of work requirements and participation in school activities;
- candidates should be study the same pre-service education programs as all pre-service teachers;
- assessment and supervision arrangements and standards for completion should be the same as for other pre-service teachers; and
- additional coaching and advisory support (effectively a case management approach) should be provided through the Department, the school and the tertiary institution to ensure that potential difficulties for Indigenous candidates are managed and resolved.

Most critically, the department will have to demonstrate strong support for the program, maintain funding over an extended period and guarantee that graduates will have access to positions in schools.

Initiatives will also be required to encourage school graduates and possibly Indigenous people from other areas of the workforce to undertake teacher training. The current MIT Cadetships program is aimed at this potential source, but there are at present only six recipients. The MIT Scholarships also seek five-year Indigenous residents of the Northern Territory. Data about this program vary. Nutton et al, writing in 2012, suggest that there have been 92 recipients and 41 graduates since 2007 (Ibid.: 40). DoE data refer to 26 current recipients and only 22 present and past employees from this source (internal DoE document). The Menzies report points out the exceptionally wide range of different and overlapping approaches to increasing Indigenous teacher numbers (only a few of which have been touched on here). The review would support a simplification, leading preferably to a single high profile program aimed at school leavers, university graduates and Indigenous members of the general workforce, with the intention of attracting them into the teaching profession and supporting them in their study and induction into teaching.

The fundamental issue about the current arrangements for developing Indigenous teachers is quality. While there are clearly outstanding Indigenous teachers in schools, there was consistent feedback to the review about the unsatisfactory quality of some graduates. A common view was that there was such a commitment to increasing Indigenous teacher numbers that in some cases standards had been lowered and assessment processes bypassed or distorted to ensure graduations. To the extent that this is true it is a destructive approach: it puts less capable teachers in classrooms, damages the reputation of Indigenous teachers in general and eventually puts the new teacher in an impossible position.

### ***Assistant Teachers***

The review is concerned that the position of ATs (and some other Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees) is anomalous in a number of respects. They are employed under two quite different models: the formal department arrangement or school council employment contracts. Expectations seem to be lower for Indigenous staff: the poor attendance rate noted above is one example. Many ATs have been engaged in an apparently endless cycle of training, which in many cases has produced little change in their qualifications or circumstances. Their roles vary dramatically from co-teachers in some schools to low-level administrative tasks in others. The Department's statement of the responsibilities of teachers (DoE, 2013C) makes no reference to the role of teachers in working with assistant teachers. This suggests that there are no clearly stated expectations of teachers in respect of their working relationships with local staff.

These and other characteristics of the current arrangements combine to reduce both the attractiveness of the role and the effectiveness with which this valuable resource is used. The review proposes that assistant teachers should usually be employed on a common basis to overcome the anomalies in the current arrangements. Where there is a permanent position available, assistant teachers should be offered the opportunity to apply. The review supports the maintenance of contract arrangements in some cases to allow a degree of flexibility in staffing commitments, but this should not be the normal form of employment for assistant teachers. In particular, it should not be the means by which schools manage poor attendance or performance of assistant teachers. As is the case for other classroom staff, they should be subject to probation and performance review processes. Expectations of attendance and performance standards should be consistent with those for other employees. The department should develop clear statements of the way in which teachers are expected to work with ATs, including their involvement in planning and recognition of their essential role in providing the educational bridge for children with little or no English.

### **Non-Indigenous employees**

There have been some reservations expressed over the years, and during this review, about the quality of teachers in the remote workforce. While the report acknowledges this issue, the review's visits to schools have identified excellent teaching in many schools. The basis for the review's workforce recommendations is the principle that the best teachers should be in the most demanding schools and classrooms. There are clearly not enough outstanding teachers volunteering to work in the often difficult and challenging circumstances of remote schools.

### **Principals**

Respondents to the current review took the view that the quality of principals was the single most important factor in the quality of schools. More than one respondent argued that principal quality was the basis on which teacher quality, teacher retention and student learning in a school rested. The role of a remote school principal is complex and diverse. The range of responsibilities extends far beyond the provision of education programs, including, for example, the management of housing, furnishings, vehicles, pastoral care of staff out of hours, interagency work and power generation.

The review has identified the selection, training and preparation of remote principals as one element that could significantly affect the education of Indigenous children. There seems to be an expectation that teachers seeking promotion to leadership roles, or principals transferring to remote locations, will have gained appropriate skills and knowledge through their previous experience. Given the opportunity for teachers to gain leadership positions, including teaching principal positions, at a relatively early stage of their career, this expectation is likely to be flawed.

The review argues that there are several areas in which action could strengthen principal quality in remote settings (and to some extent more generally):

- Initial training is one key element. The initial training of new principals is weakly developed and inadequate to the critical role principals play. For remote principals, there is a specific need for a significant training program, which should be initiated with at least a full day of training in dealing effectively with and being culturally responsive to remote Indigenous communities. In addition, there should be a substantial and extended training program for all new principals, including refresher experiences, aiming to develop the skills of principalship and covering the wide range of responsibilities of principals and the forms of support that are available. All principals should identify a local Indigenous mentor to support their continuing learning in the community.
- There should also be a clear statement developed of the responsibilities of remote principals. The review was unable to identify such a statement in relation to, for example, staff engagement with communities, cross-cultural training, management and support of Indigenous and other staff,

effective use of assistant teachers or treatment of Indigenous languages in the curriculum. For new principals in smaller remote schools, especially following changes to the Group School and College structures, there will be additional responsibilities in key functional areas (HR, finance, strategic planning, reporting etc) with which many appointees will be unfamiliar.

- The third element concerns experienced external support for new and continuing principals. Too little formal use is made of experienced principals in mentoring and advising new or more junior principals. A number of teaching principals or remote principals referred to the very high valuation they placed on formal or informal mentoring arrangements with colleagues or a College principal. The separation of the mentoring role from the accountability role played by DSPs for remote principals seemed to meet their needs, potentially providing them with two sources of support with somewhat different roles and orientations. It is proposed that all principals have access to a mentor and/or a coach provided by the department.
- The review supports the establishment of local principal support groups in bush settings, involving a small group of principals in regular shared professional learning including instructional rounds in each other's schools. This should be accompanied by external input and support to question practice and encourage planned and effective implementation of priority programs and approaches.
- In addition, applicants for senior roles should have to demonstrate that they have established a pattern of relevant professional learning including specific required hurdle programs, without which candidates should not be appointed.

The department should also explore the possibility of identifying a small number of senior, successful principals with the characteristics appropriate to success in remote leadership and offering them substantial incentives (to be negotiated individually) to spend a minimum of three years leading a bush school. Principals prepared to take on this challenge should be provided with an enhanced degree of budget and staffing control, and

In addition when principals are leaving (and especially when principals in bush schools are identified as having been very successful in establishing strong performance), the new appointment should be made some months ahead of the departure date, and arrangement established so there can be a handover period in which the new principal works with the outgoing principal to ensure an effective understanding of the processes and structures that have been successful. This is designed to avoid the problem of new principals feeling they have to make their mark by undoing the programs of the previous occupant and establishing a new approach.

### ***Teachers***

There are already incentives for teachers to work in remote locations. Teachers from outside communities (non-local recruits) are entitled to free housing and subsidized utilities. A points system based on tenure and location provides many teachers with study leave after a period in a remote school, with no apparent requirement to undertake study. Some respondents argued that the relative ease of picking up a promotion position in a remote school constituted a career incentive.

Current incentives appear to be adequate. Teachers are likely to apply more willingly for remote schools if those schools are seen as worthwhile places to work. The outstanding principals observed during visits to schools had a demonstrable effect on teacher interest and retention. Consistent with this view, the principal of each school should have an enhanced role in staff selection.

Pre-service teacher courses conducted in Northern Territory institutions should reflect the key elements of this review. The Department should negotiate with CDU and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) to ensure that courses, where appropriate, include attention to:

- the conditions of bush schools and evidence-based approaches to teaching in these schools;
- phonemic awareness and phonics, other mandatory programs and assessment of student progress using mandatory instruments;
- School Wide Positive Behaviour Support and classroom management in very remote schools; and
- expectations of teachers regarding cultural awareness and community engagement.

Where possible, the review proposes that pre-service teachers undertake the practicum in at least one bush school. In addition, the department should seek to establish relationships with teacher training institutions around Australia with a view to encouraging student teachers to experience teaching rounds in the Territory, becoming a possible supply source for future appointments.

Equally importantly, initiatives proposed in this report should be supported with dedicated training programs and access to high quality coaching and mentoring. Research cited elsewhere in this report indicates the importance of combining training with other forms of support and reinforcement.

## Other workforce issues

In addition to issues specifically to do with the remote workforce, there are broader workforce matters that impact on the education of Indigenous young people. While the report does not address these areas in detail, they deserve more sustained attention through the Department's workforce planning processes.

## Pedagogy

It is notable that there is no common framework for teaching practice in the Northern Territory. Central Region has adopted the John Hattie program *Visible Learning* for this purpose. While there are other programs serving similar purposes, it is clear that for many teachers the Hattie approach has been welcome and effective. The review supports extension of this program to all town schools in the Territory, but proposes an initial review of progress to determine whether the extensions should be conducted on the same basis as has been undertaken in Central Australia.

The extension of the program to bush schools is not supported at present. While it will be valuable in all schools eventually, the McKinsey analysis outlined in Chapter 4 suggests that rollout beyond the town schools should be delayed until the initiatives proposed in this report (including early literacy, social and emotional learning and workforce changes) are bedded down.

## Other Indigenous staff

There is a multitude of positions in addition to assistant teachers that are specifically dedicated to Indigenous student welfare and learning including Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW), Aboriginal Resource Officers (ARO), Cultural Liaison Officers (CLO), Family Liaison Officers (FLO) and Home Liaison Officers (HLO). The review has not examined conditions or roles of these employees in detail. We are aware, however, of some anomalies in their allocation and distribution: in some areas (including Darwin), for example, allocations of AIEWs are historical and no longer reflect the distribution of the students they serve. It is recommended that each category be reviewed and re-allocated on the basis of need.

## Study leave

Study leave is available to staff working in remote locations on the basis of a variable points system. Accumulation of sufficient points gives access to a period of study leave on pay. This approach is supported by the review as offering both an incentive to work remotely and an opportunity for mid-career renewal. The current arrangements, however, allow those on study leave to treat the time as a



paid holiday. This should be addressed by requiring all study leave applicants to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.

## Cultural training

The review is concerned that initial cultural training offered by the department to all staff has become very limited and the time available truncated. All staff should have access to a substantial, continuing program of cultural training, initiated with a minimum of a full day provided centrally. New appointments to principal-level positions should receive further training in their roles and responsibilities related to community engagement and cultural awareness.

## Workforce planning

The Menzies report on remote workforce development observed that:

A coherent and comprehensive overarching DET workforce strategy is needed to align the disparate efforts toward addressing the complex needs of remote educators (Nutton et al: 59).

In researching and consulting on this area for the review, it was difficult to capture all the information on workforce development and workforce planning. There is no overall plan for achievement of the department's strategic goals and it seems that no area of the agency has overall responsibility for the workforce. Expertise is lacking, workforce planning is not seen as part of core business of the Human Resource area, and many of the functions have either devolved to schools or dispersed throughout the agency, CDU and BIITE. Whilst there are some benefits in resourcing different areas of the department for professional development and workforce management, devolution must be matched with effective central workforce planning.

The absence of such a plan exposes the department to risk, particularly when formal commitments have been made to improve Indigenous employment and development opportunities. The importance of workforce planning in the teaching service is illustrated by the fact that about one-third of current teachers are either eligible for retirement (aged 56 years or over) or approaching retirement (51-55 years). The highest proportions of those eligible for retirement are Executive Contract Principals (41.4%) and Principals (36.1%) (DoE 2013E: 24).

The review proposes that the development of a comprehensive workforce plan is essential to meeting the needs of all children, and especially Indigenous children. The plan should focus specifically on the following issues as critical to the education of Indigenous children:

- undertaking a thorough scan of the environment and anticipated medium- and long-term changes in the make-up of the workforce engaged in the education of Indigenous children;
- identifying skill requirements associated with teaching in remote communities and with Indigenous students;
- identifying skill requirements to meet the areas recommended in this report, including improvements in pedagogy in general, FaFT and pre-school training requirements, early literacy, remote leadership and social and emotional learning support;
- conducting an audit of current skill levels and staff availability in the areas identified as priorities;
- identifying forms of support including training and coaching required to meet skill requirements in priority areas;
- focusing existing resources (including study leave) explicitly and only on Department priority areas;
- strengthening the remote area workforce including attracting the best principals and teachers (those with the skills identified as essential to remote teaching) to remote and hard-to-staff schools;

- rationalizing and simplifying programs aimed at expanding the numbers and improving the quality of Indigenous employees; and
- building on strong existing data collection and reporting to monitor progress in priority areas on a longitudinal basis, showing trends over time.

The review recommends that the conduct of this work should follow recruitment of additional expertise in workforce planning and management.

## Recommendations

27. Engage additional expertise and experience to develop a comprehensive workforce plan as outlined in this report, aligned with the Department's Strategic Plan, the Indigenous education strategic plan proposed in this report and the Early Years Workforce Plan.
28. Strengthen programs to increase Indigenous teacher numbers and quality including:
  - a. a revised version of the RITE program meeting the criteria set out in this report; and
  - b. a rationalised approach to attracting university graduates and Indigenous members of the general workforce into teaching and supporting them in their training and induction.
29. Establish employment and performance management arrangements for assistant teachers consistent with those of other staff and ensure their roles and responsibilities are understood and supported by all school staff, particularly classroom teachers.
30. Raise the quality of bush principals by:
  - a. strengthening initial training, including cultural competency training;
  - b. developing a clear statement of the responsibilities of leadership in bush schools;
  - c. establishing mentoring (professional and cultural) and coaching arrangements for all principals;
  - d. establishing small groups of bush principals to engage in shared professional learning and instructional rounds in each other's schools;
  - e. requiring applicants for senior positions to demonstrate a pattern of relevant professional learning, including specific required programs without which candidates should not be appointed;
  - f. exploring the possibility of attracting a small group of outstanding principals to bush schools; and
  - g. arranging early appointment and release of new bush appointees to ensure effective handover.
31. Raise the quality of bush teachers by:
  - a. improving principal quality;
  - b. enhancing the role of the local principal in staff selection;
  - c. negotiating with Northern Territory teacher education institutions to ensure that courses take account of Department priorities and the requirements for bush teaching;
  - d. attracting interstate pre-service teachers to undertake teaching rounds in Northern Territory bush schools;
  - e. providing initial cultural training to all appointees; and

- f. ensuring that initiatives proposed in this report are supported with effective professional learning and coaching.
- 32. Evaluate the implementation of *Visible Learning* in Central Region with a view to its implementation initially in all town schools in the Northern Territory, and later in all schools.
- 33. Ensure that allocations of Indigenous staff in ancillary positions (e.g. Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers) are based on need rather than historical practice.
- 34. Investigate the effectiveness of leadership support and development particularly for the provision of leadership support in bush schools.
- 35. Require all applicants for study leave to address department priorities, have clear goals and a planned program, and prepare a report on completion of study leave.

DRAFT

## Chapter Thirteen: Finance

Resourcing of education has been a substantial theme in the consultations undertaken by the review. Across the entire scope of the review's Terms of Reference, respondents have argued variously that resources are inadequate, poorly distributed, excessive in some areas, lacking in others, badly managed or ineffectively targeted. Discussion often focused on the timing of funding decisions, and the poor articulation between those decisions and program needs. A significant proportion of the discussions included the proposition that resources were not the problem and, often simultaneously, that additional resourcing was the key to better outcomes.

The review recognises all of these perceptions are true to some extent, or in some areas. There are several factors limiting the effectiveness of resourcing:

- the demographics and geography of the Northern Territory;
- rapid and unexpected changes in Department goals and funding arrangements;
- lack of understanding at school level of how allocations and timing of project and program funds are determined and how the use of these funds can be managed for student benefit;
- the substantial complexity introduced by the significance of Australian Government funding in the Northern Territory education budget;
- fluctuating patterns of enrolment and attendance, meaning that staffing formulae are rarely established on a consistent basis;
- dramatically different requirements in schools for specific services (e.g. disability services); and
- discrepancies between funding inputs and learning outcomes.

### ***Learning Lessons***

At the time of *Learning Lessons*, in the 1998–99 financial year, the total budget of the Department of Education was \$330.1 million. The Commonwealth Government contributed \$55.9 million (about 17% of the total). Indigenous education was estimated to consume \$137.3 million (or 41.6%) of the total, although the method for calculating this allocation would not stand rigorous scrutiny (Collins, 1999: 53).

Collins also noted the view expressed by both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory that their relationship was dysfunctional. The report argued that the onerous reporting arrangements for Commonwealth IESIP funding, focus on inputs and processes, lack of focus on outcomes, and low-level targets ('lack of stretch') inhibited progress. It also suggested that Northern Territory had been ineffective in accessing Commonwealth funding (Ibid.: 54-6).

The key resource issue raised by *Learning Lessons* concerned the extraordinary differences in 'levels of need, employment opportunities and service provision costs which apply across Indigenous Australia' (Ibid: 62). The review was also concerned that the Department did not have sufficiently well-developed systems for tracking relative costs at all levels, including costs related to individual students.

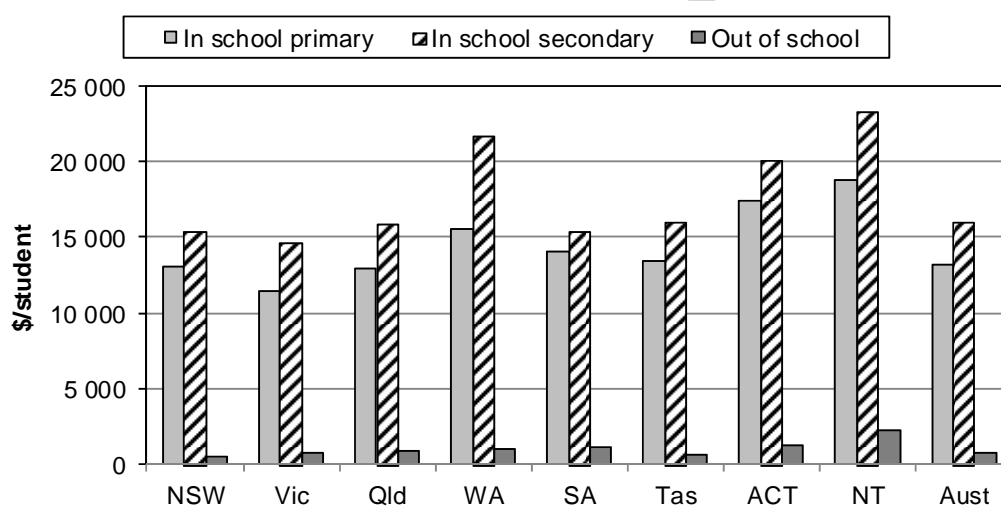
The 2002 Secondary Education Review, discussing resourcing, also pointed to inequities in resource distribution affecting schools. It noted that 'Equity of resourcing does not mean equal resourcing – it means differential resourcing according to local needs' (Ramsey: xii). At the time, the Review calculated that the average cost per full-time equivalent secondary student for the NT was \$13,057 (Ramsey: xiii).

## The Northern Territory education budget<sup>17</sup>

Many of the issues raised in earlier reports remain relevant. Although the Department now has a much more professional and analytic approach to the management of resourcing, the issues that made resourcing less effective in previous years still apply.

The cost of operating the Northern Territory education system in 2012-13 was \$864.9 million. Income, however, was only \$814.5 million, leaving a net operating deficit of \$50.5 million. The Australian Government budgeted contribution to income was \$248 million making up over 30% of the total budget. Government primary education cost just under \$340 million while secondary education cost just over \$251 million. Government pre-schooling cost almost \$40 million (\$11,717 per child) and child-care services almost \$17 million. Employee expenses made up 52% of expenditure (\$454 million). Northern Territory costs are about \$17,857 per student in primary schools and about \$22,724 per secondary student.

Figure 20 – \$ per student by jurisdiction and stage of schooling



Note that Figure 20 shows accurate relativities between jurisdictions but varies slightly in quantum from the review's calculation of per student costs listed above (Productivity Commission, 2013: 4.35).

These costs are higher than those for other jurisdictions. We note, however, that there is inevitably a higher average cost associated with educating Indigenous children in the Northern Territory because of geography, their disproportionate location in remote communities, social factors impacting on these children, their language background and the range of forms of educational disadvantage they experience. In addition, the Territory is a relatively small system with little opportunity to achieve economies of scale: many functions (e.g. development of new curriculum or support programs) are the same as in large states but amortised across a much smaller enrolment, so the cost of such overheads drives per student costs higher.

The Department calculates that the cost of Indigenous-specific programs is almost \$51 million, of which almost \$42 million is Australian Government funded. These costs do not, however, include the

<sup>17</sup> Data in this chapter, unless otherwise attributed, come from the 2013 Annual Report (DoE, 2013G) and from internal DoE briefings and working documents.

proportion of general expenditure on Indigenous education. The review has not attempted to calculate this cost specifically, since much of it is included in expenditure reports across hundreds of cost codes. While it might be useful for the Department to understand the relative costs of educating Indigenous students by geolocation, it is not essential.

Identifying the detailed costs of Indigenous education as if it were a separate enterprise is not a requirement for making progress. The review has approached issues of costs from the opposite perspective: what operations, processes, procedures, structures, programs and support are required to deliver a high quality education to Indigenous children in the Northern Territory? The costs associated with delivering an education of that kind will be analysed in a preliminary form in the implementation plan that will accompany the final version of our report. Nor does the review take a position on the current quantum of funding of Indigenous education in general. Instead, the report recommends actions required and the implementation plan will begin to map required spending to put them into practice.

The review recommends that Northern Territory funding for Indigenous education should be reformed to ensure that funding is allocated on the basis of clear goals reflected in a strategic plan, and is maintained for extended periods. This will allow Department units, regions and schools to undertake long-term planning, implement, monitor and evaluate key initiatives, and identify progress and modify plans in the light of evidence.

## Australian Government Funding

The report noted above that the Australian Government contribution to Northern Territory education, at about \$248 million in 2013-14, makes up about 30% of the total income of the Department. These resources are provided through 30 funding agreements between the two governments. A full list of these agreements is attached to this report at Appendix 4.

Of these agreements:

- 10 are National Partnership Agreements (NPA);
- 15 are Commonwealth Own Purpose Expenditure (COPE) funded;
- 2 are Special Purpose Payments (under the National Education Agreement); and
- 3 are funded under other agreement types.

In 2014–15, 23 of the existing 30 funding agreements between the NT Government and the Australian Government will expire. The remaining seven agreements will provide \$226 million in funding to the Northern Territory Government in the 2014–15 financial year.

Of the 30 agreements, 16 have an emphasis on providing services for Indigenous students. In 2013/14, these agreements will deliver \$76 million in funding to the Northern Territory. Over 60% of this funding is provided under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory National Partnership (SFNT).

Of the 16 agreements allocating funding specifically to Indigenous education, only two will continue in 2014-15. One is the SFNT, with funding of approximately \$50 million in 2014/15. The SFNT Implementation Plan will provide \$659 million over its life (2012-2022) to improve school readiness, attendance and achievement in 91 schools across the Northern Territory. Of this total, \$413 million is directed as follows:

- Additional Teachers (\$166 million)
- Additional Housing (\$52 million)
- Quality Teaching Initiatives (\$126 million)

- SEAM (\$22 million)
- School Nutrition Program (\$47 million).

The other continuing agreement is the Low Socio-Economic School Communities NP, funding for which is linked with school funding reform, and which could therefore conclude at the end of 2013. This agreement provides about \$8 million in 2014-15.

The initiatives funded under the existing agreements directed to Indigenous education address ongoing needs. While the expectation is that these agreements could be renegotiated, this has not yet occurred and there is some uncertainty about timing and process. Some of these agreements are of key strategic importance. These include agreements on Families as First Teachers, Child and Family Centres and the Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance Act (IETA). These programs address issues that are the focus of this review, including school readiness programs for Indigenous children and strengthening the quality of the remote teaching workforce.

The new Australian Government's election policy included a commitment to continuing the current level of funding for Closing the Gap initiatives but examining these programs to ensure that they are achieving their goals. The policy also noted issues to do with school attendance and literacy and numeracy achievement. These matters are also a focus for the current review. The policy included a commitment to extending the Schools Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) to all remote and very remote schools with attendance problems. SEAM was an initiative of the previous government under the SFNT to address attendance in line with the closing the gap targets. Following the election, the Australian Government has provided some detail on the new Remote School Attendance Strategy (see Chapter 9).

In addition, the recent resolution of future Commonwealth-Territory funding arrangements involves the provision of an additional \$272 million to the Northern Territory over the forward estimates. There have been no decisions announced by either government that suggest how this money will be spent.

The number and variety of these agreements (and specifically, for the purposes of this review, the agreements focused on Indigenous education) impose a considerable administrative burden on both the Northern Territory and the Australian Government. Reporting and accountability arrangements are onerous and deflect attention from program delivery to the fulfillment of administrative requirements. This difficulty arises in part because of the number of agreements and in part because of the detailed and prescriptive nature of each agreement. While such agreements need to ensure effective accountability to the Australian Government for funding acquittal and progress towards outcomes, it is the judgment of the review that the balance is skewed at present towards formal reporting processes and away from program effectiveness.

The review has identified numerous examples of distortions produced by funding mechanisms and timelines. The most common discussion during the extensive school visits undertaken by the review team concerned programs established with term-limited funding that had been terminated when funding ended, or extended in a cut-back form after the principal had spent considerable time and energy finding other funding sources, usually including School Council funding. These problems are not solely associated with Australian Government funding. Changes in Department of Education priorities and poor alignment and coordination at the Territory level have contributed to the school level problem. But arrangements to manage Australian Government funding are a major cause of the problem.

This problem reflects a gradual shift away from the 2008 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) framework agreement designed to simplify what was then recognised to be a problematic funding

model. The intention was to ensure that funding agreements between the Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions would be clearly focused on agreed outcomes and provide greater flexibility at the jurisdictional level regarding the allocation of funding. The current Australian Government-Northern Territory Government funding agreements show little evidence of this ambition. They reflect a multiplicity of funding sources, fragmentation and lack of effective alignment across different sources. There are inconsistencies between Territory and Australian Government approaches to funding and reliance on short-term funding to address long-term problems. In some cases there have been unanticipated changes in direction as governments, ministers or senior executives change. Agreements focus on inputs as much as outcomes, and are accompanied by onerous reporting requirements and tight prescription within agreements that make it more difficult to shift direction in response to changing circumstances. The Australian Government has been frustrated with the lack of progress in the Territory on key measures. There has been concern about cost-shifting and substitution.

The Northern Territory Government has indicated its wish to establish a new funding relationship with the new Australian Government. The Department of Education is looking to establish a long term funding commitment based on an agreed strategic plan with clear outcomes. The intention requires a plan that ensures the strategic allocation and use of resources and reduces the administrative burden of a large number of small, seemingly unconnected funding arrangements.

A related point is made by the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services in his 2013 report on progress with Local Implementation Plans:

It is recommended that work commence on developing better incentives for whole-of-government collaboration and driving funding reforms for remote Indigenous service providers to better align and streamline funding agreements and, where possible, extend funding periods (Gleeson, 2013: 46)

The review agrees that a new approach is essential, and especially for Indigenous education. This report argues for the development of a strategic plan for Indigenous education based on the recommendations in this review report (see Recommendation 2). The plan should have a very long term focus: at least a decade, with clear and explicit interim targets. Such a plan should be endorsed by both the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government. At both levels of government, it would ideally reflect a bipartisan agreement, as a means of assisting coherence and consistency over time in funding and its effects on implementation.

Funding arrangements between the two governments regarding Indigenous education should be focused on achievement of the goals and targets in the strategic plan. This should be reflected in a single, comprehensive, integrated agreement, supported by long term commitments, as flexible in funding allocation as is consistent with effective accountability and enabling renegotiation of current funding agreements (including the SFNT) where this would assist better alignment and more effective targeting of resources. The agreement should set challenging but realistic interim targets for achievement, recognise the time it will take to achieve substantial improvement in core indicators and provide a degree of certainty among the recipients of funding, especially schools, as to their capacity to undertake long-term planning based on an assured resource base.

The agreement should also allow mutually agreed modification of goals, targets and funding priorities in response to evidence over time. One clear outcome of this review has been the lack of high quality evidence about what works in Indigenous education. The funding agreement should commit both governments to high-quality longitudinal research on the effectiveness of key initiatives in such areas as school readiness, early literacy and numeracy achievement, alternative arrangements for the provision of secondary education, distance education as a means of provision in remote locations, attendance, school governance, community engagement as a contributor to student learning and the training, and recruitment and quality of remote teachers and principals. Governments should use data emerging



from the research to sharpen the focus of reform and redirect energy to those initiatives demonstrated to be the most effective.

## Recommendations

36. Allocate long-term funding in accordance with the strategic plan recommended by this review and maintain a consistent direction across the life of the plan.
37. Seek a single, integrated agreement with the Australian Government on funding for Indigenous education (and more broadly) committing both governments to:
  - a. long-term goals and targets based on the strategic plan for Indigenous education recommended by this review;
  - b. reasonable certainty in funding over an extended period allowing long-term planning;
  - c. flexibility in funding allocations by the Territory combined with effective accountability; and
  - d. longitudinal evaluation of all key initiatives enabling progressive modification of the plan in response to evidence.

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## Appendix One: *Learning Lessons*: a reflection on the Collins review

A number of reviews and reform agendas have shaped the Indigenous education policy currently in place. The review that is regarded as most significant in relation to Indigenous education is *Learning Lessons – an independent review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory* (Collins, 1999).

*Learning Lessons* was a comprehensive investigation into a broad range of factors affecting outcomes for Indigenous students. In 1998, the Northern Territory Government established a Review Team, comprising the Hon. Bob Collins, Tess Lea, and a team of departmental personnel to fulfill the Terms of Reference to establish:

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

The review reported in 1999, presenting 151 recommendations to government. The recommendations touched on virtually every area of the work of the department. They highlighted system changes urgently required to better support schools, including stronger relationships with parents and community, and rigorous assessment and reporting processes. The messages conveyed throughout the report are direct, and supported by data portraying unacceptable educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The *Learning Lessons* recommendations and discussion have influenced policy and practice for the subsequent 14 years. In 2005 the department compiled an implementation status report on the recommendations for the Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee co-chaired by Bob Collins and Esther Djayhurrnga, Principal Gunbalanya School. Of the 151 recommendations, 82 had been implemented fully and 51 were partially implemented with ongoing action. Seventeen recommendations were assessed as being superseded by new policy or legislation, and one, departmental housing for local recruits, had not had any government action (LLISC, 2005: 7 and 64).

In the period since the Collins review, major strategies were developed to drive the effort to improve student enrolment, attendance and retention, secondary education provision, staff recruitment and retention, literacy and numeracy and employment and training. These intentions are reflected in the Indigenous Education Strategic Plans of 2000-2004 and 2006-2009 (DEET, 2000 and DEET, 2006).

The Collins report was highly critical of the apparent attempt to bury or ignore the results from the bush, noting that at the time of the review the department had virtually no data management systems. By 2005 the story was different. Reporting infrastructure was in place and there was a continual roll-out of information technology. There was a clear goal to ensure that schools in remote communities were not disadvantaged by the lack of access to information and education programs and that data systems were available and accessible (LLISC, 2005: 7).

Much has changed in the political landscape and the department's structure (Ludwig & Sarra, 2009) since the 2005 status report was released. In undertaking the current review, it is apparent that the key themes of *Learning Lessons* still form part of the focus of the reform agenda for education in the Northern Territory. This review has not revisited all of the recommendations of *Learning Lessons*, but it has been useful to reflect on some of the major reform areas and seek information on what critical issues remain.

## Community engagement

*Learning Lessons* recommendations on partnerships and the self-managing schools program focused on the authority of the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory (IECNT). *Learning Lessons* explored options to break down the barriers between schools and communities and proposed the piloting of local and regional partnerships, under the auspice of the IECNT (Collins, 1999: 164). Negotiated agreements were to include components such as attendance, retention, flexible schooling, goals for improved education outcomes, improved facilities and professional development/staffing programs.

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

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

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

Information from within the department (internal departmental brief) indicates that remote schools have generally not taken up the degree of autonomy that is available to School Councils. Further, the department has acknowledged that there has been a lack of training in governance for School Council members, and in recent times the department has introduced annual school council governance training, aimed at building the capacity of school council members to fulfill their roles and responsibilities under the Education Act.

In conjunction with this the department has funded the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO) to develop and deliver school governance training to all government schools in the Northern Territory. The aim of the training is to work with School Council members and their communities to increase their awareness and understanding of governance processes. Thus all government School Councils have the opportunity to attend the annual Department of Education training and then receive follow-up NTCOGSO training, which can be tailored to meet the needs of their communities.

Feedback to the Review indicates that there is a degree of variance in how School Councils are engaged in the business of the school, and the degree to which governance training is achieved.

Since the time of *Learning Lessons*, there have been a number of approaches to community and school partnerships and better representation of Indigenous people in the delivery of education in the Northern Territory. Information provided to this review indicates that the department explored options

including Self-Managed Schools, Community Controlled Schools, Education Boards, Remote Learning Partnership Agreements (RLPAs) and more recently the Community and School Partnership Agreements. The Government now has, in addition, a policy for Community Driven Schools. Commentary provided suggests that there has been a genuine intent by all parties to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous students. Despite this, where outcomes were achieved they have not been sustained. As one contributor to the review indicated:

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

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

What is apparent from the feedback received is that at the system and school and community levels, the goal of community engagement remains elusive.

## Early Years

Collins (1999) acknowledged the critical importance of the early acquisition of literacy: '....children who fall behind are unlikely to catch up and in fact are more likely to find the gap widening in secondary school' (ibid: 96). Schooling culture, particularly in remote locations, would need to be developed and supported. Collins found that many schools were lacking the techniques and resources to assist them in working with very young children in the attainment of reading and writing skills. Further, the engagement of families in early literacy acquisition was considered essential, and at the time of *Learning Lessons* a number of trial programs were running in very remote communities, involving parent participation in the schooling experience (ibid: 97).

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

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

By providing the necessary space, props and developmentally appropriate activities, literacy and numeracy understandings will be developed that will assist the transition into the artificial and disciplined world of the classroom and its modes of instruction, making the transition to school more continuous and ultimately more successful (Collins 1999:99).

By 2005 the Australian and Northern Territory Governments were funding initiatives to increase access to early years programs throughout the Northern Territory. The *Learning Lessons* Implementation Status Report described the mobile preschools initiative and a rollout of childcare facilities and community initiatives to provide health promotion, care and early learning. Information provided for this Review indicates that effort in the early years has been an ongoing priority for Governments. Through Universal Access to early years learning the Northern Territory can now demonstrate that 90%

of the preschool cohort has access to services in the year prior to full-time schooling. The Indigenous enrolment for this cohort is 79.3%.

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have been working to integrate child and family services, particularly in remote communities 'where the population is among Australia's most culturally diverse and geographically isolated, with the greatest health, wellbeing, education and infrastructure needs of any Australians' (NTG Integrated Family Services Initiative handbook, YEAR: 8-9).

Integrating services continues to be a priority to ensure young children and families are engaged in early learning and care programs. Key initiatives include Families as First Teachers, mobile pre-schools and integrated service delivery through the child and family centre initiative. The Northern Territory Government will need to work closely with the Australian Government to streamline and guarantee targeted and ongoing funding if the success of these early years programs is to be sustained.

### **Access and Provision – Primary school**

The *Learning Lessons* report has a substantial focus on language and literacy acquisition. The review reported a view among many Indigenous respondents that children then at school had weaker literacy skills than earlier generations. The review team concluded that:

the Standard Australian English oracy and literacy of the majority of Indigenous students in remote and to a lesser extent urban schools are simply not at a level that enables full participation in further education, training or employment (Collins, 1999: 118).

The deficit was quantified through data on the percentage of students achieving year level benchmarks in 1998, with remote and ESL Indigenous students performing very poorly:

## Appendix Two: School and Site Visits

The sites listed below are those visited during the course of the review process prior to the finalisation of the Draft Report.

Alyangula Area School  
Amoonguna School  
Angurugu School  
Barunga School  
Callistemon House  
Centralian Middle School  
Centralian Senior College  
Gray Primary School  
Gunbalanya West Arnhem College  
Macfarlane Primary School  
Maningrida School  
Milyakburra School  
Minyerri School  
Moulden Park Primary School  
N'taria School  
Ngukurr College  
Palmerston High School  
Sadadeen Primary School  
Shepherdson College  
Spinifex State College Mt Isa  
Spinifex State College Residential Campus  
Tennant Creek High School  
Tennant Creek Primary School  
Umbakamba School  
Wangkana-Kari Hostel  
Wugularr School  
Yirara College  
Yirrkalā Homelands School  
Yirrkalā School  
Yuendumu School



## Appendix Three: Remote Secondary Provision Trial

(Provided by the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team in the Department of Education)

Secondary provision to Indigenous students in regional and remote Territory schools is characterised by what can be described as ‘patchy’ outcomes. These outcomes emerge from the challenges of delivering quality education in an environment of low attendance<sup>18</sup>. Effects of low attendance include poor literacy and numeracy, low employability skills and Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions well below national benchmarks. Improving the number of students who obtain an NTCET completion<sup>19</sup> is a key performance indicator to ensure every student is a successful learner<sup>20</sup>. While Indigenous NTCET completions have seen an increase, they have largely been achieved in urban and provincial areas. Remote completions remain low.

The Department of Education (DoE) has a goal of increasing the number of students who achieve paid employment at the end of their schooling. The evolution of the Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE) into the NTCET is a result of the desire to legitimise vocational pathways within schools and build flexible options congruent with the economic needs of the Territory. As a result of this, students remaining at school through to year 12 will have a choice of three pathways: full academic, full vocational and a combination of the two. The academic pathway is well understood by educators and programs are often driven by the rules to achieve an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). A vocational pathway, while less understood by schools, allows a student to undertake compulsory NTCET Stage One subjects and then fulfil the educational pattern requirements by gaining credit towards NTCET completion with vocational and educational training (VET) programs. To achieve NTCET completion via the vocational pathway, students would be required to undertake a Certificate III level VET program which is deemed the equivalent of a Stage 2 subject. This presents difficulties due to the higher levels of literacy and numeracy demanded at this certificate level resulting often in a mixture of academic and vocational. The third pathway is a blended mixture of the academic and vocational pathways, and is the basis of the proposal.

### Proposal in brief

The aim of the Remote Secondary Provision trial is to improve NTCET and employment outcomes for Indigenous students. Both are considered desirable outcomes. For many students, both aims will be realised simultaneously. Students who gain employment and leave school prior to achieving an NTCET are considered successful by the Department. The four schools identified for the trial are N’taria School, Gunbalanya School, Tennant Creek High School and Katherine High School. In each school the program will be characterised by:

- a vocationally focused program preparing students for employment pathways, supported by online resources from the Pre-VET package in the middle years;
- an employment focussed VET program;
- a VET based leadership program associated with an engagement program such as Clontarf, Girls Academies or Cadets;

<sup>18</sup> One third of NT schools experience attendance less than 70% during Term 3 2013 ( $\mu=76\%$   $\sigma=22\%$ ).

<http://www.education.nt.gov.au/students/at-school/enrolment-attendance/enrolment-attendance-statistics>

<sup>19</sup> NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community/curriculum-ntbos/ntcet>

<sup>20</sup> Goal 2: Every student a successful learner. Creating Success Together *Department of Education Strategic Plan 2013–2015*

- an industry engagement plan incorporating an industry placement program; and
- online resources to support the delivery of stage one and two subjects.

Remote Secondary Provision is based on the Employment Pathways Model developed by the Industry, Engagement and Employment Pathways (IEEP) team.

School support will be provided by a joint team made up of members from the IEEP team, the Senior Years team and distance education providers.

## Proposal in detail

The DoE strategic plan commits it to working with key stakeholders to achieve the best possible educational outcomes and pathways for young people in the Northern Territory. Indigenous students' NTCET outcomes is a key priority. This achievement provides students with choices once they have completed their time at school, but does not guarantee successful post schooling employment and progression options. For several years the Employment Pathway Model has evolved under a united goal to empower regional and remote Indigenous students to achieve qualified sustainable working futures as Australian citizens and as individually and culturally respected members of their local community. Resource development, service delivery models and the development of trade training facilities are all aligned to this critical goal.

## NTCET outcomes and the NTG Blueprint

The NTCET is an outcome that can be flexibly achieved. It is an internationally recognised qualification, designed to recognise the knowledge and skills that have been acquired through formal education and training. It provides students with access to flexible learning arrangements where students have increased opportunities to develop the academic, interpersonal and employment-related skills needed for the future<sup>21</sup>. Students must earn 200 relevant points to achieve the certificate. While there are many permutations, at its simplest an NTCET can be achieved by engaging in a VET or academic pattern which includes a compulsory Personal Learning Plan (PLP), two compulsory literacy subjects and one compulsory numeracy subject at a Stage One level aggregated with a minimum of 60 Stage Two credits associated with agreed subjects or VET equivalents (typically within a Certificate III level VET program).

The Department of Education Strategic plan 2013–2015 supports the Government's *Framing the Future* agenda<sup>22</sup> which commits to working with industry and education providers to create structured pathways to employment for students to ensure a capable and flexible workforce can meet the demands of Northern Territory business.

An NTCET outcome can be achieved in conjunction with employment pathway. However, for some students a vocational and blended pathway can lead to gainful employment and not to an NTCET outcome. Employment in an apprenticeship or traineeship, provided it is equivalent to a Stage Two outcome, will still allow an NTCET to be achieved. Direct employment into a job that is not part of further training is aligned to outcomes for the NTG Blueprint and for RSP trial purposes is recognised as a positive outcome even though it is not able to contribute to an NTCET outcome.

## The Employment Pathways Model

Through the course of its work over the last three years the IEEP team has developed a model for the conduct of an employment pathway for students in school. Given the disadvantage experienced in a

<sup>21</sup> Curriculum, Assessment Reporting and Certification Policy: Years 10–12 <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/teachers-educators/ntbos/policies-and-guidelines>

<sup>22</sup> NTG Framing the Future Blueprint p.7 [http://www.dcm.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/59780/FramingTheFutureDraftStrategy.pdf](http://www.dcm.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/59780/FramingTheFutureDraftStrategy.pdf)

significant number of remote communities many students have restricted exposure to concepts of work. In regional towns the situation is similar for a significant but smaller percentage of Indigenous students. Addressing this issue is the core element of changing the pathway from further dysfunction and disadvantage.

The Employment Pathways model is easily understood by students allowing them to envisage their preferred future. With post schooling employment focus at its core, the Employment Pathways model provides the student with an underlying reason to attend school and offers a clear pathway through school to a job, thus answering the question ‘Why come?’, supporting sustained engagement.

The Employment Pathways model uses VET as its main tool and introduces VET in various stages. It subsequently engages the student increasingly in the work place to validate the career choice and to maintain a consistent increase in employability skills acquisition. This prepares the student effectively for their life after school. The model unfolds in stages:

Years 7 and 8	Students engage in a pre-VET program, introducing them to the world of work. This can be supported by online resources and should include engagement with role models who are in jobs. It requires students to undertake excursions to work places and interact with employers.
Year 9	Introduce the first formal VET Certificate programs in a broad-based course relevant to local employment circumstance (eg: Resources and Infrastructure in a mining area). Introduce job work placement and simulated placement.  To ensure that students gain the additional skills required by employers that are not obtainable under Certificate programs, JobSkills funding is used to boost student achievement and skills acquisition. This grants-based funding provides support for short-term one-off courses such as white card and first aid skills.
Years 10–12	Introduce the Certificate II level programs with the Stage One compulsory subjects, also Stage One and Stage Two VET focused subjects to complete the student’s pattern.

Alternatively, once the compulsory subjects have been achieved the student can be focused on a strong Certificate II outcome then in Year 12 move to a School Based Apprenticeship at a Certificate III level. The attainment of a Certificate III will, in most cases, count towards Stage Two equivalents and therefore can be used to fulfil the remaining elements of a student’s pattern.

In both cases on-the-job placement needs to increase during this phase to allow the student to obtain skills to enable authentic engagement. IEEP have also introduced what has been referred to as ‘finishing schools’ where students can bring all their learned skills together in an authentic environment. This is currently achieved through training focussed stations owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation or managed through an Aboriginal Land Trust. A ‘practice’ mine would be another useful example of a ‘finishing school’. JobSkills will again provide additional complex one-off training programs to enhance employability skills.

The Employment Pathways model is dependent on effective delivery of VET in a school program.

Effective delivery is not via block delivery mode which provides a single week of training during a term. VET programs need to be a regular feature of the school's timetable and guided by an embedded trainer reporting to a recognised Registered Training Organisation. Literacy and numeracy should be a contextualised learning experience<sup>23</sup>. The Employment Pathways model is also dependent on school leadership to ensure teachers contextualise curriculum so there is an authentic connection to the VET program. As a collaborative team teaching-training model, students undertake learning as a means of strengthening both vocational and academic outcomes.

VET programs are more successful when a mentor is engaged. However, this is frequently outside the scope of school budgets. An important stakeholder, the mentor needs to be a traditional owner with a vested interest in the success of the program that acts as an important link between community and school by providing support and understanding to the student before they disengage.

## Engagement

Various engagement programs are run in schools with the intent of ensuring that students who attend school remain at school. Programs such as Clontarf and Sporting Chance for Girls are now widely known and well established models facilitated by third party organisations. In every school some form of engagement program is undertaken. The Clontarf program exists in three of the four identified trial schools. Girls' engagement programs are run in each school in various forms. Cadets do not currently operate in any of the identified trial schools, however discussions are being undertaken between DoE and the Department of Defence.

## Online Resources

The team has developed a suite of online courseware to support that will underpin the model in any context but is most suited to remote delivery. Pathways products are ideal for new teachers in Northern Territory remote schools or teachers inexperienced in delivering a particular subject. For experienced teachers Pathways products are an exceptional resource for adaption as a whole, or in components for integration into existing programs.

Pathways online courseware products provide extensive support in prepared documentation and course materials. The Pathways products focused on are: Pre-VET™, Ready to Run, Nodes™ and Fliplets

Nodes™ and Fliplets products both focus on Hospitality and Tourism and extract the literacy the numeracy required for a learner to be able achieve a successful outcome in a VET program.

scaffold the student's broader learning with relevant resources that are applicable to everyday items known to the student's world. They help makes sense of the training program to the student.

**NODES** Courses

and  
to  
They

**PreVET**

Showcasing a broad range of possible jobs, Pre-VET™ provides a set of resources to teachers and information to students that unpacks the elements of a series of jobs. It uses everyday Indigenous people as role models to introduce positive ideas about work and connect the work activities to the classroom through layered support resources. Pre-VET™ opens up possibilities for each student and gets them thinking about employment, usually in circumstances where they rarely engage with long



<sup>23</sup> McGlusky, N., Thaker, L. (2006). Literacy support for Indigenous people: current systems and practices in Queensland. Adelaide: NCVER. p.24

term employed Indigenous people.



Ready to Run subjects support VET Pathways by providing teaching and learning materials for Senior Years subjects through four NTCET

recognised subjects: Personal Learning Plan, Workplace Practices, Design and Technology Stage 1 (Talking Poster) and

Stage 2 (Vamp TV Music Video). Each course is designed to



improve digital literacy, problem solving skills and focus wherever possible on post schooling



employment pathways. New teachers in the Northern Territory or teachers inexperienced in delivering a particular subject would significantly benefit from the standards modelled

in this courseware. Ready to Run provides extensive support in prepared documentation and course materials. For experienced teachers this is a comprehensive resource available on DoE's learning management system (Moodle) in a cloned form for adaption or in components for integration into existing programs.

**WORKPLACE PRACTICES**

## Bringing it all together

The above programs have been developed in broad consultation and are aligned to employment pathways but largely in isolation of each other. Now they are being brought together to operate more effectively in schools. The individual parts of the outlined Employment Pathways model can operate well together. However an effective linking together can be achieved by the introduction of an employability skill focused VET led program operating alongside existing engagement and VET programs.

The introduction of such a program would strengthen and build on work already being achieved in key engagement programs such as Clontarf and offer an outcome that can contribute to the students' overall educational achievement. To date the work of Clontarf-type engagement programs have been useful as character builders and in improving attendance, but have not directly contributed to the educational attainment of a student. Equally VET programs, while ensuring employability skills are addressed, do not exclusively focus on them. As part of the Employment Pathways Model, it is proposed that VET aligned Leadership Certificates be developed to act as the link most suitable for this task. Currently, the identified Certificate is based on a Western Australian program and will require a significant amount of development to reflect Northern Territory contexts. Embedded trainers will be required to deliver the program. The DoE has a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in place, but the Leadership Certificate will need to be added to its current scope of registration to allow the delivery of certificate to occur.

The outcome will be a project in four schools that takes the following shape:

- a team made up of IEEP, Senior Years, NTOEC and KSA would monitor the introduction and progress of the project;
- the model of operations adopted would be based on the Employment Pathways model outlined above;
- linked to this model would be a leadership program that would be VET orientated and support students involved in defined engagement programs;
- a VET Consultant and Senior Years representative would work together to advise schools on student patterns; and
- the eLearning and Development team would develop a leadership program and senior years VET

focused subjects for online delivery.

To overcome the problems associated with school staff turnover, each school site and the project team will be asked to sign a three-year agreement.

DRAFT

## Appendix Four: Australian Government Funding Agreements

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
	<b>National Partnership Payments</b>						
1	Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory <i>2013-2022</i>	<b>412.65</b>	46.49	50.60	Improve school readiness, attendance and attainment of students in 91 remote and very remote schools. \$52.121M of this is for housing construction and is provided to the Department of Housing.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
2	Low Socio-Economic School Communities <i>2009-2016</i>	<b>70.13</b>	10.43	7.95	To improve student engagement, educational attainment and wellbeing in participating schools, make inroads into entrenched disadvantage (including in Indigenous communities), contribute to broader social and economic objectives and improve understanding about effective intervention.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
3	Improving Teacher Quality <i>2009-2013</i>	<b>5.92</b>	2.14 <i>(Reward)</i>	0	To improve teacher and school leader quality to sustain a quality teaching workforce with additional funding for the Principal Professional Development project.	No	DE (DEEWR)
4	Improving Literacy and Numeracy <i>2013-2013</i>	<b>6.63</b>	2.21	0	Support the implementation of evidence based literacy and numeracy practices in selected participating schools with a particular focus on students performing at or below national minimal standard in the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).	No	DE (DEEWR)
5	Universal Access to Early Childhood Education <i>2013-2015</i>	<b>8.30</b>	5.10	3.0	Universal Access to, and improved participation by children in, quality early childhood education in the year before full-time school, with a focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged children.	No	DE (DEEWR)
6	National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care 2010-2014	<b>2.61</b>	0.84	0	Establish a jointly governed unified National Quality Framework for early childhood care and Outside School Hours Care services.	No	DE (DEEWR)



	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
7	Rewards for Great Teachers <i>2013-2019</i>	<b>11.10</b>	0.39	1.23	To recognise quality teachers through a teacher reward payment scheme and contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of all teachers by ensuring they have access to constructive performance and development processes and will contribute to improved learning outcomes for students.	No	DE (DEEWR)
8	More Support for Students with Disabilities <i>2011-2014</i>	<b>2.94</b>	0.78	0.58	Australian schools and teachers are better able to support students with disabilities, contributing to improved student learning experiences, educational outcomes and transitions to further education or work.	No	DE (DEEWR)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
9	Youth Attainment and Transitions <i>2009-2014</i>	<b>1.43</b>	0.18	0	To increase the educational engagement, attainment and successful transitions of young people.  To achieve a national Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate of 90 per cent by 2015, provide an education or training entitlement to young people aged 15-24; better engage young people in education and training; assist young people age 15-24 to make a successful transition from schooling into further education, training or employment.	No	DE (DEEWR)
10	Closing the GAP: NPA on Indigenous Early Childhood Development <i>2009-2014</i>	<b>42.35</b>	5.62	0	Improve developmental outcomes for Indigenous children and achieve key targets as agreed by Council of Australian Governments (COAG). \$26.239m of this funding is for construction and is provided to the Department of Infrastructure.	Yes	DSS (FaHCSIA)
<b>Sub Total (National Partnership Payments)</b>			<b>74.18</b>	<b>63.36</b>			

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
	<b>Commonwealth Own Purpose Payments</b>						
11	Employment Pathways for Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants in the Northern Territory - Education Support 2010-11 to 2013-14	24.08	5.582*	0	<p>Create career paths for Indigenous Australians in Northern Territory (NT) schools and provide ongoing support for employees in these funded positions. Funds available to assist with accredited training costs.</p> <p>*This is the total amount available under the agreement for 188 positions. Funding received may be less due to decreased participant numbers.</p>	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
12	Family Support Program - Families as First Teachers 2010-2014	15.39	3.41	0	<p>The program consists of two schedules. Schedule one is focused on increasing the number of Indigenous families and children that have access to parent-child services and actively promoting positive outcomes for young children. Schedule two provides regular playgroup sessions by qualified staff in remote locations.</p>	Yes	DSS (FaHCSIA)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
13	Ongoing National Implementation Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)- 2012 collection cycle under The Child Care Services Support Program <i>2012-2014</i>	<b>0.51</b>	0.22	0	The NT through the AEDI community engagement program will promote the AEDI and facilitate ongoing community engagement, dissemination of data and community action planning.	No	DE (DEEWR)
14	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 1 - Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) (preschool only) <i>2009-2014</i>	<b>0.92</b>	0.46	0	SRA is available for government and non-government providers that meet eligibility criteria and aims to accelerate the educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians beyond those which could reasonably be expected from mainstream and own source funding alone.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
15	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 6 - Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) <i>2009-2013</i>	<b>2.23</b>	0.23	0	This project allows the IECBs to consult with ATSI communities and provide advice to the Australian and State/Territory Governments to progress the achievement of goals of the National ATSI Education Policy (AEP) and the ATSI Education Action Plan 2010-2014.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
16	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 15 - Teach Remote Stage 2 - Phase 1 2011-2013	1.60	0.80	0	The National Alliance for Remote Indigenous Schools (NARIS) is a high level steering committee driving collaboration between the NT, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales (the NARIS Jurisdictions). The aim is over time to build a high status, high quality, committed and competent workforce for remote schools, with a focus on recruiting, selecting and supporting teachers in remote communities.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
17	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 13 - Teach Remote	2.12	0.08	0	As above.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
18	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 15.1 - Teach Remote Stage 2 - Phase 2 2013	0.94	0.83	0	The objective of Teach Remote Stage 2 (the Program) is to support NARIS in building a high status, high quality, committed and competent workforce in remote Indigenous communities across Australia.  The Program will contribute to effective recruiting, selecting, training and supporting teachers who work in remote and very remote communities.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
19	Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. 2009-2013 Schedule 14.5 - NTIEC PaCE Governance and Administration Training 2013	<b>0.32</b>	0.32	0	Establish the Tiwi Islands Education Board that will provide community driven governance and direction to all schools on the Tiwi Islands.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
20	Providing Access for Immigration Detainee Children in the Northern Territory to Education in Northern Territory Government Schools 2013 (4-15 years)	<b>1.89</b>	0.92	0	Providing all detainee children between the ages of 4 and 15 years who have been in or may be expected to be in immigration detention for longer than 3 weeks will be considered by DIAC and DET for placement in a NTG school.	No	DIBP (DIAC)
21	Providing Immigration detainee children (16-17 years) access to education in government schools and providing an educational holiday program for immigration detainee children (5-15 years)	<b>2.37</b>	0.77	0	Placement of detainee children aged 16 to 17 years in NTG Schools giving them the opportunity to obtain an education whilst in detention.	No	DIBP (DIAC)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
22	Providing Immigration Detainee Children Aged 16 to 17 years with access to Education in Northern Territory Government Schools and Providing an Educational Holiday Program for Immigration Detainee Children Aged 5 to 15 years (2012)	1.64	0.72	0	Placement of detainee children aged 16 to 17 years in NTG Schools giving them the opportunity to obtain an education whilst in detention.	No	DIBP (DIAC)
23	Indigenous Ranger Cadetship Pilot in Maningrida Community Education Centre 2013-2015	0.50	0.33	0	Generate stronger ATSI community engagement, improve school capacity to retain ATSI students to Year 12 and assist students transition from school to further education, training and work. Contribute to lifting Year 12 attainment levels for ATSI students and to closing the gap in learning outcomes between ATSI and other students.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
24	Indigenous Ranger Cadetship Pilot in Yirrkala Community Education Centre and Shepherdson College 2012-2015	1.00	0.50	0	As above.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
25	Katherine High School (KHS) Stronger Smarter Sisters Academy 2010-2014	0.59	0.08	0	Deliver girls only school-based sports academy, focusing on improving the participation and engagement of Indigenous female students that are at risk of not completing Year 12 or equivalent. The academy will operate in KHS during the 2010, 2011 and 2012 calendar years.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
Sub Total (Commonwealth Own Purpose Payments)			15.25	0			



	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
	<b>Special Purpose Payments</b>						
26	National Education Agreement – Government Schools	Ongoing	57.47	56.50	Contributes to shared outcomes including ensuring that all children are engaged and benefiting from schooling with a goal to lift the year 12 attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2015; ensuring children meet basic literacy and numeracy standards; and continuing to improve overall literacy and numeracy achievement.  This funding is untied and is used to supplement core budget.	No	Cwlth Treasury
27	National Education Agreement – non-government schools	Ongoing	99.37	106.06	Agreements are between DEEWR and non-govt schools - DoE acts as a "post-box" in that it receives money from the Australian Government and facilitates payments to non-government schools.	No	Cwlth Treasury
<b>Sub Total (Special Purpose Payments)</b>			<b>156.84</b>	<b>162.56</b>			

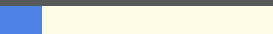



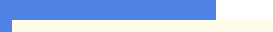
	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
	<b>Other</b>						
28	Focus School Next Steps Initiative <i>2012-2014</i>	<b>3.22</b>	0.28	0	Through the ATSI Education Action Plan Focus Schools Next Steps Initiative, the Australian Government in consultation with education providers have targeted 101 of the Focus schools across Australia that require extra assistance to achieve the Closing the Gap education targets. The NT has been allocated Next Steps funding for 10 government and one non-government schools.	Yes	QUT via DE (DEEWR)
29	Agreement with Education Services Australia - MOU 2013	<b>0.8</b>	0.80	0	Integrate Scootle into DoE IT environment to facilitate online support of the Australian Curriculum.	No	ESA

	Funding Agreement	Agreement Total (\$M)	2013-2014 (\$M)	2014-2015 (\$M)	Agreement Objectives	Indigenous Emphasis	Funding Agency
30	Mobile Families as First Teachers (MFaFT) – Central Australia	0.68	0.68	0	To promote positive outcomes for vulnerable Indigenous families with young children (aged 0-5 years old) living in small remote communities in Central Australia by providing intensive, targeted and coordinated support to improve child development, child safety and family functioning.	Yes	DE (DEEWR)
Sub Total (Other)			1.76	0.0			
GRAND TOTAL ALL AGREEMENTS			248.03	226.01			





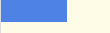



## Appendix Five: Indigenous Education Review Survey

The tables below show results of the first seven questions in the online survey conducted as part of the data gather phase of the review. Questions 8–11 involved open-ended answers. These are being analysed and will be discussed in the final report.







### 1. Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Yes - Aboriginal		73	15%
2	Yes - Torres Strait Islander		3	1%
3	Yes - Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		6	1%
4	No		370	78%
5	No Response		23	5%
	Total		475	100%



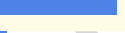




### 2. Tick all that apply to you

#	Answer		Response	%
1	I am a parent or guardian of a child/children aged up to 5 years		45	10%
2	I am a parent or guardian of one or more school aged children		132	29%
3	I am a parent or guardian of a child or children older than 17		101	22%
4	I work or have worked with children at a school		367	80%
5	I work or have worked with children in a childcare setting		53	12%
6	I work or have worked with children in another setting		113	25%
7	None of the above		17	4%
8	No response		11	2%
	Total		456	100%








### 3. Which of these best describe you?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	I work in a Northern Territory government school		257	56%
2	I work in the corporate area of the NT Department of Education		81	18%
3	I work in another government department		27	6%
4	I work in a Northern Territory non-government school		13	3%
5	I am a member of the general public/other		64	14%
6	No response		14	3%
	Total		456	100%











### 4. Are you....?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	A Principal		33	12%
2	A registered teacher in the school leadership team		69	26%
3	A registered teacher not in the school leadership team		95	36%
4	An assistant teacher (A/T)		7	3%
5	Other teaching staff		23	9%
6	Non teaching staff		35	13%
7	No response		5	2%
	Total		267	100%

### 5. How long have you been employed in the education system?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Less than 2 years		28	8%
2	2 or more years, but less than 5 years		48	14%
3	5 or more years, but less than 10 years		62	18%
4	10 or more years, but less than 15 years		64	18%
5	15 or more years, but less than 20 years		37	11%
6	20 or more years		105	30%
7	No response		4	1%
	Total		348	100%

## 6. Where do you live?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Darwin, Palmerston or Darwin rural area		181	40%
2	Townships near Darwin including Batchelor, Wagait, Adelaide River		6	1%
3	Alice Springs		56	12%
4	Katherine		44	10%
5	Tennant Creek		12	3%
6	Nhulunbuy		17	4%
7	In the NT but outside of these town centres		111	25%
8	In Australia, but outside of the NT		16	4%
9	Outside Australia		0	0%
10	No response		10	2%
	Total		453	100%

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**7. For each statement, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.**

#	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Can't say or Not Applicable	Total Responses	Mean
1	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides programs that prepare children for learning in the early years of school	19	66	60	189	41	24	399	3.45
2	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory encourages parents to be involved in their children's schooling	25	109	69	152	32	12	399	3.15
3	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is good at teaching English literacy to Indigenous children with English as an additional language or dialect	88	159	57	60	21	14	399	2.39
4	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides the opportunity for Indigenous children to achieve a quality secondary education	108	141	43	64	30	13	399	2.40
5	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition into primary school	22	83	85	147	27	35	399	3.20
6	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from primary to middle years of schooling (i.e. from Year 6 to Year 7)	37	109	85	114	26	28	399	2.95
7	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from the middle years to senior years of schooling (i.e. from Year 9 to Year 10)	66	112	84	78	23	36	399	2.67
8	I think education is highly valued by parents in my school community	45	93	63	121	60	17	399	3.15
9	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is meeting the needs of Indigenous children	164	143	40	37	9	6	399	1.94
10	I think that the government education system in the Northern Territory is improving learning outcomes for Indigenous children	105	120	71	77	16	10	399	2.43

Statistic	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides programs that prepare children for learning in the early years of school	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory encourages parents to be involved in their children's schooling	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is good at teaching English literacy to Indigenous children with English as an additional language or dialect	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory provides the opportunity for Indigenous children to achieve a quality secondary education	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition into primary school	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from primary to middle years of schooling (i.e. from Year 6 to Year 7)	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory supports children through their transition from the middle years to senior years of schooling (i.e. from Year 9 to Year 10)	I think education is highly valued by parents in my school community	I think the government education system in the Northern Territory is meeting the needs of Indigenous children	I think that the government education system in the Northern Territory is improving learning outcomes for Indigenous children
Min Value	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max Value	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Mean	3.45	3.15	2.39	2.40	3.20	2.95	2.67	3.15	1.94	2.43
Variance	1.12	1.25	1.34	1.60	1.13	1.28	1.40	1.64	1.10	1.43
Standard Deviation	1.06	1.12	1.16	1.27	1.06	1.13	1.18	1.28	1.05	1.20
Total Responses	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399

### 9. In your opinion, what are the strengths of Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	254

### 10. In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	278

### 11. In your opinion, what helps to improve Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools? What could enable improvement?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	275

### 12. In your opinion, what doesn't help to improve Indigenous education in Northern Territory government schools? What are the barriers to success?

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	267



**13. Is there any other feedback you'd like to provide into the review into Indigenous Education?**

Statistic	Value
Total Responses	191

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## Appendix Six: Town and bush schools

Schools on the list below are categorised as town schools or bush schools. The list is designed to be used in interpreting discussion and recommendations in the report referring to the different treatment of these categories of school. Distance education schools remain uncategorised. A number of other schools, nominally in each category are marked in colour to indicate that they should be further examined to determine the appropriate category based on their enrolment, attendance and achievement along with patterns of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage.

The categories cut across standard geolocations. The two Nhulunbuy schools and the two Tennant Creek schools, while classified as very remote, are categorised here as town schools. All other very remote schools are categorised as bush schools. Ten remote schools are categorised as bush schools (though three of these are recommended for further analysis). All other remote schools are categorised as town schools. All provincial schools are classified as town schools.

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Acacia Hill School	Alice Springs	Remote	60	66.67%	33.33%	Town
Bradshaw Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	398	42.21%	57.79%	Town
Braitling Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	259	69.11%	30.89%	Town
Centralian Middle School	Alice Springs	Remote	360	65.56%	34.44%	Town
Centralian Senior College	Alice Springs	Remote	462	46.75%	53.25%	Town
Gillen Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	293	63.48%	36.52%	Town
Larapinta Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	288	42.71%	57.29%	Town
Ross Park Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	454	14.10%	85.90%	Town
Sadadeen Primary School	Alice Springs	Remote	203	63.55%	36.45%	Town
Alawa Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	195	34.36%	65.64%	Town
Anula Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	413	18.89%	81.11%	Town
Casuarina Senior College	Darwin	Provincial	942	20.59%	79.41%	Town
Darwin High School	Darwin	Provincial	1167	6.60%	93.40%	Town
Darwin Middle School	Darwin	Provincial	643	10.26%	89.74%	Town
Dripstone Middle School	Darwin	Provincial	640	20.00%	80.00%	Town
Henbury School	Darwin	Provincial	90	30.00%	70.00%	Town
Jingili Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	332	17.17%	82.83%	Town
Karama Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	248	50.40%	49.60%	Town
Larrakeyah Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	370	4.05%	95.95%	Town
Leanyer Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	539	10.58%	89.24%	Town
Ludmilla Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	175	34.86%	65.14%	Town
Malak Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	288	48.61%	51.04%	Town
Manunda Terrace Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	225	50.67%	49.33%	Town
Millner Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	238	43.28%	56.72%	Town
Moil Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	330	13.33%	86.36%	Town
Nakara Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	510	8.82%	91.18%	Town
Nemarluk School	Darwin	Provincial	140	38.57%	61.43%	Town

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Nightcliff Middle School	Darwin	Provincial	251	23.90%	76.10%	Town
Nightcliff Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	511	10.57%	89.43%	Town
Parap Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	514	6.42%	93.58%	Town
Sanderson Middle School	Darwin	Provincial	389	30.59%	69.41%	Town
Stuart Park Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	560	6.79%	93.21%	Town
Tivendale School	Darwin	Provincial	35	91.43%	8.57%	Town
Wagaman Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	325	27.69%	72.31%	Town
Wanguri Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	426	15.96%	84.04%	Town
Wulagi Primary School	Darwin	Provincial	234	30.34%	69.66%	Town
Bees Creek Primary School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	348	10.92%	88.79%	Town
Berry Springs Primary School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	229	20.09%	79.91%	Town
Girraween Primary School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	424	8.96%	91.04%	Town
Howard Springs Primary School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	251	13.94%	86.06%	Town
Humpty Doo Primary School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	411	25.30%	74.70%	Town
Middle Point School	Darwin Rural	Provincial	26	11.54%	88.46%	Town
Taminmin College	Darwin Rural	Provincial	1020	16.08%	83.92%	Town
Adelaide River School	Darwin Rural	Remote	43	32.56%	67.44%	Town
Batchelor Area School	Darwin Rural	Remote	150	54.67%	45.33%	Town
Jabiru Area School	Jabiru	Remote	300	52.67%	47.33%	Town
Casuarina Street Primary School	Katherine	Remote	282	12.41%	87.59%	Town
Clyde Fenton Primary School	Katherine	Remote	249	63.45%	36.55%	Town
Katherine High School	Katherine	Remote	592	43.07%	56.93%	Town
Katherine South Primary School	Katherine	Remote	397	29.97%	70.03%	Town
Kintore Street School	Katherine	Remote	27	77.78%	22.22%	Town
MacFarlane Primary School	Katherine	Remote	216	89.81%	10.19%	Town
Nhulunbuy High School	Nhulunbuy	Very Remote	227	14.10%	85.90%	Town
Nhulunbuy Primary School	Nhulunbuy	Very Remote	559	16.28%	83.72%	Town
Bakewell Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	660	15.76%	84.24%	Town
Driver Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	482	25.93%	74.07%	Town
Durack Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	391	8.44%	91.56%	Town
Gray Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	328	44.21%	55.79%	Town
Moulden Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	398	55.78%	44.22%	Town
Palmerston Senior College	Palmerston	Provincial	487	28.13%	71.87%	Town
Rosebery Middle School	Palmerston	Provincial	625	30.08%	69.92%	Town
Rosebery Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	452	11.06%	88.94%	Town
Woodroffe Primary School	Palmerston	Provincial	421	21.62%	78.38%	Town
Tennant Creek High School	Tennant Creek	Very Remote	173	82.08%	17.92%	Town
Tennant Creek Primary School	Tennant Creek	Very Remote	430	72.56%	27.44%	Town

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Amoonguna School	Remote	Remote	30	100.00%		Bush
Barunga School	Remote	Remote	63	98.41%	1.59%	Bush
Belyuen School	Remote	Remote	33	100.00%		Bush
Douglas Daly School	Remote	Remote	11		100.00%	Bush
Dundee Beach School	Remote	Remote	15		100.00%	Bush
Pine Creek School	Remote	Remote	54	85.19%	14.81%	Bush
Tipperary Station School	Remote	Remote	6		100.00%	Bush
Wallace Rockhole School	Remote	Remote	14	100.00%		Bush
Woolaning School	Remote	Remote	6	100.00%		Bush
Woolianna School	Remote	Remote	68	79.41%	20.59%	Bush
Alcoota School	Remote	Very Remote	45	100.00%		Bush
Alekarenge School	Remote	Very Remote	140	100.00%		Bush
Alpururulam School	Remote	Very Remote	133	100.00%		Bush
Alyangula Area School	Remote	Very Remote	199	20.60%	79.40%	Bush
Alyarrmandumanja Umbakumba School	Remote	Very Remote	123	100.00%		Bush
Amanbidji School	Remote	Very Remote	17	100.00%		Bush
Ampilatwatja School	Remote	Very Remote	105	99.05%	0.95%	Bush
Angurugu School	Remote	Very Remote	250	99.60%	0.40%	Bush
Areyonga School	Remote	Very Remote	47	97.87%	2.13%	Bush
Arlparra School	Remote	Very Remote	196	98.98%	1.02%	Bush
Baniyala Garrangali School	Remote	Very Remote	28	100.00%		Bush
Bulla Camp School	Remote	Very Remote	30	100.00%		Bush
Bulman School	Remote	Very Remote	63	98.41%	1.59%	Bush
Docker River School	Remote	Very Remote	47	97.87%	2.13%	Bush
Elliott School	Remote	Very Remote	79	98.73%	1.27%	Bush
Epenarra School	Remote	Very Remote	58	100.00%		Bush
Finke School	Remote	Very Remote	42	100.00%		Bush
Gapuwiyak School	Remote	Very Remote	288	98.61%	1.39%	Bush
Gochan Jiny Jirra School	Remote	Very Remote	14	100.00%		Bush
Gunbalanya School	Remote	Very Remote	285	98.95%	1.05%	Bush
Haasts Bluff School	Remote	Very Remote	40	100.00%		Bush
Harts Range School	Remote	Very Remote	90	97.78%	2.22%	Bush
Imanpa School	Remote	Very Remote	27	96.30%	3.70%	Bush
Jilkminggan School	Remote	Very Remote	116	100.00%		Bush
Kalkaringi School	Remote	Very Remote	154	99.35%	0.65%	Bush
Kiana School	Remote	Very Remote	7	100.00%		Bush
Lajamanu School	Remote	Very Remote	230	98.70%	1.30%	Bush
Laramba School	Remote	Very Remote	70	100.00%		Bush
Mamaruni School	Remote	Very Remote	79	93.67%	6.33%	Bush
Maningrida School	Remote	Very Remote	614	97.72%	2.28%	Bush

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Manyallaluk School	Remote	Very Remote	19	100.00%		Bush
Mataranka School	Remote	Very Remote	52	26.92%	73.08%	Bush
Mbunghara School	Remote	Very Remote	13	100.00%		Bush
Milikapiti School	Remote	Very Remote	79	96.20%	3.80%	Bush
Milingimbi School	Remote	Very Remote	278	98.92%	1.08%	Bush
Milyakburra School	Remote	Very Remote	37	97.30%	2.70%	Bush
Minyerri School	Remote	Very Remote	205	100.00%		Bush
Mount Allan School	Remote	Very Remote	75	100.00%		Bush
Mulga Bore School	Remote	Very Remote	27	100.00%		Bush
Murray Downs School	Remote	Very Remote	39	97.44%	2.56%	Bush
Mutitjulu School	Remote	Very Remote	36	100.00%		Bush
Neutral Junction School	Remote	Very Remote	15	100.00%		Bush
Newcastle Waters School	Remote	Very Remote	11	90.91%	9.09%	Bush
Nganambala School	Remote	Very Remote	20	100.00%		Bush
Nganmarriyanga School	Remote	Very Remote	109	99.08%	0.92%	Bush
Ngukurr School	Remote	Very Remote	309	100.00%		Bush
Ntaria School	Remote	Very Remote	164	100.00%		Bush
Numbulwar School	Remote	Very Remote	170	99.41%	0.59%	Bush
Nyirripi School	Remote	Very Remote	46	100.00%		Bush
Papunya School	Remote	Very Remote	96	98.96%	1.04%	Bush
Peppimenarti School	Remote	Very Remote	36	97.22%	2.78%	Bush
Pigeon Hole School	Remote	Very Remote	28	100.00%		Bush
Pularumpi School	Remote	Very Remote	75	100.00%		Bush
Ramingining School	Remote	Very Remote	264	99.62%	0.38%	Bush
Robinson River School	Remote	Very Remote	68	98.53%	1.47%	Bush
Rockhampton Downs School	Remote	Very Remote	11	100.00%		Bush
Shepherdson College	Remote	Very Remote	566	97.70%	2.30%	Bush
Stirling School	Remote	Very Remote	15	100.00%		Bush
Timber Creek School	Remote	Very Remote	62	93.55%	6.45%	Bush
Titjikala School	Remote	Very Remote	27	100.00%		Bush
Ti Tree School	Remote	Very Remote	92	98.91%	1.09%	Bush
Urapunga School	Remote	Very Remote	31	100.00%		Bush
Walungurru School	Remote	Very Remote	68	100.00%		Bush
Warruwi School	Remote	Very Remote	141	100.00%		Bush
Watarrka School	Remote	Very Remote	13	92.31%	7.69%	Bush
Watiyawanu School	Remote	Very Remote	29	100.00%		Bush
Willowra School	Remote	Very Remote	59	100.00%		Bush
Wugularr School	Remote	Very Remote	117	97.44%	2.56%	Bush
Yarralin School	Remote	Very Remote	52	96.15%	3.85%	Bush
Yirrkala Homeland School	Remote	Very Remote	119	100.00%		Bush

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Yirrkala School	Remote	Very Remote	196	96.94%	3.06%	Bush
Yuendumu School	Remote	Very Remote	194	93.81%	6.19%	Bush
Yulara School	Remote	Very Remote	51	15.69%	84.31%	Bush
Bonya School	Rural	Very Remote	15	100.00%		Bush
Borroloola School	Rural	Very Remote	259	92.28%	7.72%	Bush
Canteen Creek School	Rural	Very Remote	97	98.97%	1.03%	Bush

School Name	Area	Geolocation	Enrolment			Category
			Enrolment Number	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	
Alice Springs School Of The Air	Remote	Remote	134	23.58%	76.42%	Unclassified
Katherine School Of The Air	Remote	Remote	244	28.69%	71.31%	Unclassified
Northern Territory Open Education Centre	Remote	Remote	546	45.97%	54.03%	Unclassified

