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School education

4.1   School education is compulsory in Australia until at least the age of 16, extending from the first year of primary school to year 12. The mandated age of entry differs across the states and territories. Primary schools provide education until year 6 (or 7 in South Australia). Secondary schools provide education from the end of primary school to year 12. There are also schools that cater for students with specific needs.

4.2   The schooling system has three sectors, state and territory government public schools, Catholic schools and independent schools. Together these sectors educate 3.8 million students in over 9,000 schools annually.[1]

4.3   Chapter one showed that students in regional, rural and remote communities have poorer educational and vocational outcomes than their peers from metropolitan areas.

4.4   Chapter two examined a range of factors that are external to the education system that negatively impact on students' school education. Many of these barriers increase with remoteness.

4.5   This chapter examines a range of issues relating to school education in rural, regional and remote environments, including:

- the provision of locally-accessible education
- school resourcing
- student, family and community engagement
- the Australian Curriculum
- linguistic and cultural factors
- boarding
- distance education

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1   Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey review), January 2018, p. 13.

- participation in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects

- entrepreneurialism

- workforce issues, and

- cross-jurisdictional issues, as highlighted by the experiences of communities in the tri-border region of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

4.6   The chapter also examines the response of Australian schools to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the rapid adaptation to home and online learning.

4.7   The chapter concludes with a summary, noting relevant Closing the Gap targets and recommendations from the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey review).

Locally-accessible education

4.8   Families living in regional, rural and remote areas have limited choice in where and how they educate their children.[2] Concerns were raised that many students have limited access to primary schooling within a reasonable distance and with suitable transportation options, and no access to secondary schooling apart from boarding school, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[3]

4.9   For example, Ms Jeanie Adams reported that, at Aurukun in Queensland, 'there is now no secondary school in the town so teenagers are sent away from their community to boarding school, often to elite city schools, or miss out on post-primary school altogether'.[4] This means that 'children are not able to live and be educated on their own country/land (outstation) even if their families want to live away from the problems of "town".'[5]

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2   Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld), *Submission 4*, p. 1; Empowered Communities, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Region, *Submission 17*, p. 13; Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA), *Submission 22*, p. 16; Isolated Children's Parents' Association Northern Territory (ICPA NT), *Submission 45*, p. 2; Newcastle Anglican Schools Corporation, *Submission 55*, p. 1.

3   Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 1*, p. 28; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 1; Remote Indigenous Parents Australia (RIPA), *Submission 23*, p. 2; Central Land Council (CLC), *Submission 9*, p. 8; Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation (NCEF), *Submission 66*, p. 12.

4   Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 1.

5   Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 1.

4.10   The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) noted that 'many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in remote communities do not have access to a full secondary education up to Year 12' and that 'the majority of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia are more than 100 km from a school with a full secondary education program.'[6]

4.11   In the Northern Territory, secondary education is delivered according to the Indigenous Education Strategy (IES). To enable remote students to have a pathway that is comparable to students living in a metropolitan area, the Northern Territory government provides 'a strongly supported boarding school process supported by the Transition Support Unit', which it states 'is proving a successful model for getting young remote and very remote students through to Year 12.'[7] Students who remain in their community can access a 'post primary literacy and numeracy' program delivered through their local primary school.[8]

4.12   A study conducted by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) examined the education opportunities available to and outcomes achieved by secondary school aged young people from one remote community in the Northern Territory. CAEPR found that 'under the IES, access to secondary education for families was problematic', reporting:

> Not only was supply of boarding places inadequate to meet demand, because the only alternative program was delivered in a primary school setting, teenagers were disinclined to participate. The gap in secondary education infrastructure in community became increasingly visible over the course of 2020, when all secondary aged young people were repatriated to community as a result of the Covid pandemic. By mid-way through the year, all students attending interstate schools had dropped away from education altogether.[9]

4.13   CAEPR reported that 'community members were unanimous that what they want in terms of secondary education is a school "on country"'.[10]

6   National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), *Submission 63*, p. 9.

7   Northern Territory Government, *Submission 37*, p. 4.

8   Northern Territory Department of Education, *Remote secondary school choices*, 2020, <https://nt.gov.au/learning/primary-and-secondary-students/remote-students-and-parents/remote-secondary-school-choices>, accessed 14 September 2020.

9   Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Submission 67, p. 7.

10   CAEPR, Submission 67, p. 11.

4.14   Newcastle Anglican Schools Corporation reported that while there are choices available for families to educate their children in cities and regional centres, options are limited in rural and remote communities to:

- families leaving the area
- families sending their children off to boarding school if they do not choose the local public offering, or
- accepting a local offering which often does not have the breadth of opportunity available in either its programs, and often in its subject offerings, particularly at the higher levels of maths, science and English studies.[11]

4.15   Newcastle Anglican Schools Corporation commented:

Anecdotally, when people leave an area to access schooling and other opportunities, they are unlikely to return, or if they do it is later in life. For our rural and remote communities to thrive we need to encourage people to stay and make their whole lives in those areas.[12]

4.16   The Town of Port Hedland noted that Pilbara people are concerned by 'the significant gap in education attainment for all levels of schooling between regional, rural and remote areas, and metropolitan areas'.[13] Furthermore, the need to move to access improved schooling options was reported as a prominent reason for people in the 30-39 year age range to leave the Pilbara region.[14]

4.17   There is a strong preference among families living in geographically isolated areas[15] and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities[16] for access to locally accessible, quality education at all levels.

4.18   Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia (ICPA Australia) said that the viability of rural and remote schools was 'essential' and that it is imperative for 'families to be able to provide an education for their children while continuing to reside and work in rural and remote regions.'[17] ICPA Australia further commented:

Rural schools are often the centre of their communities and ensuring that these schools are well supported, resourced and

11   Newcastle Anglican Schools Corporation, *Submission 55*, p. 1.
12   Newcastle Anglican Schools Corporation, *Submission 55*, p. 1.
13   Town of Port Hedland, *Submission 58*, p. 7.
14   Town of Port Hedland, *Submission 58*, p. 7.
15   ICPA Qld, *Submission 4*, p. 1; ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 3.
16   AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 29; Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 13; Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 3.
17   Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia (ICPA Australia), *Submission 7*, p. 3.

staffed is vital to the children's learning in these towns. Good schools can retain and even attract families to the regions, but families will quickly move away if they have concerns regarding their children's education.[18]

4.19 ICPA Australia noted that 'due to geographic isolation from services, many rural and remote families are expected to cover out-of-pocket costs for the education of their children from early childhood through to tertiary education, which is not experienced by urban families.' [19]

4.20 It was reported that there are many communities where there exists a perception that regional, rural and remote schools offer a sub-standard quality of education.[20]

4.21 The current system of school education was described by the Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) as being 'high quality but low equity.'[21] ASPA said that 'universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students.'[22]

4.22 ICPA Australia advocated for a 'national approach that ensures educational delivery of a consistently high standard, no matter where the education is provided' in order to 'improve provision of education outcomes, options and pathways for remote students'.[23]

School resourcing

4.23 The Australian Government currently provides a $314.7 billion investment in recurrent funding for all Australian schools over 2018 to 2029 under its Quality Schools package. Commonwealth funding for Australian schools is estimated to grow from $18.7 billion in 2018 to $26.4 billion in 2023 and $32.7 billion in 2029. This represents an average per student increase of 5.5 per cent per year over 2018 to 2023 (from a 2017 base).

4.24 The Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings review is underway by the National School Resourcing Board (the Board), established under section 128 of the Australian Education Act 2013 (the Act). The Board considers funding to regional and remote schools, provides findings and

18   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 4.
19   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 2.
20   AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 28.
21   Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA), *Submission 5*, p. 1.
22   ASPA, *Submission 5*, p. 1.
23   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 2.

makes recommendations relating to the current settings for the school location, school size loadings and the data informing the loadings. The Board will provide its final report to the Australian Government Minister for Education by 1 May 2021.

4.25 Concerns were raised about school resourcing arrangements for regional, rural and remote schools, in particularly funding based on enrolment numbers or school attendance. For example, the CLC noted that school funding arrangements in the Northern Territory, which are tied to school attendance during the year rather than school enrolment, are volatile, 'can delay funding of staff positions and makes it difficult for schools to plan ahead.'[24]

4.26 The CLC is concerned that 'special programs that are considered additional to the general literacy and numeracy focus of many schools, such as Indigenous Language and Culture and the provision of linguists and support staff, may be the first programs to be cut when funding is uncertain.'[25]

4.27 At the roundtable hearing on 26 August 2020, the Australian Education Union (AEU) said that changes to school resourcing introduced by the *Australian Education Amendment Act 2017* have reduced funding:

> There is the Schooling Resource Standard, which is the minimum benchmark for funding. By 2023, the Northern Territory will be at 79 per cent, which is around 21 per cent less than the actual benchmark. That's a direct result of the imposition of the 20 per cent cap from the Commonwealth. It has reduced the funding to the Northern Territory, but there is also a lack of commitment in terms of the funding that is needed across the system.[26]

4.28 According to Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation (NCEF), Strelley Community School in the Pilbara 'continually strives to provide "equal and every opportunity" but truthfully, it is constrained in its capacity to do so by its available resources (i.e. human resources, physical resources, and most importantly financial resources).'[27]

4.29 Gunnedah Shire Council reported that declining enrolments at the Gunnedah High School has reduced the variety of subject choices

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24   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

25   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

26   Ms Correna Haythorpe, Federal President, Australian Education Union (AEU), *Committee Hansard*, 26 August 2020, Canberra, p. 6.

27   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 12.

available for students and has, 'in turn resulted in lower Higher School Certificate marks, reducing future choices for our young people.'[28]

4.30   Gunnedah Shire Council further noted that 49.8 per cent of students at the Gunnedah High School left school at Year 10 or below and only 32 per cent completed Year 12, compared with the New South Wales state averages of 33.5 per cent and 52.1 per cent, respectively.[29]

4.31   Teach for Australia (TFA) reported that remote that rural and remote schools can 'struggle to provide the standard of educational experience metropolitan schools can offer', noting that these schools 'are more expensive to run, harder to staff, and students have less choice in the subjects they study, especially in their senior levels of schooling.'[30]

4.32   To address funding issues, ASPA advocated 'for the full implementation of the needs based funding model to enable school leaders to put in place sustainable interventions and staffing to address the needs of students in their communities.'[31]

Capacity to Contribute

4.33   Government funding to non-government schools is affected by a Capacity to Contribute (CTC) score. This score has previously been based on the Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA), which is a measure of educational advantage calculated from student factors (parents' occupation and parents' education) and school factors (geographical location and proportion of indigenous students).

4.34   The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) is introducing a new Direct Measure of Income (DMI) to replace the area based socio-economic status measure component of the CTC. The DMI will be based on the median income of parents or guardians, as calculated using income tax data.[32]

Student, family and community engagement

4.35   Students are more likely to succeed in education if their caregivers encourage them to attend school, are involved in the school's programs,

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28   Gunnedah Shire Council, *Submission 46*, p. 2.
29   Gunnedah Shire Council, *Submission 46*, p. 2.
30   Teach for Australia (TFA), *Submission 14*, p. 1.
31   APSA, *Submission 5*, p. 2.
32   Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), *Response to Questions on Notice*, 13 March 2020, p. 6.

are aware of the importance of sleep, routine and nutrition on learning, and who engage with school staff about the student's progress or challenges.[33] Other factors that support education and school attendance include strong school leadership and engagement with families and communities on a range of issues including cultural and linguistic needs, and access to services that support the health and wellbeing of students and their families.[34]

4.36   Conversely, where the aims and methods of education delivery are not wholly supported by families and communities, students' education suffers. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the legacy of past injustices and trauma has created distrust about the role of institutions, including schools, and there is a low level of engagement with and understanding of the benefits of education.[35] World Vision commented:

> The personal experiences of parents, carers and community members mean they are often fearful of engaging in the school environment, particularly when there are real language barriers to overcome, when they do not recognise the value of the education being offered, and particularly when they cannot see the connection between education and improved wellbeing for their children and communities. These attitudes can be passed on to children in their care. The engagement of these key people in a child's life – parents, carers and community members – is critical for their engagement in school processes, priorities and curricula.[36]

4.37   At the roundtable hearing on 26 August 2020, the AEU commented that:

> …local people want to have some more control over things like ensuring that their children are taught appropriate practices for their culture, that they have access to language programs, and that there are school leadership bodies that encompass staff but also local leaders who have some say over the direction of the school and making sure that its philosophy is in accordance with people's aspirations.[37]

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33   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 16.

34   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 16; NCEF, *Submission 66*, pp. 19-20, p. 30.

35   NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4; ACECQA, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

36   World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 6.

37   Mr Jarvis Ryan, President, Northern Territory Branch, AEU, *Committee Hansard*, 26 August 2020, Canberra, p. 4.

4.38   Pivot Professional Learning similarly noted that 'when communities and parents are involved, students do better. They stay in school longer. They have better educational outcomes.'[38]

4.39   NCEF reported that the Strelley Community School in the Pilbara has been guided by clear aims set by the community since its first registration in 1976 and that, 'with some variations, because of the changing nature of the community, these expectations have remained essentially the same.'[39] NCEF reported:

> From the outset, there was an innate desire to teach their own culture and language. Subsequently there is a great sense of ownership of the school. The community is heavily emotionally and historically invested in the success of their school and support it unreservedly.'[40]

4.40   This experience is contrasted with communities in the tri-border region, which have had less opportunity to shape their own education goals. Empowered Communities Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Region commented:

> Many Aṉangu throughout the region have told us they have little understanding of what goes on inside schools or involvement in the decisions that affect their children and their learning. Decisions about services and programs are often made externally with little or no local input.[41]

4.41   Dr David Brooks said that, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Australia, 'there is a need for a sense of purpose about the possible pathways that life offers and the role of school education to support this'.[42] Dr Brooks said that the community, through the Ngaanyatjarra Council, 'has a role in stating its goals for the region and exploring realistic pathways towards achieving these goals.'[43]

4.42   Yirrkala School called for governments to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with 'the autonomy to make decisions about what and how we educate our young people', noting that 'we believe that

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38   Ms Amanda Bickerstaff, Chief Executive Officer, Pivot Professional Learning, *Committee Hansard*, 26 August 2020, Canberra, p. 3.

39   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 6.

40   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 30.

41   Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 12.

42   Dr David Brooks, *Submission 64*, p. 1.

43   Dr David Brooks, *Submission 64*, p. 1.

the problems of educational opportunity in remote community schools have local answers.'[44]

4.43   The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) advocated for more local representation on school executives in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools 'so that the subtleties of culture and country are holistically reflected in the mission and vision of each community school.'[45]

4.44   Both the Northern Territory government and the NIAA reported that work is progressing on a Community-led Schools initiative in the Northern Territory.[46] According to the Northern Territory government:

> It is about providing decision making to local school communities in all aspects of the school to the extent desired by that community. There are seven schools that are advanced with this work, and a further three starting their community led pathway. Fourteen schools have established committees to further facilitate community engagement. While it is early days for this initiative, the desire to be engaged in school decision making is very clear and is anecdotally having a positive impact on school and community interactions.[47]

School leadership

4.45   The importance of strong leadership in schools was highlighted at the roundtable hearing on 26 August 2020. The Association of Independent Schools Western Australia commented:

> If there's a strong leader with strong relationships with the community, everything works. The community will come in. They'll help do maintenance around the school. Where there isn't a strong leader, or that good relationship with community is not there, the school just doesn't work—the kids don't go to school, and they don't get supported with what they're doing. So, getting really good leaders out there is key…Financial incentives to get good leaders with good experience out to those schools is essential to make them work.[48]

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44   Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 11.

45   National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), *Submission 40*, p. 6.

46   National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), *Submission 63*, p. 4; Northern Territory government, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

47   Northern Territory government, *Submission 37*, p. 2.

48   Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 26 August 2020, Canberra, p. 3.

4.46   Similarly, the NCEF said that 'the role of Principal is enormously important' and commented:

> As school leader, the principal needs to go out of their way to engage with the school community; build positive relationships; be knowledgeable of what works and doesn't work; have vision and commitment to improvement; maintain high expectations; and be supportive of the staff, students and parents.[49]

Attendance

4.47   Concerns were raised about poor school attendance in regional and remote communities. For example, the CLC reported that 'school attendance continues to be a huge concern in very remote NT communities', noting, 'in the CLC region, 18 out of the 27 schools in Central Australia had an attendance rate below 55 per cent, with the lowest rate being 35.2 per cent in Papunya.'[50]

4.48   The Western Australian government noted that 'the family and social factors that result from poverty can have an impact on the capacity of some students to attend or to do well when they are attending school and a negative impact in the community.'[51]

4.49   The AEU expressed concern that the school attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is declining, citing research from the University of New South Wales that found there has been a steady decline in school attendance rates from outer regional areas to remote areas.[52]

4.50   NCEF reported a range of out of school factors that influence non-attendance at Strelley Community School, including funerals and sorry business, health, ceremonies, sporting activities and cultural activities. Other factors contributing to non-attendance were:

> lack of food; lack of clean clothes; lack of hot water for showers; lack of sleep attributed to overcrowding of housing and disturbances caused by other occupants; inability to return to community due to weather events (flooding, cyclones and associated road closures); inability to return to the community due to lack of transport or money for fuel; cultural/family obligations (such as the need to assist elder family members and/or younger

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49   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 35.
50   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 7.
51   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 11.
52   AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 16.

family members both in the home or in town); or lack of action/connectivity in the community.[53]

4.51   To encourage improved attendance rates, Strelley Community School 'implemented many successful solutions-focused strategies' including the provision of laundry facilities and hot showers.[54] The school has a healthy living program that 'provides all students attending each campus with nutritionally balanced meals and snacks throughout the school day' and educates students and the community about 'healthy food preparation and making healthy food choices.'[55]

4.52   Strelley Community School also conducts 'regular roundups' of students in Port Hedland and returns them to the community.[56] A teacher commented:

> When the student returns, instead of chastising the student and making them feel shamed, we welcome them back and make a fuss. We let them know that we are glad to have them back. After all, most of the time their absence has not been the student's choice, it has been the family's choice. We want the student to feel valued and good about being back at school.'[57]

4.53   The Western Australian government commented:

> There is a need to continue to find creative solutions to transience and low attendance of students. Mainstream learning curriculum, environment and pedagogical practices do not always meet the learning needs of remote Aboriginal children and may not align closely with their culture and priorities. Often cultural and family imperatives result in high levels of transience and interrupted attendance, which limit the impact of traditional school and classroom routines.[58]

4.54   Both the AEU and Dr Sam Osborne were critical of existing strategies to increase attendance. The AEU said that programs such as the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) 'have no impact on school attendance.'[59] Similarly, Dr Osborne reported that attendance-focused strategies such as the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM)

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53   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 20.
54   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 20.
55   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 19.
56   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 21.
57   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 21.
58   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 7.
59   AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 23.

trial in the Northern Territory and RSAS have resulted in a decrease in school attendance.[60]

4.55 To improve school attendance there was support for greater community involvement and cultural sensitivity in education. For example, the AEU stated that 'for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students there are a number of defining characteristics of schools which are more effective in resolving the attendance issue', including:

- Schools that have strong, effective leadership
- A positive culture and a positive sense of identity for students
- Teachers and support staff with the skills and knowledge to effectively engage and develop relationships with students
- High levels of community involvement in the planning and delivery of school processes, priorities and curriculum.
- Genuine understanding of cultural competencies, and
- Collaboration in the development of school curriculum with communities.[61]

4.56 Dr Osborne reported there was a statistically significant relationship between the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and improved attendance and National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[62]

Student engagement

4.57 The AEU noted that 'there is an obvious relationship between school engagement and student attendance. Students who are engaged and motivated at school, will see greater benefits in attending school more regularly.[63]

4.58 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 'are more likely to be affected by a range of social, cultural and economic factors that can adversely impact on their ability to engage with their education.'[64]

4.59 TFA reported that students of rural and remote schools 'demonstrate poorer educational outcomes, higher rates of absenteeism, and engage less with tertiary education' and also 'report more challenges with emotional

60 University of South Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 3.
61 AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 16.
62 University of South Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 3.
63 AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 16.
64 AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 29.

wellbeing and with feelings of belonging, self-confidence and perseverance.'[65]

4.60   NCEF emphasised the difficulty with maintaining engagement among older students. They reported that:

> Student engagement and learning at Strelley Community School for our older students (especially our senior secondary students) is much more problematic than for our students in the lower year levels. Despite the expressed intentions of the community, the greatest challenge is keeping these students in the community and at school.[66]

4.61   NCEF commented that boredom and a lack of future aspirations are two key drivers of student disengagement:

> Currently, there are extremely limited opportunities for students and community members of the school to engage in purposeful and directed educational and recreational activities on a regular basis within the community and outside of school operational hours…[t]he lack of internet connectivity and technology within the communities is increasingly influencing teenagers' decisions to stay in town. In modern society, social media and other technology platforms are an important vehicle for young people to stay connected with each other and the world and this is simply not possible in the community except within the school grounds.[67]

4.62   NCEF also said that 'our children do not have the same opportunities available within the community to attend sport and recreational activities and clubs that are so readily accessible to their peers living in regional towns and centres', and that schools end up bearing the responsibility to deliver extra-curricular programs.[68]

4.63   In addition, common strategies used to discipline students can exacerbate disengagement. Just Reinvest advised that school suspensions can make it difficult for students to catch up, 'leading young people to further disengage from school…suspension from schools removes protective factors and increases a kid's chance of getting in trouble.'[69]

4.64   World Vision was critical of the use of expulsions:

> First Nations communities and parents are rarely given the opportunity to have self-determination in the education of their

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65   TFA, *Submission 14*, p. 1.

66   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 14.

67   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 14.

68   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 22.

69   Just Reinvest, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

children. The system seems punitive in expelling for truancy. While truancy should not be supported, it is counter intuitive to expel a student from not attending, which then leads to further educational exclusion. The onus for educational engagement and achievement is often directed at students and parents, rather than exploring deficits in the education model as some of the reasons why the student is not engaging. This same misplaced onus is reflected in government policy linking welfare payments to school attendance.[70]

4.65 The consequences of disengagement can extend beyond the classroom. According to Just Reinvest:

There is a strong link between school disengagement and interactions with the juvenile justice system. Current government policy around school suspensions, including the over-use of long-term school suspensions, is a key driver in the 'school-to-prison pipeline', which sees marginalised and excluded young people at an increased risk of juvenile and, eventually, adult incarceration.[71]

4.66 Just Reinvest commented that feedback it received from young people, their families and frontline services indicated support for 'in-school suspensions rather than being forcibly excluded from learning.'[72]

4.67 Save the Children suggested that:

Addressing disengagement requires fostering students' connection to school, capacity (including how much students feel they learn and develop skills at school), and sense of meaning (including how much students feel that what they are doing matters).'[73]

4.68 The AHRC argued that, to address disengagement, whole-of-family supports are needed to assist students and their families with issues relating to poverty, overcrowded housing, and higher rates of trauma.[74] The need for trauma-informed approaches to education was also discussed in chapter two.

4.69 At the roundtable hearing on 2 September 2020, the AHRC further commented:

Learning methods need to be trauma informed, healing and restorative, with an aim to revitalising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society to full health and wellbeing. We cannot

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70   World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 9.
71   Just Reinvest, *Submission 42*, p. 5.
72   Just Reinvest, *Submission 42*, p. 4.
73   Save the Children, *Submission 52*, p. 3.
74   AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 29.

> underestimate the need for therapeutic, well-informed approaches and school spaces becoming trauma-informed service providers.[75]

Adult literacy

4.70   The strong links between levels of adult literacy and the educational attainment of children were highlighted.[76] For example, Associate Professor Bob Boughton noted that low rates of adult English literacy is a key barrier to education outcomes in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and explained:

> This is both a product and an ongoing cause of the failure of school and post-school education systems over many decades, which have left the majority of adults in these communities unable to operate in English at anything but the most basic level (e.g. Level 1 or below on the Australian Core Skills Framework), including most of the significant adults in the lives of school children. Because literacy is a social practice, which must be developed and supported in family and community to flourish, the absence of a culture of literacy in homes and communities means that most Indigenous children in remote communities start school well behind their non-Indigenous and urban peers, and only a small number ever catch up. Moreover, the parents and community leaders who are products of this failed system rarely have the English language competence and confidence to intervene effectively and assist the schools to do better with their children.[77]

4.71   There was support for the provision of whole-of-community programs, such as mass adult literacy campaigns, to improve English language proficiency, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[78]

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75 Ms June Oscar, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, AHRC, *Committee Hansard*, 2 September 2020, Canberra, p. 13.

76 Associate Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 35*, p. 1; Just Reinvest NSW, *Submission 42*, p. 3.

77 Associate Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 35*, p. 1.

78 Associate Professor Bob Boughton, *Submission 35*, p. 1; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 16; Just Reinvest NSW, *Submission 42*, p. 3; NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4; AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 34.

Australian Curriculum

4.72   According to DESE, 'the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum sets the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or go to school.'[79] DESE stated:

> The Curriculum is designed to be implemented to meet the needs of priority cohorts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.[80]

4.73   Despite this, concerns were raised that the Australian Curriculum does not meet the needs of all students in regional, rural and remote locations. For example, the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) reported receiving feedback from its member schools that:

> The Australian Curriculum has been developed by writers with a metropolitan or city-based focus, simply because that is their lived knowledge and experience. There are few references to remote or other contexts within the curriculum, simply because the writers did not have those frames of reference. Therefore, students in and from remote communities and complex environments will not 'see themselves' within the Australian Curriculum and will not be able to as easily relate to the content.[81]

4.74   ISCA further reported that delivering the Australian Curriculum can be complicated in remote classrooms where multiple year levels learn together in the same classroom. ISCA stated:

> Such a scenario can be challenging even for experienced teachers, especially given the construct of the Australian Curriculum which has year level achievement standards in the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, and Humanities and Social Sciences. Even highly experienced and capable teachers can struggle with the tensions of trying to support the differing educational needs of younger learners and older students in the same learning space.[82]

4.75   The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) noted that 'school subjects often do not equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in rural and remote communities with

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79   DESE, *Submission 49*, pp. 29-30.
80   DESE, *Submission 49*, pp. 29-30.
81   ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 20.
82   ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 20.

knowledge and skills to improve their quality of life' and stated that struggling students in particular can 'benefit from engaging in health literacy, home economics, and other family, community and life skills.'[83]

4.76   Yirrkala School was critical of policies and programs being imposed on remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools 'that are not developed with community and most often not supported by any local evidence base.'[84] Yirrkala School advocated for more flexibility in the Australian Curriculum to allow communities to develop their own policies and programs:

- Adopt a principle of localised decision making for policy decisions affecting remote communities
- Work with schools to develop high quality assessment tools in both the local language and English that reflect the actual language acquisition progressions of bilingual learners
- Cease NAPLAN as a compulsory requirement in remote schools with large cohorts of EAL/D learners and particularly in bilingual school settings, and
- Provide Departmental support for research into community-led curriculum and pedagogy programs towards developing a locally-contextualised evidence base for effective education.[85]

STEM

4.77   DESE stated that 'high quality STEM education is critically important for Australia's productivity. However, Australia's recent results from the 2018 cycle of PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] have not shown gains, particularly in mathematics and science.'[86]

4.78   To address this issue, the National STEM School Education Strategy 2016-2026 outlined an agenda to support 'all young people to become more STEM capable' and to increase 'participation in challenging STEM subjects in the senior secondary years.'[87] The Strategy aims to increase the access of groups under-represented in STEM, such as non-metropolitan students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students from low

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83   National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Submission 44*, p. 4.
84   Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, pp. 14-15.
85   Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, pp. 14-15.
86   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 31.
87   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 31.

socioeconomic backgrounds, to the opportunities STEM-related occupations offer through improved STEM education.[88]

4.79   DESE reported that 'online accessibility is a feature of many of these initiatives, providing a way around issues associated with remoteness and complexity.'[89]

4.80   There are currently a number of government projects aimed at improving STEM participation for students from regional rural and remote communities. For example, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) provide a range of innovative programs and educational initiatives, 'with a focus on multisensory learning where students are engaged in STEM through sight, sound and touch.'[90] ANSTO's programs, such as school excursions and videoconferences, are 'accessible to students nationally and have been successful in engaging and educating students in rural and regional communities.'[91]

4.81   The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)'s Indigenous STEM Education Project has offered a number of programs to increase participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in STEM education and careers, including the Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Technology and Science (ASSETS) program, Science Pathways for Indigenous Communities and Inquiry for Indigenous Science Students (I2S2).[92]

4.82   The I2S2 program aims to help students build 'skills and capability through hands-on, inquiry-based projects in an Indigenous context.'[93] CSIRO stated:

> Students reported that they found it encouraging that Indigenous knowledge was included in the curriculum, and teachers reported a high level of interest and engagement demonstrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[94]

4.83   The Western Australian government reported it is funding a STEM skills strategy, initially $3.3 million over 2018-2021, to provide 'professional development of more than 1 000 teachers in lower socioeconomic public schools, STEM communication, mentoring programs, and digital and

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88   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 31.
89   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 31.
90   Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), *Submission 3*, p. 2.
91   ANSTO, *Submission 3*, p. 2.
92   CSIRO, *Submission 10*, p. 4.
93   CSIRO, *Submission 10*, p. 5
94   CSIRO, *Submission 10*, p. 5

technology programs.' [95] The Western Australian government has a target to have 85 per cent of Year 12 students completing two or more STEM courses and/or STEM-related VET qualifications by 2024. [96]

4.84   Ms Julie Bailey advocated for the STEM curriculum to be adapted 'to the environment in which the learning occurs. This needs local consultation which can be achieved through distance communication. The teachers, students, parents and communities can all be involved in localising the curriculum.'[97]

4.85   Similarly, World Vision suggested that:

> additional hours before or after standard school time could support improved STEM outcomes for First Nations students by focusing on traditional practices which can embed STEM as an approach rather than embedding traditional knowledges into STEM which has often been the method. For example, biology could be taught through bush tucker and medicine and land management. Maths, for instance, could be taught through traditional story-telling and technology could be taught in the context of using technology to maintain traditional practices, particularly with digital technology.[98]

Language, culture and country

4.86   There is increasing recognition that being strong in language and culture are protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's health and wellbeing, and support mainstream educational attainment.[99] This recognition has not translated into widespread support for first language learning and the integration of culture into curriculum for

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95   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 26.

96   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 26.

97   Julie Bailey, *Submission 53*, p. 7.

98   World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 12.

99   NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 4; AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 26; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 4; SNAICC, *Submission 15*, p. 10; Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 12; AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 43; Dr. Carmel O'Shannessy and Prof. Jane Simpson, *Submission 8*, p. 2; NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4; Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 14; Dr Sam Osborne, *Submission 29*, p. 2; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 15. See also, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Our land, our languages: language learning in Indigenous communities*, September 2012, pp. 21-31, 79-86.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those who have grown up speaking a language other than English in their home.[100]

4.87   While the Australian Curriculum sets expectations about what all Australian students should be taught, each state and territory has the flexibility to deliver curriculum that is best suited to students in local schools, including programs that incorporate local languages and cultures.[101]

4.88   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have advocated strongly for approaches to education that acknowledge and promote the use their languages and cultures.[102]

4.89   In December 2019, all Australian governments expressed their commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to reach their potential and to shape their own futures. The Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration noted:

> All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples must be empowered to achieve their full learning potential, shape their own futures, and embrace their cultures, languages and identities as Australia's First Nations peoples.[103]

Language

4.90   Standard Australian English is the dominant language in Australia and there is broad agreement that all Australian children should be proficient in the English language. However, existing language skills, for example in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, can complement and enhance a student's ability to become proficient in English.[104]

4.91   The importance of supporting students' development in English through recognising students' existing language skills has been highlighted as being essential to literacy and numeracy development.[105] For example, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP said:

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100   NPY Women's Council, Submission 47, p. 12; Children's' Ground, *Submission 56*, p. 6; Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 8; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 1; NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4.

101   Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, January 2018, p. 15.

102   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18; RIPA, *Submission 23*, p. 3; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 11; NPY Women's Council, Submission 47, p. 12.

103   COAG Education Council, *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, December 2019, p. 16.

104   NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 4; Dr. Carmel O'Shannessy and Prof. Jane Simpson, *Submission 8*, p. 2; NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4; AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 22.

105   AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 26.

> There was an old adage when I was training as a teacher – teach from the known to the unknown – and understand the culture of a child to enable a better outcome. While everyone understands and learns differently in the way they access knowledge we have an obligation to build on the knowledge of their prior learning.[106]

4.92 The NIAA noted that a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote schools are English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners:

> In 2014-15, around one-third (34 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 4-14 years spoke an Australian Indigenous language (including those who only spoke some words). This increases to two-thirds (66 per cent) in remote, compared with 26 per cent in non-remote areas.[107]

4.93 Despite this, NACCHO reported that 'most schools do not allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to speak in a language other than English when at school, and there is no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language learning.'[108]

4.94 Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) commented that 'language can act as a significant barrier to accessing and engaging in early education in remote communities' and noted that 'the year one school curriculum presumes a level of English that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities do not have.'[109] SNAICC expressed concern that this means 'children are beginning their school journey from a position of disadvantage.'[110]

4.95 Evidence from Cape York in Queensland indicates that the use of local languages at school is discouraged. Ms Adams reported that while 'children at Aurukun, like the whole community, speak Wik Mungkan almost exclusively at home', they 'are not taught in their own language(s), and there is no pressure for staff to learn the local language, as there would be if they were to teach in another country. Wik Mungkan is actively discouraged in classrooms.'[111]

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106 NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 4; The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP, *Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture*, University of New England, 19 November 2019.

107 NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 5.

108 NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4.

109 Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), *Submission 15*, p. 10.

110 SNAICC, *Submission 15*, p. 10.

111 Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 1.

English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D)

4.96 Dr Carmel O'Shannessy and Professor Jane Simpson recommended that if students speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their main everyday language, they require 'targeted, explicit, appropriate instruction in Standard Australian English as a second or additional language in order to learn English well.'[112]

4.97 NIAA reported that the key characteristics of effective school English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) programs include:

- Specialist support for students in standard Australian English and their first language;
- Interactive and engaging classroom-based language teaching and learning; and
- Teachers who are knowledgeable in English as a Second Language (ESL) pedagogy and multicultural education and have high expectations of student achievement.[113]

4.98 NIAA commented:

> While specialist EAL/D teachers can and do provide expertise for EAL/D students, once beyond the initial stages of learning English, the majority of EAL/D students' time is spent in mainstream classes. For this reason, it is important that teachers in mainstream classes have the cultural capability and training to adopt effective practices that address EAL/D learning needs.[114]

4.99 The Western Australian government noted that many students in remote Aboriginal communities grow up speaking Aboriginal English, Kriol, a traditional language or a combination of these, and that these students learn Standard Australian English through EAL/D pedagogy. According to the Western Australian government, EAL/D support is provided to all Western Australian remote community schools at all phases of learning.[115]

Bilingual education

4.100 The most significant difference between bilingual education and EAL/D is that, in bilingual programs teachers must speak both English and the local language, whereas in EAL/D programs, teachers may only speak English. The goal of bilingual programs is for students to be fluent in both English and the local language.[116]

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112 Dr. Carmel O'Shannessy and Prof. Jane Simpson, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

113 NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 5.

114 NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 5.

115 Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

116 CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 15.

4.101   There was strong support for the provision of bilingual education programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools.[117] For example, the AEU commented:

> Learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in English are complementary rather than mutually exclusive; rather than acting as a barrier to the learning of English, bilingual programs actually strengthen it (provided they are adequately supported and resourced).[118]

4.102   Similarly, the CLC commented:

> In the NT, the available evidence shows that [students in] bilingual programs generally attained better literacy and numeracy scores than their peers in non-bilingual schools. It is significant to note here, that in the remote Indigenous context of the Northern Territory, a key aim of bilingual education programs is to improve English language outcomes, and that there is no credible evidence to support the assertion that giving attention to Indigenous languages comes at the expense of English language development.[119]

4.103   It was noted that, in the past, bilingual programs were common in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools, but have been largely abandoned.[120] For example, Tangentyere Council noted that 'between 1974 and 2008 the multilingual nature of Aboriginal populations in the NT was supported through bilingual education.'[121] Tangentyere Council reported that bilingual education was abandoned in the Northern Territory following the review of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), despite the review recognising bilingual education 'as a universal success factor.'[122]

4.104   At the roundtable hearing on 2 September 2020, World Vision Australia remarked:

> We have generations of Aboriginal people who are in their late 50s, early 50s and late 40s who have actually grown up in a

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117   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18; AEU, *Submission 43*, pp. 21-2; Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 7; AHRC, Submission 1, p. 26; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 4; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 15; NPY Women's Council, Submission 47, p. 15.

118   AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 22.

119   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 15.

120   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18; AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 26; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 2; Children's' Ground, *Submission 56*, p. 6; SNAICC, *Submission 15*, p. 10.

121   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18.

122   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18; See also: Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board, *Report of the NTER Review Board*, October 2008, p. 31.

> bilingual education system who can speak and write both
> languages in their communities, but younger parents and children
> can't read or write in English. I think there's something that we
> can learn from bilingual programs that have been in place
> before.[123]

4.105   There is a debate around the benefits of other pedagogies such as Direct
         Instruction compared to bilingual education; however the evidence for the
         effectiveness of these pedagogies is contested.[124]

Culturally-relevant education

4.106   There was strong support for education to be provided for Aboriginal and
         Torres Strait Islander students that is culturally relevant and reflects 'two
         ways' or 'both ways' modes of learning that incorporate both Standard
         Australian English literacy and numeracy and local languages, concepts
         and values.[125] The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
         students having the opportunity to learn on country was also
         highlighted.[126]

4.107   For example, NPY Women's' Council commented:

> We wholeheartedly endorse the need for culture and country to
> play a key role for young people's learning and development. This
> should sit alongside mainstream education so that young people
> in the NPY region can realise their goals, achieve their dreams and
> overcome these challenges.[127]

4.108   The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority
         (ACECQA) noted a range of benefits associated with the provision of
         culturally safe education and care that includes Aboriginal and Torres
         Strait Islander voices and perspectives and provide continuity with prior
         learning in children's homes. These benefits include 'supporting children's
         learning, affirming their identity and encouraging participation by

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123 Ms Teresa Hutchins, Manager, Program Development and Effectiveness, Australia First
     Nations Program, World Vision Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 2 September 2020, Canberra,
     p. 16.

124 AEU, *Submission 43*, p. 18; Good to Great Schools, *Submission 64*, p. 1; Dr Sam Osborne,
     Submission 29, p. 4.

125 Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 15; Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 18;
     Dr Sam Osborne, *Submission 29,* p. 2; World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 8; Yirrkala School,
     Submission 48, p. 8.

126 World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 8; NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 15; Northern
     Territory government, *Submission 37*, p. 2; Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 10; NCEF,
     Submission 66, p. 7; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 15.

127 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 24.

children and families where historically there has been distrust fear and disengagement from educational institutions.[128]

4.109   The AHRC reported that its consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and stakeholders have highlighted the 'potential for increased engagement with an education system that adequately reflects their values, recognises their histories and embraces their cultures and languages.'[129]

4.110   Children's Ground expressed concern that 'First Nations children are often sent into culturally damaging educational environments' and stated:

> these environments do not reflect their identity, language, family, history or knowledge-systems and often they deny and diminish the culture and identity of children. Too often children feel like failures and too many drop out of school.[130]

4.111   Successful approaches to the provision of culturally-relevant education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were highlighted. For example, ACECQA noted that Yirrkala Preschool in the Northern Territory had been awarded an 'excellent' rating, which is the highest rating a service can achieve under the National Quality Framework (NQF):

> The service was recognised for collaborative partnerships with professional, community or research organisations, commitment to children that respects, reflects and celebrates culture and diversity, including place of origin, inclusive partnerships with children and families and practice and environments that enhance children's learning and growth.[131]

4.112   A community based curriculum is employed by Tangentyere Council's Land and Learning project, which has been supporting 'Aboriginal community schools and Elders in central Australia to teach two-way science about the bush since 1998.'[132] The program supports:

- Training teachers to deliver two-way science in schools with Aboriginal teachers, teacher aides and/or elders;
- Providing on-ground support for schools to plan topics integrating Aboriginal ecological knowledge and Western Science, including facilitating learning on country trips;

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128   Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), *Submission 12*, p. 5.
129   AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 25.
130   Children's Ground, *Submission 56*, p. 6.
131   ACECQA, *Submission 12*, p. 11.
132   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 30.

- Supporting Aboriginal teachers, assistant teachers and elders to deliver Aboriginal language and culture programs in schools; and

- Producing bilingual resources on Aboriginal ecological knowledge for schools.[133]

4.113   'Two way' learning has been central to the curriculum offered at the Strelley Community School in the Pilbara for many years. NCEF reported that the learning day at Strelley Community School is divided into two main sections:

- literacy and numeracy involving 'mainstream skill learning and reinforcing to levels of automaticity with agreed age-level standards appropriate to EALD students from a non-western cultural family and community background',[134] and

- an integrated curriculum of project-based, 'two way' learning that connects science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with traditional ecological knowledge, and oral language development in both Nyangumarta and Standard Australian English.[135]

4.114   As previously noted, CSIRO has several programs that 'promote the importance and support both Western, scientific epistemology and First Nations ecological knowledge', including the ASSETS program and I2S2.[136]

4.115   Strelley Community School has partnered with CSIRO's Science Pathways for Indigenous Communities program 'as a vehicle to provide more structure and robustness to the Two-Way Science curriculum already in place. To date, this is proving to be a highly engaging strategy.'[137]

4.116   CSIRO commented that an evaluation of the Science Pathways for Indigenous Communities program has found that:

> embedding a two-way learning approach into the curriculum; immersive two-way teacher professional development led by local Elders; and incorporating on-country learning into curriculum to support subjects such as Science, Mathematics, English and general capabilities, are all factors that improved the involvement of community and family in student education.[138]

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133   Tangentyere Council, *Submission 60*, p. 30.
134   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 39.
135   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 40.
136   Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), *Submission 10*, p. 4.
137   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 40.
138   CSIRO, *Submission 10*, p. 6.

Boarding

4.117   Concerns were raised that boarding is the only option to attend secondary school for many students living in remote areas of Australia[139] and that there is limited choice in boarding providers. For example, ICPA Australia were concerned 'there are relatively few government-run boarding school options available to families, which leaves most having to pay the ever-increasing high costs of independent or private boarding schools to educate their children.'[140]

4.118   It was reported that the experience of boarding school can have a negative impact on the wellbeing of many students from regional, rural and remote communities.[141] For example, Remote Indigenous Parents Australia (RIPA) noted that boarding 'often proves to be too difficult for some students to adjust to. This can result in a student's disengagement from school.'[142]

Support

4.119   The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) reported that the 'additional costs of educating students from remote communities in boarding school away from their families and communities is significant', and noted:

> These additional costs include not only living and educational support, but also substantial physical and mental health support to meet the often complex and high-level needs of students including those from disrupted and traumatic backgrounds, pastoral and cultural support, and costs associated with maintaining links to home communities.[143]

4.120   ICPA NT reported that the cost to send children to boarding school 'can be crippling' and there is 'very little support in regard to travel and fees for families in the NT.'[144]

4.121   To address these issues, several support programs have been implemented at state government, school and community levels. For example, AHISA reported that independent schools adopt a range of strategies to help students overcome the challenges they experience living away from home, including targeted literacy and numeracy

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139   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 4; CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 3.
140   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 7.
141   ICPA QLD, *Submission 4*, p. 2.
142   RIPA, *Submission 23*, p. 2.
143   AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 12.
144   ICPA NT, *Submission 45*, p. 4.

teaching/tutoring, visits by school staff to students' homes, buddy systems with day students and school families and facilities for students to videocall parents.[145]

4.122 AHISA also noted the importance of residential scholarship programs in providing opportunities for Indigenous students from regional and remote areas, stating 'not only is this support of direct benefit for students, it also encourages contributions from private individuals, school communities and philanthropic organisations.'[146]

4.123 The Northern Territory's Transition Support Unit (TSU) provides support to students who may wish to access support to enrol in secondary schools outside of their local communities. In 2019, the TSU 'provided 450 students from 78 school communities with transition planning and preparation support with a focus on attending boarding school in 2020.'[147]

4.124 The NPY Women's Council provides support for young people and their families to attend boarding school, including case management, advice, and practical and financial assistance, including helping families to maintain contact with their children while at boarding school. The NPY Women's Council Boarding School Program has 'been able to streamline processes between scholarship providers, boarding schools and Abstudy and advocate with young people and their families to make access easier.'[148]

4.125 Despite the existing supports for boarding students, concerns were raised that more is needed. Empowered Communities NPY Region reported that there was demand for the NPY Women's Council Boarding School project to be expanded across the NPY region and generally 'an extension of boarding school support programs to increase the secondary education choices available to families across the region.'[149]

4.126 ISCA reported that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students 'need significant health and social and emotional support in order to be 'school ready' at the beginning of the term but 'the additional support Indigenous students need to actually get to school, stay at school and be ready to learn is not part of standard educational funding.'[150]

145 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 19.
146 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 22.
147 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 37*, p. 4.
148 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 17.
149 Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 10.
150 ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 12.

Gender equity

4.127   The Committee asked DESE about equity of schooling, in particular the lack of boarding schools for girls outside of metropolitan areas. DESE responded that this was a matter for the states.[151]

4.128   While the committee did not receive specific evidence on the issue of shortages of gender segregated boarding schools, ICPA NT expressed concern regarding the lack of boarding school options for families in the Northern Territory. ICPA NT noted that 'families have many reasons for choosing a particular boarding school for their children which will relate to extended family support, origins of parents, curriculum, cost and what is the 'right fit' for the child.'[152]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students

4.129   As previously noted, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students encounter difficulties accessing secondary school without moving away from home. Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia (IEBA) reported that:

> For young Indigenous people living in regional and remote Australia there are few education options after primary school other than to leave their family and country to become boarding students in unfamiliar cities large distances from home. For many, boarding is their only access to secondary education.[153]

4.130   School resourcing issues were raised that are unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For example IEBA reported that:

> No Commonwealth government agency has direct responsibility for resourcing Indigenous student boarding and the State governments do not currently provide effective secondary education in many remote communities that produces outcomes commensurate with their wider Australian peers.[154]

ABSTUDY

4.131   There were concerns that the current rate of ABSTUDY did not fully cover the cost of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending boarding schools. For example, ISCA reported that:

151 Mr David Pattie, First Assistant Secretary, Improving Student Outcomes Division, DESE, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 5 February 2020, p. 2.

152 ICPA NT, *Submission 6*, p. 3.

153 Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia (IEBA), *Submission 28*, p. 1.

154 IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 1.

> Independent schools which provide boarding facilities for Indigenous students in remote communities operate at half the expense of boarding services provided by government facilities. While government funding, including ABSTUDY payments play a central role in funding these services, the current ABSTUDY payment covers only half the cost. This situation leaves a significant funding gap.[155]

4.132　The NCEC expressed concern that Catholic schools that educate high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (particularly in the Northern Territory and North Queensland) have higher costs than other schools and changes to ABSTUDY, including the introduction of means testing to eligibility criteria for the boarding supplement and altered attendance requirements, have reduced funding.[156]

4.133　NCEC advised that some of its schools have to find additional sources of funding to cover shortfalls:

> Without access to programs like ABSTUDY and without the cross-subsidisation of other Cairns Catholic schools, Catholic schools at Herberton and Cooktown would not be able to fulfil their mission. For example, to remain financially viable Herberton required annual cross subsidisation (a transfer of Commonwealth recurrent grants from other Cairns Catholic Schools) of more than $500,000.[157]

4.134　NCEC also describes the administration of ABSTUDY as 'onerous and difficult' and notes that delays in processing applications can lead to students disengaging.[158]

4.135　NIAA reported that 'there are around 5,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students who receive ABSTUDY assistance as they need to study away from home. Over three-quarters of these ABSTUDY students are from a remote area.'[159]

4.136　The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) (now the NIAA) commissioned Grant Thornton Australia (GTA) to undertake analysis of the investment in support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary boarding students. Recommendations in the report *Boarding: investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (September 2019) include the need for national boarding

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155　ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 29.
156　NCEC, *Submission 40*, p. 8.
157　NCEC, *Submission 40*, p. 9.
158　NCEC, *Submission 40*, p. 9
159　NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 9.

standards, strengthened communication between government and the boarding sector, further changes to ABSTUDY and improvements to wrap-around and transition support services for boarders. The report also showed there is a shortfall in funding for boarding providers with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[160]

4.137   According to ISCA, 'the gap between income and costs for schools providing this critical educational service for Indigenous students must be addressed urgently, in order for the viability of schools educating large numbers of Indigenous boarding students to be maintained.'[161]

Cultural competence

4.138   CAEPR's study of secondary school education opportunities in one remote community in the Northern Territory found that the cultural competence of boarding schools is variable and this has a negative impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's engagement with education and subsequent attainment:

> We found that over a ten-year period, 100 members of the research cohort had been dispersed among 38 different schools located in 16 cities or towns in every state or territory of mainland Australia. Our study produced no evidence of a consistent standard of cultural competence in the boarding schools which community members attended: some were enrolled in schools which have a long history of working with First Nations students, in other situations they were the first and only First Nations student the school had ever had. A concerning pattern of early disengagement from education and low levels of academic attainment emerged.[162]

4.139   IEBA suggested that building cultural competence in boarding schools will result in better student outcomes:

> If students are culturally strong it follows that academic outcomes will be enhanced. The evidence to date suggests that if organisations are not culturally intelligent then Indigenous students are far more likely to leave those educational settings and not be able to take advantage of the educational opportunity offered in a secondary boarding setting.[163]

160   DESE, *Response to Questions on Notice*, 13 March 2020, p. 8; G Thornton, *Boarding: investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, June 2019.

161   ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 13.

162   CAEPR, *Submission 67*, p. 7.

163   IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 4.

4.140   IEBA noted that the Boarding Standard for Australian schools and residences (AS 5725:2015) 'does not include any specific references to addressing cultural safety or the cultural intelligence of the boarding school'[164] and expressed support for the implementation of an Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard (Recommendation 15 of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs' 2017 education inquiry).[165]

4.141   IEBA stated that an Indigenous Cultural Boarding Standard:

> will assure consistent culturally safe boarding practices, address specific health and well-being needs and support effective parent and community engagement. It will also support appropriate policies, procedures and identify the required competencies by boarding school staff. Importantly in doing so it will boost retention and academic outcomes for Indigenous students.[166]

Distance education

4.142   Many students living in geographically isolated areas of Australia, for example on remote cattle stations, boats and islands have little choice but to access distance education.[167]

4.143   According to DESE, 'while government schools offer distance education this is usually provided for specific purposes and for limited periods. Distance education at non-government schools is more freely available, although still limited.'[168]

4.144   The need for supervision was identified as one of the most significant challenges associated with distance learning. ICPA NT noted that 'either a parent is the supervisor, meaning the family is foregoing an income or has to employ somebody to replace the supervisor in other roles, or the family has to employ a governess to supervise DE.'[169] ICPA NT further noted that recruiting appropriate supervisors, such as governesses, is 'notoriously difficult'.[170]

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164   IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 4.

165   IEBA, Submission 28, p. 2. See: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *The power of education: From surviving to thriving Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, December 2017, p. 112.

166   IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 2.

167   ICPA NT, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

168   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 24.

169   ICPA NT, *Submission 6*, p. 3.

170   ICPA NT, *Submission 6*, p. 3.

4.145   ICPA NT reported a range of other challenges with the provision of distance education, including:

- Limited face-to-face contact with trained teachers
- Limited access to extra-curricular including sport, art, music and STEM/science
- Limitations of technology in the delivery of DE
- Limited access to support services and socialisation opportunities
- Lack of prioritised and clear pathways for intervention, diagnosis and management of special learning needs and the costs of accessing, and
- Financial and time costs of accessing activities and services in urban centres.[171]

4.146   ICPA Australia also noted that distance education for secondary students 'can be very difficult to commit to and be successful at, especially if a student has attended a local school for their primary years and does not have a previous distance education background.'[172]

4.147   Mrs Elizabeth Burnett and Mrs Hayley Howe noted that a barrier to the provision of distance education for geographically isolated students is the availability and affordability of appropriately qualified Distance Education Tutors (DETs or 'governesses').[173]

4.148   Mrs Burnett and Mrs Howe said that a DET Payment is 'critically required' with eligibility based on remoteness and distance from available schooling.[174] They commented that appropriate qualifications for DET payments should include all school teachers, in-training teachers, early childhood professionals with more than 3 years' experience with age groups 4 years and above, and individuals with relevant qualifications outside the common education field which add value to the education of remote children.[175]

4.149   Mrs Burnett and Mrs Howe suggested that an alternative to a Distance Education Tutor Payment would be to relax transitional provisions for the current In Home Care (IHC) for Early Childhood program to allow qualified teachers to be eligible for IHC payments as DETs. Currently, primary educators 'cannot operate within the IHC model without the support of an early childhood professional for 20 per cent of their

171   ICPA NT, *Submission 6*, p. 3.
172   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 7.
173   Elizabeth Burnett and Hayley Howe, *Submission 61*, p. 1.
174   Elizabeth Burnett and Hayley Howe, *Submission 61*, p. 2.
175   Elizabeth Burnett and Hayley Howe, *Submission 61*, p. 2.

employed weekly hours'.[176] Mrs Burnett and Mrs Howe noted that 'in urban schools a Bachelor of Primary qualified teacher provides Early Childhood education to children aged 5-8 years via Prep-Yr. 2, but in remote areas under the IHC model as educators they cannot.'[177]

Entrepreneurialism

4.150   AHISA noted that schools in regional and remote locations are adopting a greater focus on entrepreneurial activity among students and are 'active in seeking ways to expand provision for students to help equip them to contribute to their local communities, and prepare them for existing work opportunities or to create new opportunities.'[178]

4.151   In addition to a focus on entrepreneurialism as part of the business studies curriculum, schools have established programs or ventures such as:

- Encouraging students to engage in social entrepreneurialism
- Making it a requirement for students studying the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to establish ventures to raise money for attendance at a VCAL camp
- Making it a major assessment task for Year 11 Business Studies students to create a business proposition which they then present to a panel of business professionals from the local community (in the style of the TV program, Shark Tank)
- Using a Conservation and Land Management course as a platform for growing trees for the community and land care organisations
- Establishing a student run café to put into practice financial literacy skills
- Making and posting YouTube clips on learning a language other than English, and
- Helping young mothers develop a business in partnership with their Aboriginal elders in fabric design and clothing and fashion accessories.[179]

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176 Elizabeth Burnett and Hayley Howe, *Submission 61*, p. 3.
177 Elizabeth Burnett and Hayley Howe, *Submission 61*, p. 3.
178 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 12.
179 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 12.

Workforce issues

4.152   The Halsey review found that 'in order to increase the achievements and expand successful transitions and pathways for RRR [regional, rural and remote] young people in and across the board, committed and highly effective teachers and teaching in every location for every year level is essential.'[180]

4.153   Yet, as with other professions in regional, rural and remote communities, there remains significant attraction, retention and training issues for the teaching profession.

4.154   SNAICC reported that 'service-level barriers are major contributors to our children in remote areas of Australia being significantly behind children in other areas in early education participation and outcomes' and include a lack of service infrastructure, workforce shortages and a lack of housing for staff.[181]

4.155   Empowered Communities NPY Region advocated for 'structural changes to improve the retention and skills of non-Anangu teaching staff coming to the region, and upskilling with ESL and language training'.[182] They also advocated for 'increased opportunities for supported Anangu employment and professional development in order to increase the Anangu workforce in NPY schools.'[183]

4.156   The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA) expressed concern about high staff turnover in remote schools, noting that one school in the Tiwi Islands has had seven principals in two years. NATSIPA stated:

> It is extremely difficult for students and community to build trust and rapport with staff who continue to leave and yet the community is stable. There is no consistency in personnel or learning. The turnover of teachers is enormous yet the knowledge keepers and educators who stay in these locations are from these communities.[184]

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180   Emeritus Professor John Halsey, *Department of Education and Training, Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, January 2018, p. 38.

181   SNAICC, *Submission 15*, p. 4.

182   Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 15.

183   Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 15.

184   National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA), *Submission 33*, p. 2.

Teacher training

4.157 A national survey by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) of over 4,000 educators found that access to high quality professional learning was particularly challenging for teachers in regional, rural and remote settings.[185]

4.158 ISCA commented that schools in remote communities and complex environments often employ a higher proportion of younger and/or inexperienced staff, resulting in heightened costs of upskilling, developing and nurturing of new staff through professional learning and other related opportunities.[186]

4.159 ISCA stated:

> Even for experienced staff, a lack of specialised locally available professional learning…can be a challenge. Similarly, it can be difficult for principals and other school leaders to have the opportunity to interact with and learn from other similarly placed leaders…
>
> Often only a small percentage of staff professional learning and development can be provided locally. While staff are increasingly able to undertake online professional learning, for nonsystemic Independent schools finding and accessing relevant and appropriate online opportunities can be difficult.[187]

4.160 There are also training issues associated with low teacher numbers and high turnover in isolated schools. The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales cited 2016 research showing that 'many schools require teachers to teach subjects outside their field of expertise to make up for the shortfall' and that, 'in remote locations, about 41 per cent of Years 7-10 teachers teach out-of-field at least some of the time, compared to 24 per cent of metropolitan teachers.'[188]

4.161 The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales advocated for:

- teachers to be encouraged to 'undertake experience exchange programs in other RRR schools…This would allow the teachers to gain exposure to different teaching methods and expectations, and to foster fresh ideas', and

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185 Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), *Submission 34*, p. 5.

186 ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 18.

187 ISCA, *Submission 22*, p. 18.

188 Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 20*, p. 3.

- 'all university teaching degrees include teacher training with a specific focus on RRR schools, and teacher 'pracs' include a RRR school.'[189]

4.162   AHISA suggested that universities could have an ongoing role in teachers' professional development:

> …partnerships between regional and remote schools and universities could be a viable option for the provision of higher education and professional development opportunities for teachers – contributing to quality schooling provision in regional and remote locations and supporting recruitment and retention of teachers.[190]

4.163   A range of programs were highlighted that aim to improve the training of regional, remote and rural teachers including:

- TFA's Leadership Development Program recruits and trains exceptional teachers to become Associates by completing a two-year placement in schools serving low socioeconomic communities while studying to attain their Masters in education.[191] TFA Associates are provided with a professional coach, an academic mentor employed by the Australian Catholic University (TFA's university partner), and a School Mentor employed by their placement school.[192]

- The Western Australian government has several programs to develop the teaching workforce in regional and remote schools, including:

  ⇒ The Regional Learning Specialists Project, 'designed to strengthen the teaching of science, humanities and social sciences, mathematics and English for senior secondary ATAR students', and works with 'teachers in these schools to build their capacity to deliver the courses locally in the longer term'[193]

  ⇒ The Country Practicum Program provides financial support for student teachers and school psychologists to undertake their final practicums in schools in the Goldfields, Midwest, Kimberley, Pilbara and Wheat belt,[194] and

  ⇒ The Rural and Remote Training Schools project promotes rural and remote teaching to university students and helps prepare them for, and encourages them to teach in, public schools with a focus on the Pilbara, Kimberley, Midwest and Goldfields regions. The Western

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189   Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 20*, p. 4.
190   AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 5.
191   TFA, *Submission 14*, p. 1.
192   TFA, *Submission 14*, p. 2.
193   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 20.
194   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 19.

Australian government reported that 'the project has delivered a significant increase in the number of pre-service teachers undertaking final practicums in rural/remote schools in these regions.'[195]

- Centres for Learning and Wellbeing (CLAWs) have been introduced in rural and remote areas in Queensland to provide 'support, professional learning, mentorship and a wellbeing focus for teaching staff.'[196]

Preparing teachers to work in culturally and linguistically diverse schools

4.164   The importance of non-Indigenous teachers being trained to competently include relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content into the curriculum and receiving induction programs to ensure they have an adequate awareness of the cultural environment within which they work was highlighted.[197]

4.165   The AHRC noted that the provision of culturally-relevant education depends upon the 'quality, knowledge and preparedness of teaching staff', and reported that 'remote schools are often staffed by a largely external workforce with extremely high turnover which can have a significant impact on teaching quality.'[198]

4.166   IEBA stated that teachers need to 'have the skills to effectively teach Aboriginal students' and that school staff need to be culturally proficient, listen to and support families, and to work with local Aboriginal education workers to assist in teaching and to engage with the community.[199] IEBA said there is also a need 'to ensure that all teaching staff understand Aboriginal histories, languages, spirituality and cultures' and that 'school principal must assess their school-wide cultural competencies, connect with the local Indigenous community and engage their Aboriginal education staff.'[200]

4.167   Empowered Communities NPY Region advocated for structural changes to improve the retention and skills of non-Aṉangu teaching staff, including providing staff with ESL/D and language training.[201]

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195 Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 23.

196 IPCA QLD, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

197 AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 25; Dr Sam Osborne, *Submission 29*, p. 4; Ms Julie Bailey, *Submission 53*, p. 5; NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 7; World Vision, *Submission 51*, p. 6; NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

198 AHRC, *Submission 1*, p. 30.

199 IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

200 IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 6.

201 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 15.

4.168   The Western Australian government reported that pre-service teachers in that state are provided training in the specific language learning needs of Aboriginal students whose first language is not Standard Australian English. The Tracks to Two-Way Learning resource 'positions Aboriginal English to be recognised and valued alongside Standard Australian English'; 'encourages the accepted use of diverse languages and dialects in schools'; and, 'improves teachers' knowledge and ability to teach and engage with Aboriginal staff, students and community.'[202]

Mobilising a local workforce: training and accreditation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

4.169   The importance of mobilising a local workforce to teach in community schools was highlighted, however it was reported that there are barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people becoming fully accredited teachers. For example, Yirrkala School noted that 'our most important teachers are home grown' but expressed concern that 'there are few truly accessible pathways for First Nations educators in the Northern Territory to become fully qualified teachers.'[203]

4.170   As previously noted, Dr Sam Osbourne reported that there is a positive relationship between the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in schools and improved educational outcomes for students:

> Myschools data shows a statistically significant relationship between the number of non-teaching staff (almost exclusively local Aboriginal community members working as education support, administration, grounds, bus driving and so on) and improved attendance and NAPLAN scores. This suggests there is a significant need for investment in local employment and workforce development in remote Aboriginal schooling.[204]

4.171   NIAA noted that there is an important role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff in schools 'in providing bridges between students, the local community and teachers', and commented:

> These staff are critical to the delivery of bilingual education programs, particularly in remote and very remote schools. They are able to assist both teachers and students in first language learning and in translating concepts across languages.[205]

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202   Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 5.
203   Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 16.
204   Dr Sam Osborne, *Submission 29*, p. 4.
205   NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 5.

4.172   NACCHO reported that there is a severe shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australia:

> Only 0.7 per cent of all teachers in Australia identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, although around 3 per cent of the Australian population identify as such, and low numbers as set to worsen as older teachers retire. There is also a general lack of visible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models in school communities.[206]

4.173   At the roundtable hearing on 26 August 2020, the AEU referred to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce as 'an untapped resource' and noted:

> …over six per cent of all public school enrolments are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators make up just over two per cent of the total workforce. Research shows that, when you employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education workers in schools, it's directly linked to improved attendance rates, improved student outcomes and improved connections with the community.[207]

4.174   The CLC noted that there is currently 'an ageing Aboriginal teacher and Assistant Teacher workforce within very remote schools' in the Northern Territory, as a result 'of the withdrawal of well-resourced teacher training programs in the 1980s and 1990s, which contributed to the establishment of a highly professionalised remote Indigenous language workforce.'[208] The CLC called for 'an expansion of Aboriginal Assistant Teacher allocations and a strategic and resourced program to address the barriers to increasing the numbers of trained Aboriginal teachers from very remote locations.'[209]

4.175   NATSIPA advocated for:

> a greater focus on developing the skills of our Aboriginal workers and traditional language speakers to be trained as teachers, to be recognised as teachers and remunerated accordingly to work alongside fly-in teachers who are failing our children. The best qualified and most experienced teachers should be targeted to

206   NACCHO, *Submission 44*, p. 4.
207   Ms Correna Haythorpe, Federal President, AEU, Committee Hansard, 26 August 2020, Canberra, p. 6.
208   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 17.
209   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 18.

work in our communities and low SES schools not the teachers
who are least qualified and suitable.[210]

4.176   NCEC noted that Catholic Education Northern Territory has collaborated
with Charles Darwin University to deliver the Growing Our Own Project.
NCEC reported:

> This project works with assistant teachers who would like to
> undertake pre-service teacher training in the school they are
> working at. This project has had a high success rate with local
> community members becoming teachers in their community
> school.[211]

4.177   Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) programs were highlighted as a
way to increase the training and accreditation of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander education workers and teachers.[212] For example, the CLC
reported that the RATE program formerly delivered through Bachelor
College in the Northern Territory 'contributed to the establishment of a
highly professionalised remote Indigenous language workforce' and was a
'successful approach to ensuring fully qualified teachers.' [213]

Recruitment and retention

4.178   DESE reported that remoteness makes it more difficult to recruit and
retain high quality principals, school leaders and teachers, especially in
science and mathematics.[214]

4.179   Various factors that negatively impact recruitment and retention in
regional, rural and remote schools were identified, including the
preparation of teachers to work in non-metropolitan locations. For
example, ICPA Australia reported that 'often young inexperienced
teachers take on hard to fill positions in isolated locations, unprepared for
rural living, isolation from family, friends and colleagues, and the impact
lack of educational services has on student outcomes.'[215]

4.180   SNAICC reported that recruiting and retaining quality staff, particularly
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, is a major difficulty in remote
communities and can be attributed to a lack of local training opportunities,
culturally unsafe training processes, recruitment and workplace culture,

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210   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 18.

211   NCEC, *Submission 40*, p. 6.

212   Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 16; Ms Jeanie Adams, *Submission 57*, p. 3; NCEF,
Submission 66, p. 34.

213   CLC, *Submission 9*, p. 17.

214   DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 28.

215   ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 5.

structural and language barriers and inflexible workplaces, lack of access and support for relevant qualifications and a lack of recognition of the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge in educational services.[216]

4.181　According to the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales:

> A constant challenge for schools in remoter areas is gaining and retaining a sufficient number of specialist qualified teachers able to deliver the curriculum. The disincentives for teachers to move to remoter areas – such as the costs of moving, the remoteness itself – can often counteract attempts to address this challenge.[217]

4.182　NCEF said that resourcing can exacerbate recruitment problems for some schools:

> NCEF is unable to offer the attractive remote employment incentives that the bigger public and catholic sectors can offer. There is no 'carrot dangling' offer of permanency in a regional or metropolitan position after fulfilling a teaching tenure in our remote community school. Qualified staff come to our school through their own choice as part of their own professional and personal life goals.[218]

4.183　There are also issues when teachers are not required to move in order to teach in remote areas and work on a fly-in, fly-out basis. IEBA were concerned that due to industrial conditions preventing travel during school holidays, teachers who resided outside of the community they worked in did not arrive in the community until after the school term had started and left before the school term ended, resulting in students missing around four weeks of school each year.[219]

4.184　An inability to recruit and retain appropriately trained teachers can negatively affect student learning outcomes. NIAA noted that 'teacher quality has been found to be the largest in-school determinant of educational success' and quality is reduced by turnover as 'strategic classroom planning and curriculum implementation is interrupted.'[220]

216　SNAICC, *Submission 15*, p. 5.
217　Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 20*, p. 3.
218　NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 34.
219　IEBA, *Submission 28*, p. 3.
220　NIAA, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

4.185   NCEF noted that staff retention is critical in remote schools, stating that 'the longer a teacher stays, the greater the relationships and trust that are developed with the students and community.'[221]

4.186   Empowered Communities NPY Region noted 'the transience of staff through remote community schools results in poor continuity for students – within a culture that values relationships as foundational to all interactions', and teachers are often new, inexperienced and 'lacking specialist skills required to support high-needs students.'[222]

4.187   NPY Women's Council stated that 'government incentives currently favour new graduates with limited experience to come and teach in remote communities', however 'there needs to be experienced teachers to promote innovative models to engage young people.'[223]

4.188   NCEF suggested that teachers need to have several characteristics in order to teach successfully in remote schools:

> Working in a remote community school requires a special type of person. It is essential the applicant is genuine in their intentions, culturally sensitive, has the right professional skills, the tenacity and resilience to live in harsh remote conditions. The school is no place for a martyr or a crusader as both have the potential of creating more harm than good.[224]

4.189   To reduce recruitment and retention difficulties in regional, rural and remote communities, Mr Phil Brown of the Country Education Partnership (CEP) suggested there needs to be 'a holistic view about what the preparation needs to look like, how we then recruit staff, how we support new graduates in those communities and then how we continue to grow them.'[225]

4.190   DESE noted that the Commonwealth has:

> committed over $28 million in funding for La Trobe University and Teach For Australia to deliver the High Achieving Teachers Program and support schools experiencing teacher workforce shortages. Commencing in 2020, the High Achieving Teachers Program is offering two alternative, employment-based pathways into teaching.[226]

221 NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 35.

222 Empowered Communities NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 14.

223 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 10.

224 NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 34.

225 Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Partnership (CEP), *Committee Hansard*, 12 February 2020, Canberra, p. 3.

226 DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 12.

4.191   DESE reported that work is underway on a teacher workforce strategy under the National School Reform Agreement. The work is being undertaken by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership with the states and territories and is examining 'where the workforce demands are and the skill sets of teachers that may be required.'[227]

4.192   DESE also noted that the government has implemented measures in response to recommendations provided by the Special Envoy for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, including:

■ teachers engaged as a teacher at a school campus in a very remote area of Australia will not be charged indexation on their accumulated Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt while they are teaching in a very remote area, and

■ teachers who have worked as teachers in schools for at least four years in a very remote area of Australia, from the start of the 2019 school year, may be eligible to have all or part of their outstanding HELP debt remitted.[228]

4.193   The Western Australian government reported that they provide a range of incentives to attract and retain teachers in regional and remote schools, including employee housing and relocation assistance, location-based allowances and other conditions.[229]

4.194   A range of actions were recommended to improve the recruitment and retention of staff in regional, rural and remote schools:

■ APSA suggested an incentive package to attract and retain staff serving in rural, remote and complex schools that included pay, accommodation, relocation allowances and other conditions[230]

■ ASPA suggested that high achieving graduates be appointed to rural or remote schools 'with a guarantee of return to their (nominated) preferred region after the agreed period of time'[231]

■ NATSIPA suggested an extension of Queensland's recruitment strategy to include the Remote Ambassador program, which 'identifies suitable teachers and principals who would be willing to be a champion for the benefits of remote teaching'[232]

227 DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 6.
228 DESE, *Submission 49*, p. 45.
229 Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 26.
230 ASPA, *Submission 5*, p. 3.
231 ASPA, *Submission 5*, p. 3.
232 NATSIPA, *Submission 33*, p. 6.

- Yirrkala School suggested funding 'a pilot of a Community-Based Teacher Education Program (such the program formerly known as Remote Area Teacher Education or RATE in the NT) to provide pathways for remote people to become fully qualified school teachers, in community, without having to leave,'[233] and

- Yirrkala School suggested optimising 'the support through Centrelink for local students studying to become teachers and school support officers whilst working part time in remote schools'.[234]

Temporary Skills Shortage visa program

4.195   AHISA noted that some regional and remote schools have sought to recruit teaching and non-teaching staff from overseas, however this has been affected by 'the reclassification of occupations eligible under the Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa program, from the medium-term and long-term Skilled Migration occupation list to the short-term list'[235].

4.196   AHISA called for a 'more nuanced approach to determining skills shortages for the purposes of TSS processes, to avoid restricting the capacity of schools to fill skills gaps.'[236] Specifically, AHISA advocated for a number of occupations to be re-instated to the medium-term and long-term occupation list, including 'Education Manager', 'Specialist Manager' and 'Education Adviser' (all of which could cover a school leadership role such as Head of Senior School or Director of Curriculum not carrying a teaching load), 'Primary School Teacher', 'Middle School Teacher', 'Residential Care Officer' and 'Student Counsellor'.[237]

Cross-jurisdictional issues: the tri-border region

4.197   The Committee was interested in hearing about the education challenges faced by communities in the tri-border region including NPY lands in the central desert region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and the Aṉangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY lands) in the remote north west of South Australia. These communities are located in one of the most geographically isolated areas of Australia, which makes the delivery of education and other services challenging.

233 Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 17.
234 Yirrkala School, *Submission 48*, p. 17.
235 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 15.
236 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 15.
237 AHISA, *Submission 2*, p. 15.

4.198 Responsibility for education delivery in NPY and APY communities is shared between four different jurisdictions (Commonwealth, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory) and includes a mix of government and independent schools.

4.199 Aṉangu people living in the tri-border region maintain strong links to their land, languages, traditional laws and family but have extremely limited educational outcomes and pathways to employment due to complex historical, geographic and structural barriers.[238]

4.200 NPY Women's Council reported that 93 per cent of Aṉangu speak their local language at home, with English as a second, third or fourth language.[239]

4.201 Aṉangu have expressed their desire for their children to receive bilingual education,[240] delivered through a 'red dirt curriculum'.[241] Empowered Communities NPY Region describes this approach as:

> an Aṉangu-led view of culturally appropriate, place-based education – designed and delivered by Aṉangu (within the parameters of the Australian Curriculum), whereby children learn locally relevant content in an integrated and contextual way. This means drawing on local examples, knowledge, stories and opportunities and combining an Aṉangu world view into everyday learning – rather than as isolated subjects or standalone activities.[242]

Access and equity

4.202 Empowered Communities NPY Region expressed concern that 'resourcing for education varies widely across jurisdictions and the region has no consistent strategy or coordinated approach amongst education providers across borders.'[243]

4.203 Empowered Communities NPY Region noted that the NPY region consists of 25 communities with a population of about 4500, and reported that:

- Half of the population is under the age of 25 years and 80 per cent of adults are unemployed[244]

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238 Emeritus Professor Max Angus, *Submission 38*, pp. 1-7; Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 3.

239 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 7.

240 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 12.

241 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 12.

242 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 12.

243 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

244 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

- In 2015, 74 per cent of children under 5 years from the NPY region were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains[245]

- In 2018, the average annual school attendance at NPY schools was 29 per cent[246]

- In 2016, only 18 per cent of those aged 20 to 24 years in the NPY region had completed Year 12,[247] and

- In 2016, 13 percent of young people aged 17 to 24 years in the NPY region were participating in work or study. Only 3 per cent had completed a Certificate III or above qualification.[248]

4.204   Empowered Communities NPY Region reported that:

- 'access to early childhood programs are variable across the NPY region', noting that some communities have dedicated playgroup and pre-school facilities and regularly operating programs, others run a fly-in-fly-out or occasional service as an add-on to existing family wellbeing programs, while other communities have few or no programs at all[249]

- 'anecdotal evidence suggests that many communities receive less than 15 hours per child per week recommended under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education'[250]

- while the Northern Territory government has plans to integrate child and family centres as 'place-based hubs that encourage family participation in early childhood education and development', there are currently no centres of this type, or integration of early education and primary schools except in a handful of APY (South Australian) communities within the region, and[251]

- secondary schooling in the NPY region is delivered through primary school facilities in most communities and the range of subjects is 'extremely limited'.[252] It noted that the Finke community in the Northern Territory has 'no secondary provision at all and students must attend boarding school in order to pursue secondary education.'[253]

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245 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 7.
246 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 7.
247 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 8.
248 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 9.
249 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 6.
250 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 7.
251 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 11.
252 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 8.
253 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 8.

4.205   NPY Women's Council reported that a range of programs and services available to students in South Australia are unavailable to students in nearby communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory:

> For example, in South Australia APY lands there are vocational providers, connection with the Wiltja Aṉangu boarding school in Adelaide and the Umuwa Trade Training Centre, as well as flexible learning options (FLO) program. This is in addition to the primary and secondary schooling available. Apart from primary and secondary schooling, these additional resources…do not exist in the Ngaanyatjarra lands and the Southern NT remote communities that are within the NPY region.[254]

4.206   While noting the disparity in educational opportunities and services across jurisdictions, Empowered Communities NPY Region commented that 'there is considerable demand for equivalent facilities and support to be available for all students throughout the region.'[255]

4.207   The Western Australian government noted that there is 'very limited access to training and tertiary education' on the NPY lands, stating that:

> Currently there are no students undertaking formal vocational or tertiary courses. There is sporadic access to TAFE courses, which operate with the support of school personnel and are always short-term courses.[256]

4.208   NPY Women's Council commented that 'Aṉangu do not traditionally identify via the standard geographical boundaries imposed on their environment' and, consequently, 'Aṉangu youth do not conveniently stick to the mainstream tristate borders.'[257] NPY Women's Council noted 'as young people move through these borders, they encounter different curricula, methods of teaching and variable support structures' and advocated for a 'flexible and consistent approach across the tristate region.'[258]

4.209   NPY Women's Council called for a partnership to be developed between the education departments of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory to pilot a cross border educational agreement.[259]

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254 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 9.
255 Empowered Communities, NPY Region, *Submission 17*, p. 8.
256 Western Australian government, *Submission 6*, p. 9.
257 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 9.
258 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 9.
259 NPY Women's Council, *Submission 47*, p. 11.

Rollout of online education in response to COVID-19 pandemic

4.210   The response of Australian schools to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the rapid adaptation to home and online learning, has further highlighted the digital divide between Australians with ready access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and those without.

4.211   DESE noted that COVID-19 'has had a dramatic impact on the lives of millions of people worldwide. In Australia, schools supporting nearly four million students were required to move rapidly to alternative delivery models and embrace distance and digital learning for most students.'[260] DESE commented that 'schools, school systems, parents, students and their educators were at vastly different stages in terms of preparedness for such an immediate change.[261]

4.212   DESE reported that school communities faced a range of challenges, including:

- the basic resources of families needed to support home learning, including physical space for learning
- the availability and suitability of information, communication and telecommunications resources and know-how
- the capability and willingness of students and parents to engage remotely
- the capability and familiarity of teachers to support online learning, and
- the ability for the education system to address those adjustments for students that may benefit from being in the classroom.[262]

4.213   DESE also noted that some communities experienced greater difficulties than others due to biosecurity restrictions. For example, in the APY lands in South Australia, schools were closed for an additional two weeks at the start of term two due to the requirement for school teachers and staff to quarantine for 14 days prior to re-entering the community.[263]

Vulnerable students disadvantaged

4.214   DESE commissioned six studies to examine the impact of remote learning on educational outcomes for vulnerable cohorts of children, and barriers

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260 DESE, *Supplementary Submission 49.1*, p. 4.
261 DESE, *Supplementary Submission 49.1*, p. 5.
262 DESE, *Supplementary Submission 49.1*, p. 5.
263 DESE, *Supplementary Submission 49.1*, p. 5.

to access.[264] The studies indicated that the shift to online education will disadvantage many students, with vulnerable children and those in early years, in particular, facing long-term impacts on their education.

4.215   For example, the Rapid Research Information Forum, chaired by Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel AO, reported:

> The limited and varied evidence in primary and secondary schools, both from Australian and international sources, suggests an extended period of remote learning is likely to result in poorer educational outcomes for almost half of Australian students, including those in early-years students (those five and under), students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those with English as a second language, those with special learning needs, and students who are generally less engaged with school.[265]

4.216   Evidence to this inquiry has shown that the rollout of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on many students, particularly those who were already experiencing disadvantage.[266] For example, ASPA stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has 'caused the significant inequities in the Australian education system to be magnified.'[267]

4.217   The NCEC commented:

> While there is presently insufficient detail to understand the full ramifications of the remote learning experiment, observable patterns are emerging, and it is becoming clear that students who were already experiencing disadvantage pre-COVID will suffer the worst.[268]

4.218   Similarly, the Western Australian government reported:

> The COVID-19 situation has highlighted a significant gap for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Aboriginal students, in their ability to access support for home learning. This

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264   DESE, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for schools and students*, <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/schools>, 19 June 2020, viewed 27 July 2020.

265   Rapid Research Information Forum, *Differential learning outcomes for online versus in-class education*, 4 May 2020, <https://www.dese.gov.au/document/dr-alan-finkel-ao-faa-ftse-fahms-rapid-research-information-forum>, viewed 27 July 2020, p. 1.

266   NCEC, *Supplementary submission 40.1*, p 2; ASPA, *Supplementary submission 5.1*, p. 1; Western Australian government, *Supplementary submission 6.1*, p. 6; Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), *Supplementary submission 30.1*, p. 1.

267   ASPA, *Supplementary submission 5.1*, p. 1.

268   NCEC, *Supplementary submission 40.1*, p. 2.

is an indication that school is the best place for learning to occur, particularly for vulnerable students.[269]

4.219 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) reported that 'the COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated the daily inequities faced by children and young people with disability and their families and caregivers'. [270] CYDA commented:

> During the COVID-19 crisis, existing interface issues between the education system and the NDIS were exacerbated, with students with disability learning from home and missing many of the supports they usually receive at school and through the NDIS. There is also evidence that students in rural areas were unable to learn from home during the pandemic, due to a lack of equipment and reliable internet access at home. [271]

4.220 CYDA said that online learning 'did not work for all students particularly for those with complex needs where supervision was required at all times. Parents reported a loss of income or a reduction in working hours as they were required to monitor online learning without extra assistance.'[272]

4.221 ICPA Australia expressed concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on future tertiary students and noted that 'uncertainty surrounds the cohort of students who would have been planning to apply for independent Youth Allowance in 2021' because 'they may be unable to qualify due to not being able to meet the requirements which apply due to limited job opportunities and job losses during COVID-19.[273]

4.222 DESE noted that it will be 'important to understand any longer-term impacts on the movement to remote learning at scale on educational outcomes' and commented:

> Longitudinal research tracking whether there are lasting effects on students' education outcomes and access to post school pathways for different groups of students will be important to identify effective strategies for addressing any negative outcomes.[274]

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269 Western Australian government, *Supplementary submission 6.1*, p. 6.

270 CYDA, *Supplementary submission 30.1*, p. 1.

271 CYDA, *Supplementary submission 30.1*, p. 1.

272 CYDA, *Supplementary submission 30.1*, p. 5.

273 ICPA Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 4.

274 DESE, *Supplementary submission 49.1*, p. 20.

Impact of COVID-19 on education in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

4.223   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in some remote communities did not have the opportunity for their education to be continued via online learning at all. In these communities, hard copy learning packs were provided to students.[275]

4.224   Some remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experienced an increase in population in response to concerns about COVID-19 in major centres. This made already overcrowded living conditions worse, increased family and community violence, and made home learning more difficult for students already experiencing disadvantage.[276] Other communities experienced a decline in population, which affected student attendance and enrolments in the latter half of term two.[277]

4.225   Aboriginal and Torres Strait boarding students from remote communities were particularly disadvantaged by the shift to online learning and alternative modes of education delivery.[278] For example, NPY Women's Council reported that, of the 10 boarding school students who returned to their communities in the tri-border region due to COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020, only one student had access to Wi-Fi in their home. NPY Women's Council commented:

> None of the students has home computers or access to a laptop in their homes. One school sent laptop computers and dongles for their students. The boarding school posted the equipment, which went from Cairns in Queensland, to Amata Community APY lands in South Australia. It took five weeks to arrive. Most of the work provided for boarding school students was printed and posted in the mail. These work packs took weeks to arrive as well, with some not arriving at all. Thus significantly delaying students work progress. During this time, NPYWC boarding school students had no access to computers or printers at home and questionable access to quiet spaces for study.[279]

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275 Western Australian government, *Supplementary submission 6.1*, p. 2; NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 46.

276 RIPA, *Supplementary submission 23.1*, p. 2; NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 2.

277 NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 47.

278 RIPA, *Supplementary submission 23.1*, p. 3; NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 1.

279 NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 1.

4.226   NPY Women's Council's boarding school support staff found places where the boarding school students could do their schoolwork, although this was challenging:

> Social distancing rules made it difficult to find adequate spaces. It was also difficult to find ensure supervision for these students both in the home and in alternative venues. In most cases communities' schools were willing to support boarding school clients, but not in all cases.[280]

4.227   NPY Women's Council noted that, in the transition to home learning, 'the expectation falls to parents and caregivers to provide support for work packs to be completed by students.'[281] NPY Women's Council commented that, in some remote Aboriginal communities, 'it is likely that parents/care givers, with English as a second language, would not have comprehension skills to interpret instructions with students.'[282]

4.228   IEBA expressed concern that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may disengage from education as a consequence of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. IEBA advocated for 'an effective ongoing communication campaign' to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 'are not lost to the education system and return to their schooling.'[283] IEBA has developed a proposal for a 'Bringing them Back to School Campaign' to support students in regional and remote communities to continue to engage with their schooling and return to boarding schools when it is deemed safe to do so.[284]

Impact of pandemic on schools

4.229   In addition to having a range of negative impacts on the education of vulnerable students, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant financial stress on some remote schools and boarding schools that provide education for students from regional and remote areas.

4.230   NCEF reported that, as a consequence of families moving away during the pandemic, a community school in the Pilbara was in danger of losing funding:

> With the August Federal Government student census looming and lower than usual student numbers due to COVID-19, the potential impact to the total per capita funding is of grave concern. Whilst

280 NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 2.
281 NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 2.
282 NPY Women's Council, *Supplementary submission 47.1*, p. 2.
283 IEBA, *Supplementary submission 28.1*, p. 2.
284 IEBA, *Supplementary submission 28.1*, p. 1.

> community assurances have been given and there is no doubt that the community and their children will return, this needs to occur in time for the census count. This is the cruel dilemma imposed by the limitations of a once a year per capita funding model and its inflexibility in times of crisis.[285]

4.231   The NCEC reported that the disruption to boarding schools caused by the pandemic has had a significant financial impact on boarding income for Catholic schools:

> Many of our boarding schools have lost much, if not all of their boarding income for term 2 and even with prudent financial management, there is little capacity to absorb the once-in-a-century shock of COVID-19 within the lean budgets of Catholic boarding schools.[286]

4.232   ISCA was critical of 'mixed messages and conflicting advice from state and territory governments and the Australian government on who should be attending school and who should be learning from home', in particular guidance on who should be classed as essential workers, vulnerable students and vulnerable staff.[287]

4.233   ISCA said that independent schools have also been managing a variety of issues and concerns, ranging from reporting requirements to staffing 'without systemic support, such as that available to government schools.'[288]

Realising the potential of online and flexible learning

4.234   For many students the experience of online or home based learning has been positive and education systems have shown remarkable adaptability and resilience in challenging circumstances.

4.235   The response of many schools has demonstrated that, where students have access to suitable devices, a reliable internet connection and appropriate bandwidth, quality education can be delivered online and provide continuity during extreme events.[289]

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285   NCEF, *Submission 66*, p. 47.
286   NCEC, *Supplementary submission 40.1*, p. 3.
287   ISCA, *Supplementary submission 22.1*, p. 4.
288   ISCA, *Supplementary submission 22.1*, p. 4.
289   AHISA, *Supplementary submission 2.1*, p. 4.

4.236   Universities have been delivering online and flexible learning for many
        years and were well placed to move their courses online in response to the
        pandemic.[290]

4.237   Online Education Services (OES) suggested that the delivery of online
        education in universities has demonstrated the potential of online and
        flexible learning to improve equity in education. OES stated 'online
        education has offered learning opportunities to many people who
        otherwise would never have studied through a university or major
        vocational institution.'[291]

4.238   Some schools have found aspects of new remote learning practices
        beneficial. For example, NCEC commented:

> Some approaches may well continue as they have led to improved
> efficiencies and more positive student and parent feedback. These
> include online parent-teacher interviews, a greater understanding
> about individual student's home learning environments enabling
> more targeted teaching, and improved collaboration amongst
> teaching staff across the sectors.[292]

4.239   The importance of teacher training in online modes of education delivery
        was highlighted.[293] For example, DESE reported that a national survey of
        over 10,000 Australian teachers conducted during April 2020 found that
        'only 30 per cent of teachers had been trained to deliver remote learning
        prior to the pandemic, and the majority (80 per cent) felt unprepared for
        the transition, particularly in non-metropolitan areas.'[294] DESE
        commented:

> For teachers, effective remote learning and use of online
> mechanisms requires more than simply knowing how to use
> technology or transferring existing materials to an online platform.
> It requires new or adapted pedagogies, management and
> organisation of content, institutional support and new or adapted
> ways of engaging and interacting with students.[295]

4.240   AITSL advocated for the adoption of evidence-informed practice related to
        online and distance learning.[296] Similarly, Mr Tom Worthington argued for

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290   La Trobe University, *Supplementary submission 36.1*, p. 1; Charles Sturt University,
      Supplementary submission 41.1, p. 2.

291   Online Education Services (OES), *Submission 25*, p. 2.

292   NCEC, *Supplementary submission 40.1*, p. 2.

293   MGSE, *Submission 59*, p. 4; Mr Tom Worthington, *Submission 50*, p. 1; AITSL, *Supplementary
      submission 34.1*, p. 2.

294   DESE, *Supplementary Submission 49.1*, p. 12.

295   DESE, *Supplementary submission 49.1*, p. 11.

296   AITSL, *Supplementary submission 34.1*, p. 2.

teachers to be trained to teach online, noting that 'while we have the technology for teaching, what has been lacking during the COVID-19 pandemic are university and school teachers trained to use that technology effectively.'[297]

Summary and discussion

4.241 A range of barriers to education were identified that are within the scope of education systems to address. To address these barriers there was support for:

- providing locally-accessible, quality education within a reasonable distance, and with appropriate transportation options

- a national approach to education that supports consistently high standards and outcomes for students, regardless of where education is provided

- a needs-based school funding model that addresses regional and remote student disadvantaging families and communities in children's education, including allowing communities more say in how their children are educated, within the parameters of the Australian Curriculum

- improving student engagement in STEM subjects, including through innovative and collaborative delivery of the Australian Curriculum

- encouraging greater school attendance by engaging students in education that is meaningful to them and providing whole-of-family supports to help achieve this; and, increasing the use of in-school suspensions to discipline students, and reducing the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to reduce the rate of vulnerable students disengaging from education

- improving adult literacy, for example through the provision of mass adult literacy campaigns

- responding flexibly to local cultural and linguistic needs in the provision of education, particularly when a child's first language is not Standard Australian English

- providing a range of supports to help students overcome the challenges they experience living away from home at boarding schools

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297 Mr Tom Worthington, *Submission 50*, p. 1.

- improving resourcing for boarding schools that educate students from regional, rural and remote communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- improving access to and support for distance education

- addressing a range of workforce issues, including: improving teacher training, recruitment and retention in regional, rural and remote schools; improving the capacity of teachers to work in culturally and linguistically diverse schools; and, increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

- improving the capacity of schools to fill skills gaps through a more nuanced approach to determining skills shortages for the purposes of the TSS visa program, and

- improving coordination across state and territory boundaries to address cross-jurisdictional issues in the delivery of education.

4.242   Stakeholders reported a range of issues relating to the response of education systems to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including that:

- the rapid adaptation to home and online learning has further highlighted the digital divide between Australians with ready access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and those without

- the shift to online education disadvantaged many students, with vulnerable children and those in their early years of schooling, in particular, facing long-term impacts on their education

- schools reported a range of difficulties as a consequence of the pandemic, including potential funding shortfalls, and

- there is a need to improve the capability and familiarity of schools and teachers to support online learning.

Relevant Closing the Gap targets

4.243   In relation to school education, the Closing the Gap agreement includes the target to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent by 2031.[298]

4.244   The new Closing the Gap National Agreement also includes outcome areas, targets and indicators that support the cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in areas of languages; cultural

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298 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf?q=0720> viewed 30 July 2020, p. 21.

practices; land and waters; and access to culturally relevant communications.[299] In particular, Closing the Gap now includes targets to achieve a:

- sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken by 2031

- 15 per cent increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests by 2030, and

- 15 per cent increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea by 2030.[300]

4.245   The target to increase the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages has the following drivers (factors that significantly impact the progress made against a target):

- proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages categorised as strong

- number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken

- number and age profile of the speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including children

- proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language.[301]

4.246   In relation to languages, the Closing the Gap Agreement noted several areas where outcomes are not currently measured and where further work is required on data development, including measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being:

- spoken in Aboriginal community settings, and

- taught in early-learning, primary and secondary schools.[302]

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299 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf?q=0720> viewed 30 July 2020, p. 4.

300 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf?q=0720> viewed 30 July 2020, pp. 34-35.

301 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf?q=0720> viewed 30 July 2020, p. 35. Explanation of indicators and drivers, p. 16.

302 Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, July 2020, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/national-agreement-ctg.pdf?q=0720> viewed 30 July 2020, p. 35. Explanation of data development, p. 16.

Relevant Halsey review recommendations

4.247   In relation to the issues identified in this chapter, the Halsey review made several relevant recommendations and encouraged a range of actions to progress those recommendations. Relevant recommendations and sections of the government response are provided below. As previously noted, the government did not detail how or whether it would implement all the actions to progress the recommendations of the Halsey review.[303]

4.248   Recommendation 1 related to improving the flexibility of education delivery and assessment:

> **Recommendation 1**: Establish and/or refine processes for ensuring the relevance of the Australian Curriculum and state/territory assessment processes for RRR students and communities.
>
> **Actions to progress this recommendation**:
> - increase opportunities in the Australian Curriculum for students to learn about the historical, economic, social, political and environmental importance of rural, regional and remote contexts and communities in Australia
> - create and resource as required opportunities for direct consultations with RRR stakeholders and communities in the review of the Australian Curriculum in 2020
> - facilitate and resource as required more opportunities for RRR teachers to participate in state-wide and national assessment and moderation processes
> - support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to continue to develop, implement and evaluate community valued blends of traditional culture, language and ceremonial life with the Australian Curriculum
> - provide illustrations of good practice to RRR schools to demonstrate how the Australian Curriculum can be interpreted and used flexibly to suit local contexts, and
> - reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning.[304]

4.249   Recommendation 2 related to improving the quality and capacity of teachers in regional, rural and remote schools:

> **Recommendation 2**: Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-

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303 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018.

304 Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 37.

service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support.

Actions to progress this recommendation:

- ensure that the challenges and opportunities of RRR schools and contexts are explicitly included in the selection processes for teacher education degrees/programs
- ensure that a candidate's academic and personal requirements for admission to a teaching degree/program are commensurate with developing the skills, knowledge and attributes to be a successful teacher
- provide funding and opportunities for initial teacher education students to undertake high quality extended professional experience placements in RRR schools and communities
- introduce a topic (suggest that it is weighted at the equivalent of a semester in size) into teacher education degrees on teaching and living in RRR schools and communities that students complete successfully as part of graduation requirements
- increase the number and diversity of experienced teachers appointed for extended periods to RRR schools by using targeted salary and conditions packages which include an absolute guarantee to return to their originating/preferred school or workplace at the end of a fixed term appointment
- improve the availability and diversity of in-school/locally based professional development for teachers in RRR schools and communities including by using visiting curriculum and pedagogy specialists
- implement up to a ½ term handover and induction period for teacher transfers to foster continuity of students' learning in RRR schools where there is a history of frequent teacher turn-over and substantial student under achievement, and
- continue to improve the availability of quality accommodation, cost of living allowances, access to essential human services, and partner employment where applicable to attract and retain high quality teachers for RRR schools[305]

4.250 Recommendation 3 related to improving the quality and capacity of school leaders in regional, rural and remote schools:

Recommendation 3: Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection, preparation, appointment and on-going professional support of educational leaders.

Actions to progress this recommendation:

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[305] Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 45.

- continue improving how educational leaders for RRR schools and communities are identified, prepared and supported

- increase the number and diversity of experienced educational leaders in RRR schools by using targeted salary and conditions packages which include an absolute guarantee to return to their originating/preferred school or workplace at the end of a fixed term appointment

- implement up to ½ a term handover and induction period for leaders to foster continuity of students' learning in RRR schools where there is a history of frequent leadership turn-over and substantial student underachievement

- substantially expand mentoring and coaching by experienced principals for inexperienced educational leaders as a key strategy to building RRR leadership capabilities and capacities

- investigate the appointment of 'turn around teams' (such as a principal, a curriculum leader and a business manager) to schools with a persistent long term record of underachievement

- develop nationally consistent initial and renewal teacher registration requirements which fully recognise the diversity of RRR contexts and conditions, and

- continue improving the availability of quality accommodation, cost of living allowances, access to essential human services, and partner employment where applicable to attract and retain high quality leaders for RRR schools.[306]

4.251   In its response, the government indicated it was supportive of recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of the Halsey review and noted:

> With the Australian Government's leadership role, we will consider these issues in the development of a new national school agreement and the ensuing bilateral agreements with states and territories from 2019. We will also work with all education ministers through Education Council to implement curriculum and assessment initiatives, and support programs and incentives to place quality teachers and leaders into regional, rural and remote schools.
>
> In parallel to this work, and to inform Education Council, the Government will task the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership to undertake research into best practice approaches to teacher and school leader training, professional

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306 Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 49.

development and support for regional, rural and remote settings.[307]

4.252   Recommendation 7 related to facilitating a greater role for philanthropy in supporting education:

> **Recommendation 7**: Encourage the philanthropic sector to play a greater role in raising achievements and improving opportunities for RRR students.
>
> **Action to progress this recommendation**:
>
> - in partnership with philanthropy develop and promote widely a set of core principles to enable government, philanthropy, schools and communities to work together more collaboratively.[308]

4.253   In its response, the government indicated it is supportive of this recommendation but did not state if it would be undertaking specific new work in this area.[309]

4.254   Recommendation 8 related to improving opportunities for entrepreneurship in education:

> **Recommendation 8**: Improve opportunities for RRR schools to implement entrepreneurship in education through curriculum, teaching, system and cultural changes and building on good practice.
>
> **Actions to progress this recommendation**:
>
> - encourage and resource schools in partnership with others involved and/or interested in entrepreneurship to design, implement, and drive changes required to expand entrepreneurship in RRR education
> - provide funding to Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia to develop and in-service food and fibre entrepreneurship teaching and learning resources, and
> - provide funding to expand the Country Education Partnership's Rural Inspire initiative.[310]

4.255   In its response, the government indicated it was supportive of this recommendation and noted:

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307 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 9.

308 Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 66.

309 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 11.

310 Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 69.

The Australian Curriculum: Work Studies and Economics and Business has specific content that details entrepreneurial skills and behaviours. Critical and creative thinking is also one of the seven general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. Through critical and creative thinking, students are encouraged to develop enterprising behaviours, such as showing initiative and adaptability, and to develop entrepreneurial approaches to imagine possibilities, consider alternatives, test hypotheses, seek and create innovating pathways and draw conclusions. Our challenge is to bring these worlds together – of entrepreneurs and curriculum – and how to best engage, including through initiatives such as P-TECH and the National Career Education Strategy.

The Department of Jobs and Small Business's Entrepreneurship Facilitators helps young entrepreneurs access assistance to start their own business and connects them to existing programs including the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme. The Entrepreneurship Facilitators work in Cairns, the Hunter Region and Launceston.

The Australian Government will work across departments and agencies to identify the most appropriate way to engage entrepreneurs in education, including assessing relevant funding program guidelines to ensure explicit links to education and training are included.[311]

4.256 Recommendation 10 related to implementing innovative approaches to education in regional, rural and remote communities to improve equity and access:

Recommendation 10: Support RRR communities to implement innovative approaches to education delivery designed to improve education access and outcomes for students living in remote communities.

Actions to progress this recommendation:
- ensure that high quality distance education services delivered by states and territories are available to every student who cannot access face-to-face schooling on a regular basis
- formally recognise using Recognition of Prior Learning processes or similar the expertise and contributions of distance education home tutors
- ensure that boarding services (including the provision of extra small scale facilities closer to the source of need), transport

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311 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 9.

(including for pre-schoolers) and associated payments to students and/or parents optimise access to education

- examine the resourcing allocations for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools to ensure they are authentically informed by culture and language, ceremonial obligations, the Australian curriculum, and enrolments, and

- investigate the impact of appointing cluster administration managers on learning opportunities and outcomes.[312]

4.257   In its response, the government was supportive of this recommendation but did not outline any new areas of work. It noted:

There is an increasing focus across Australia on digital access, literacy and application as the future of education and the world of work changes. That is why the Australian Curriculum includes a focus on digital skills and why this Government is continuing to invest in education initiatives such as the Inspiring all Australians in Digital Literacy and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) measures as part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA).[313]

4.258   Recommendation 11 called for a national focus on regional, rural and remote education to improve coordination in education delivery:

Recommendation 11: Establish a national focus for RRR education, training and research to enhance access, outcomes and opportunities in regional Australia.

Actions to progress this recommendation:
- establish a national RRR education strategy and associated taskforce to drive greater coherence, coordination and access to high quality education and training in RRR Australia
- establish a dedicated national RRR education and training fund to fund the work required to improve the achievements and opportunities of young people living in these locations
- ensure that education providers, higher education and vocational education and training providers are eligible to apply for funding under existing regional funding schemes
- provide advice and support to all Regional Development Australia Committees so they can engage with education as an active partner
- ensure legislation and programs which frame and impact on rural, regional and remote Australia recognise place and

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312   Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 79.

313   Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 10.

location as legitimate bases for resource allocation including the provision of essential services.[314]

4.259   In its response, the government was supportive of this recommendation:

> In recognition of the significant role of skills development in regional development, the Government will explore options to expand regional program funding eligibility to incorporate funding to vocational educational providers and ensure they remain eligible to access a range of regional programs.[315]

4.260   The government response did not outline how greater coordination would be achieved in education delivery in regional, rural and remote locations. However, the response noted that the Australian government would monitor the work of Regional Development Australia Committees with 'key stakeholders to identify opportunities to grow their regional economies, including engaging with governments, industry, business, education providers and communities.'[316] The government indicated it would report annually on this work 'through the Regional Ministerial Statement on progress in delivering improved access, outcomes and opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australians in education, employment and training.'[317]

Conclusion

4.261   The committee is aware that significant work is currently underway to respond to the findings and recommendations of various policy reviews, including the Halsey review and the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (Napthine review). In addition to this work, the government has made a number of announcements in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the committee expects that further updates are likely in the coming months.

4.262   As previously noted, evidence to this inquiry supports the findings of the Halsey review. The committee does not seek to duplicate the recommendations of the Halsey review, which directs the government to:

314 Emeritus Professor John Halsey, Department of Education and Training, Halsey review, January 2018, p. 83.

315 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 7.

316 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 7.

317 Department of Education and Training, *Australian Government Response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education*, 30 May 2018, p. 7.

- address workforce issues

- develop greater coordination across jurisdictions

- improve distance education provision

- ensure that boarding services, transport and associated payments to students and their families optimise access to education

- examine funding for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools to ensure these schools can offer a balance of culture and language, ceremonial obligations and the Australian curriculum,

- to ensure the relevance of the Australian Curriculum and state and territory assessment processes for regional, rural and remote students and their communities, and

- encourage philanthropy and entrepreneurialism.

4.263   The committee is concerned that, while the government has agreed with the findings of the Halsey review, there is no clear implementation plan currently available.

4.264   Furthermore, the committee is concerned that many of the government's responses to individual recommendations contained in the Halsey review may not adequately address the substance of those recommendations.

4.265   For example, Professor Halsey called for a national focus on regional, rural and remote education and proposed a range of actions to improve coordination in education delivery. The government agreed with this recommendation but did not outline how greater coordination between education systems would be achieved in regional, rural and remote locations.

4.266   Evidence to this inquiry, particularly from the tri-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, shows that there is a critical need to improve coordination across state and territory boundaries to address cross-jurisdictional issues in the delivery of education. The committee expects the government to outline how it intends to improve coordination in education delivery in regional, rural and remote communities in its implementation plan for the Halsey review.

Recommendation 9

4.267   **The committee recommends that, by May 2021, the Minister for Education publish a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommendations and actions outlined in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey review).**

4.268　The committee notes that, in relation to school funding, the current Government made the decision outlined in the 2014 Budget to cut school funding associated with the former Labor Government's Better Schools funding model, because the latter model had a disproportionate impact on regional and remote schools. Many of the challenges highlighted in the evidence presented to the committee may have been reduced if the original funding had remained in place. The compounding impact of this funding not being received by these schools has limited their ability to address many of the barriers outlined in this report.

4.269　The committee is concerned that while Australia aspires to universal access to school education, it does not currently provide a nationally consistent minimum standard of education that can be accessed by all students.

4.270　Many students have limited access to primary schooling within a reasonable distance and with suitable transportation options, and no access to secondary schooling apart from boarding school, particularly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is unsurprising that, in these circumstances, many children and young people disengage from education after primary school. The committee notes there is a strong preference among families living in geographically isolated areas and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for access to locally accessible, quality education at all levels.

4.271　The lack of secondary school access and the limited curriculum available to many students living in regional, rural and remote communities is particularly concerning. The committee is aware that the current National School Reform Agreement is due to expire in 2023. There is scope for the new National School Reform Agreement to provide a renewed focus on universal access to secondary school provision for all Australian students, regardless of their geographic location, and to a nationally consistent minimum standard.

4.272　Several other issues that have a bearing on student, family and community engagement in education were highlighted during this inquiry.

4.273　A lack of family and community engagement in education contributes to poor school attendance in many regional, rural and remote schools. There is more scope for the Australian curriculum to be flexibly applied by individual schools to suit local linguistic and cultural needs based on ongoing processes of community engagement and feedback.

4.274　The development of a new National School Reform Agreement should seek to enhance opportunities for families and communities to have more say in how schools apply the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 10

4.275 **The committee recommends that the Education Minister develop, for inclusion in the new National School Reform Agreement, commencing in 2023:**

- **a proposal to introduce a needs-based school funding model that aims to address barriers to accessing education in remote and regional communities**

- **a proposal to ensure that all Australian students can access secondary school education, to a nationally-consistent minimum standard, regardless of their geographic location, and**

- **a proposal to enhance family and community engagement in shaping how schools apply the Australian Curriculum.**

4.276 Children who are suspended and expelled from school are more likely to disengage from education. The committee is concerned by the use of suspensions and expulsions and strongly encourages educations systems and schools to develop and deploy alternative behaviour management strategies that keep students engaged with school.

4.277 Parents and caregivers who are literate are more likely to support children to engage with education. The committee is concerned that low levels of adult literacy in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is impeding progress towards the Closing the Gap education targets.

4.278 The committee recognises that it is unreasonable to expect children who arrive at school speaking a language other than English to achieve parity with their peers if they are taught English without appropriate EAL/D instruction. Yet, the evidence suggests that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are expected to learn English and other school subjects without EAL/D support. The committee acknowledges strong evidence suggesting students who are not supported in their language development early will disengage from education.

4.279 Approaches to education that focus on providing EAL/D support and integrate local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and culture in curriculum through bilingual education are likely to improve the engagement of students and their families in education.

4.280 The committee notes that Closing the Gap now includes language and culture targets. These targets will need to be supported by policies that encourage the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and culture.

4.281   The committee is concerned by evidence from the Northern Territory, in particular, that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be disengaging from education because secondary school is unavailable in their local communities and that not all boarding schools offer culturally inclusive education.

4.282   The committee is aware the government has agreed in principle with the House Indigenous Affairs Committee's 2017 recommendation to establish a National Indigenous Cultural Standard for boarding schools. The government supports an industry-led approach that is being developed by peak bodies and the NIAA.[318] It is the committee's view that the establishment of a National Indigenous Cultural Standard should be a matter of priority.

4.283   The committee recognises the importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and is concerned by evidence suggesting that pathways for the recruitment, training and accreditation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education support workers are currently limited.

4.284   The committee is concerned that many schools and teachers require more training and support to work safely and competently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those who have experienced trauma.

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318 Government response to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *The power of education: From surviving to thriving Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, August 2020, p. 24.

Recommendation 11

> The committee recommends that, as part of its 2021 policy commitments to Closing the Gap, the Commonwealth:
>
> - **provide adult literacy campaigns in communities with low levels of adult English literacy**
> - **ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can access English as an Additional Language or Dialect support and instruction at school**
> - **ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can access bilingual education where Standard Australian English is not the first language spoken, or where school communities have expressed a desire for this to occur**
> - **establish programs that support the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce, and**
> - **establish trauma-informed, cultural induction and training programs for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.**

4.285   The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the education of Australian students in 2020 and has placed huge strain on the capacity of education systems, schools and teachers to deliver education outside of classrooms.

4.286   The shift to online learning disadvantaged many students, particularly vulnerable children and those in their early years of schooling, and exposed the digital divide between families with access to the internet and internet-enabled devices, and those without.

4.287   The committee is concerned that many students may have disengaged from education during the remote learning period and is aware that further work will be required to assess and address this disengagement.

4.288   The committee recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has also interrupted important transitions in many children's lives, as highlighted in media reports. For example, many children will begin early childhood education after having limited opportunities for socialisation during 2020.[319] Likewise, many Year 12 students face uncertainty around

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319   E Seselja, 'Coronavirus restrictions cut young children's opportunities to socialise. What does this mean for their development?', *ABC News Online*, 9 May 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-09/what-coronavirus-restrictions-mean-for-childhood-development/12222866>, accessed 15 September 2020.

assessments and their transition to further education, and will miss out on many of the rites of passage associated with school completion.[320]

4.289   This experience has shown that while online education has the potential to bridge gaps in education access, it is no substitute for in-classroom teaching and it is clear that many issues still need to be worked through including the need for broader access to ICT, and improved online pedagogy and teacher training.

4.290   While noting that the individual health advice of the states and territories will guide whether children learn in classrooms in the coming months, the committee strongly encourages jurisdictions to prioritise the safe delivery of in-classroom teaching over home-based learning.

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320 D Pendergast and S Prestridge, '"It really sucks": how some Year 12 students in Queensland feel about 2020', *The Conversation*, 17 August 2020, <https://theconversation.com/it-really-sucks-how-some-year-12-students-in-queensland-feel-about-2020-144004>, accessed 15 September 2020.