The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Education in remote and complex environments

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training

November 2020
Canberra

Contents

THE REPORT

APPENDICES

Foreword

This inquiry examined how education meets the learning needs of students in regional, rural and remote communities and how barriers in education can be overcome. The committee found that Australians growing up in regional and remote areas have lower educational attainment rates in school, in Year 12 and in tertiary education, compared to those living in metropolitan areas, and that a range of factors contribute to gaps in access and equity across a child's education journey.

The committee was mindful that significant work is being undertaken to address the issues outlined in this report, including government responses to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey review, 2018) and the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Napthine review, 2019). Evidence to this inquiry supports the findings of both the Halsey and Napthine reviews, which are current, detailed and comprehensive. While noting the government accepted the findings of both the Halsey and Napthine reviews, the committee has recommended that further detail and clarity is required to show how the government is implementing the recommendations and actions proposed by these reviews.

The committee has made 14 recommendations to improve access to quality education, and outcomes for students in regional, rural and remote communities, including:

- Ensuring all Australian students can access secondary school education, to a nationally-consistent minimum standard, regardless of their geographic location
- Providing greater opportunities for families and communities to have more say in how schools apply the Australian Curriculum
- Ensuring that the education available to children and young people with disability in regional, rural and remote locations is inclusive

- Improving access to mental health treatment and support in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Improving access to quality early childhood education and care in regional, rural and remote communities
- Providing up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Supporting early learning programs provided through distance education, and providing greater flexibility and surety in funding for:
    ⇒ mobile early childhood education services, and
    ⇒ wrap-around models of early intervention, family support, early childhood education and health care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Providing adult literacy campaigns in communities with low levels of adult English literacy
- Improving access to English as an Additional Language or Dialect support and bilingual education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- Supporting the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce
- Establishing trauma-informed, cultural induction and training programs for educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and
- Enhancing the integration of Australia's Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education sectors.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank those who contributed rich and varied written submissions to the inquiry, and who participated in the limited public hearing program. The committee would have welcomed the opportunity to hear first-hand from regional and remote communities about the education challenges they face. When the inquiry commenced in late 2019, we could not have foreseen the extent of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I would also like to thank the communities who had been prepared to host hearings and visits during the inquiry, and those who assisted with planning prior to the interruptions and uncertainty over recent months.

The 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. 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.

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

Mr Andrew Laming MP
Chair

Membership of the Committee

Chair   Mr Andrew Laming MP

Deputy Chair Ms Lisa Chesters MP

Members	Ms Angie Bell MP	Ms Ged Kearney MP
	Ms Celia Hammond MP	Ms Joanne Ryan MP
	Mr Andrew Hastie MP	Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP
	Mr Barnaby Joyce MP	Mr Terry Young MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Ms Julia Morris
Inquiry Secretary	Dr John White
Research Officer	Ms Cassie Davis
Office Manager	Ms Cathy Rouland

Terms of reference

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training will inquire into and report on the education of students in remote communities and the role of culture, family, community and country in delivering better outcomes.

The Inquiry will focus on but not be limited to consideration of:

- A child's journey through early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education in remote communities, like the tri-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory

- Key barriers to the education journey, including the effects of environmental factors such as drought on families and communities

- The role of culture and country in a child's learning

- Community and family structures that support a child's education and their attendance at school

- Effective government initiatives, past and present, that support remote communities to enable greater educational outcomes, including those that have improved attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Innovative approaches to workforce, including recruitment, professional learning, retention and support, and lessons from communities that could be more generally applied

- Access and support to deliver the Australian Curriculum (including STEM) in a flexible way to meet local learning needs and interests of remote students, including examples of innovative ways in which the curriculum is being delivered in remote schools, and

- Successful pathways to ensure students have the knowledge and skills they need to enter further education and the workforce.

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AEU	Australian Education Union
AHISA	Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AIC	Assistance for Isolated Children
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ANSTO	Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ARIA+	Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
ASPA	Australian Secondary Principals' Association
ASSETS	Aboriginal Summer School for Excellence in Technology and Science
ASU	Australian Services Union
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
BBF	Budget Based Funding
BoCAR	Bureau of Communications and Arts Research
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research

CAMHS	Child Adolescent Mental Health Service
CCS	Child Care Subsidy
CCSA	Community Connections Solutions Australia
CEP	Country Education Partnership
CGS	Commonwealth Grant Scheme
CLAWs	Centres for Learning and Wellbeing
CLC	Central Land Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CSPs	Commonwealth Supported Places
CSU	Charles Sturt University
CTC	Capacity to Contribute
CYDA	Children and Young People with Disability Australia
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
DET	Distance Education Tutor
DMI	Direct Measure of Income
DSS	Department of Social Services
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
FLO	Flexible Learning Options
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
HEPPP	Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program
I2S2	Inquiry for Indigenous Science Students
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parents' Association
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage

ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDL	Interactive Distance Learning
IEBA	Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia
IES	Indigenous Education Strategy
IHC	In Home Care
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
KICS	Katharine Isolated Children's Service
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
MCSA	Mobile Children's Services Association of New South Wales
MGSE	Melbourne Graduate School of Education
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy
NATSIPA	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association
NBN	National Broadband Network
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
NCEF	Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NPY	Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
OES	Online Education Services
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RATE	Remote Area Teacher Education

RFW   Royal Far West

RIPA   Remote Indigenous Parents Australia

RRR   Regional, Rural and Remote

RSAS   Remote School Attendance Strategy

RTO   Registered Training Organisation

SEAM   School Enrolment and Attendance Measure

SES   Socio-economic status

SNAICC   Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

STEM   Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TAFE   Technical and Further Education

TFA   Teach for Australia

TIMSS   Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

TSS   Temporary Skill Shortage

TSU   Transition Support Unit

VET   Vocational Education and Training

VETiS   Vocational Education and Training in Schools

VCAL   Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

YBFS   Year Before Fulltime Schooling

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

To reduce barriers to education, the committee recommends the Government develop policies and programs that:

■ generate investment, economic development and employment, and deliver essential infrastructure, including reliable and affordable access to electricity, in regional, rural and remote areas

■ improve access and affordability in regional, rural and remote communities to:

⇒ medical, ancillary and mental health services

⇒ services and support for people with disability, including addressing thin markets in the National Disability Insurance Scheme

⇒ public transport

⇒ services and support for communities in times of crises or during periods of rural hardship, including access to Centrelink, and

⇒ broadband and mobile phone reception, in particular extending the Sky Muster Education data offering to tertiary and vocational students in remote, regional and rural areas.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the government reaffirm its commitment to inclusive education in the new National Disability Strategy in 2021, and include a focus on ensuring inclusive education for children and young people with disability in regional, rural and remote locations.

In the development of the new Strategy, the government should consider whether a national inclusive education act is required to protect the right to inclusive education for students with disability.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that, as part of its 2021 policy commitments to Closing the Gap, the Commonwealth set out a roadmap for improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including improved access to mental health treatment and support.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends the Minister for Education develop proposals to be incorporated in the new children's education and care national workforce strategy in 2021 that:

■ address barriers to access to quality early childhood education and care in regional, rural and remote communities, including cost

■ improve the cultural competency of staff working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and

■ support the development and professionalisation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care workforce.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that, as part of its 2021 policy commitments to Closing the Gap, the Commonwealth provide greater flexibility and surety in funding for wrap-around models of early intervention, family support, early childhood education and health care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that, as part of its 2021 policy commitments to Closing the Gap, the Commonwealth provide up to 30 hours per week of subsidised early education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth modify funding arrangements for mobile early childhood education to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services in the 2021 Budget.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth support early learning programs through the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme Distance Education Allowance in the 2021 Budget.

Recommendation 9

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).

Recommendation 10

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.

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.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that, by May 2021, the Minister for Education publish a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommendations and actions outlined in the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Napthine review).

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Minister for Education, as soon as practicably possible, consider evidence as to whether the regional loading to address the higher cost of delivering higher education at regional universities sufficiently recognises the higher costs.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends the Minister for Education develop a proposal for the Education Council to consider implementing in 2021 to enhance the integration of Australia's Vocation Education and Training and Higher Education sectors.