
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

The power of education: From surviving to thriving

**Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students**

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs**

December 2017
Canberra

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are advised that this report may contain the names of Indigenous Australians who are deceased.



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Membership of the Committee

45th Parliament

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Deputy Chair The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Members Ms Sharon Claydon MP

Ms Madeleine King MP
(14/9/17–4/12/17)

Mr Ted O'Brien MP

Mrs Ann Sudmalis MP

Mr Tim Hammond MP
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Mr Llew O'Brien MP

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44th Parliament

Chair The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Members Ms Sharon Claydon MP
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Mr Mark Coulton MP

The Hon Warren Entsch MP

Mr Bert van Manen MP
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Foreword

Education provides opportunities and choices for the future. Evidence shows that improving education outcomes is critical to improving quality of life for a community.

There is no shortage of examples of Indigenous people who have worked hard to achieve significant education and employment outcomes, often overcoming substantial disadvantage to do so. Nonetheless, the gap in attendance and education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is an unavoidable fact that must be addressed.

There are significant disadvantages facing many Indigenous students including, but not limited to, food insecurity, overcrowding, exposure to anti-social behaviour, and physical and mental ill-health, that must be addressed in order to allow children to not only survive in the education environment, but to thrive.

All children have a right to feel safe, included, valued and supported both at home and at school. The committee hopes that by schools working together and building relationships with students, their families and communities, that the barriers to achievement will diminish and Indigenous students will finally be able to grasp all of the opportunities afforded to them.

Whilst governments, schools, health care providers and others work hard to assist disadvantaged students, it is essential that the family of a student is actively engaged with choosing and directing their child's education. This means that it is the family's responsibility to ensure their child is safe, clothed, well fed, can sleep at night without interruption and is at school daily. Furthermore, it is essential that Indigenous students and their families be able to choose from a range of well-supported options for secondary education, public and independent, within their local region as well as further afield.

Boarding facilities such as Broome Residential College and Kununurra Hostel provide a high-quality public boarding option for students who wish to study without leaving their region. It may not be possible to provide secondary education in all small remote communities; but by providing public boarding

facilities in regional centres, students and families are given access to quality public, and independent, schools without needing to send their children to a capital city located thousands of kilometres away.

Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw and heard about a number of programs supporting student attendance and achievement. The common elements present in all successful programs were flexibility, cultural safety, buy-in from families, as well as connection with community. Time and again it has been shown that, without a foundation of cultural safety and strong connections, any program, no matter its funding or resources, will fail.

In concluding, I would like to thank Melanie Brocklehurst, Casey Mazarella, Louise Milligan and other secretariat staff for all of their hard work throughout the inquiry. I would also like to thank all of the individuals, schools, organisations, governments and their departments for contributing to the inquiry. In particular, my appreciation goes to the many Indigenous students, families and organisations who provided information about their experiences with the education system. These accounts formed the core of the committee's deliberations, providing an insight that could not otherwise have been gained.

Ms Melissa Price MP
Chair



Terms of reference

The committee will inquire into and report on key aspects of educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students up to school leaving age, including but not limited to:

- access to, participation in, and outcomes of, pre-schooling
- the provision of boarding school education and its outcomes
- access to, participation in, and benefits of, different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia
- engagement and achievement of students in remote areas
- impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience different models of educational services
- best practice models, both domestically and internationally
- comparisons of school models in the transition to further education and employment outcomes.



Executive summary

The persistent gap in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students indicates that, in many cases, the education system is not meeting the needs of Indigenous students. This report considers the barriers and circumstances that hinder Indigenous students' education outcomes and also considers what models have been successful in addressing these issues.

Throughout the inquiry, the committee travelled across Australia to talk to people who are on-the-ground working with students, families, and communities. The committee was encouraged by the wide range of programs and initiatives that are successfully supporting and promoting regular attendance and helping Indigenous students to achieve positive education outcomes.

Lack of data

The committee was surprised and concerned to find that in the three decades since the first targets for improving Indigenous students' achievement were set, data regarding the factors which contribute to the gap in education outcomes is fragmented at best.

If the gap in education is to be closed, it is essential that policy decisions are made based on strong evidence and understanding of the range of factors that impact and influence the educational achievement of Indigenous students. As such, the committee has recommended that the Federal Government invest in the comprehensive collection and analysis of data regarding attendance and educational achievement.

Barriers to achievement

Family and community wellbeing affect educational engagement and achievement for all students. However, there are particular challenges for Indigenous students relating to the disadvantages facing Indigenous communities. The committee saw that food insecurity, overcrowded households, and exposure to substance abuse and other anti-social behaviours significantly impacts student attendance,

achievement, and wellbeing. Many students also face challenges relating to physical and mental ill-health, such as ear health and hearing loss; Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD); and trauma and mental wellbeing.

The committee found that the best outcomes for students are achieved at schools where there are strong links with the community and between health and education services. To this end, the committee makes recommendations regarding:

- the co-location of medical and health services in school grounds or as close as possible to them;
- investment in early diagnosis and clarity and consistency regarding support for students living with FASD;
- support for young mothers and recognition of their maternal responsibilities; and
- utilising technology to ensure all students in the classroom are able to hear their teacher.

Cultural safety

Throughout the inquiry, it became clear that cultural safety, fostered by strong connection and engagement with community, is the essential foundation upon which all education and support programs must be built in order to succeed.

The committee was disappointed to hear that the ability to speak an Indigenous language is rarely recognised in the same way as the ability to speak a foreign language. All students who have a first language other than English should have access to an Intensive English Language program as well as in-classroom support.

The committee has recommended that, as a matter of urgency:

- **English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) training be made a compulsory component for all teaching degrees;**
- **all teachers already working in schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students complete in-service ESL/D training as part of mandatory professional development; and**
- **where relevant, teachers be provided with the opportunity to undertake local language training if it will assist them to perform their functions, improve communications with students, and forge better relations with the community.**

Engagement programs

The committee acknowledges that attendance and educational attainment for many Indigenous students, particularly those in remote parts of Australia, is a complex issue. The committee found that the common element present in programs that successfully support student attendance and achievement was

connection with community – strong relationships with the students, parents and carers, teachers, schools, health services, and communities.

School-based ‘academy-style’ programs that combine a wide range of wrap-around support and education elements, presented in a culturally safe environment, with a ‘hook’, such as hairdressing or sport, have proven to be an effective way of engaging and supporting students at school. However, many of the programs appeared to be working in isolation and without the benefit of the discoveries and experiences of similar programs operating elsewhere.

Furthermore, the committee was concerned to hear that programs which did not utilise a sport-based ‘hook’ were not being given the same recognition and support as those that did. A wide variety of ‘hooks’ are vital to ensure that all students are engaged, not only those who enjoy sport.

The committee has recommended that engagement programs with a non-sports based ‘hook’, which targets the school cohort, be given the same opportunities for funding as sports-based programs.

Gender equity

The committee is deeply troubled by the significant disparity between the availability and funding of engagement programs for girls compared to those for boys. It is essential that all coeducational schools that offer engagement programs for boys also offer comparable programs for girls. These girls will be the mothers and carers of the next generation of Indigenous students. As such, their education is critical to improving the health, education, and employment of not only themselves but their children and future generations.

The committee has recommended that, as a matter of urgency, and to ensure gender equity, the Federal Government review and reform its policy approach and processes for evaluating grant applications under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. The Strategy should provide funding parity to education engagement and mentoring programs catering to girls, comparable to that of similar programs catering to boys, so as to ensure gender equity and equivalence of programs and funding opportunity.

Teaching and pedagogies

High quality teaching is a critical factor in improving education outcomes for Indigenous students. Teachers and staff must be able to skilfully deliver the Australian curriculum to students with a broad range of abilities and provide tailored education, and practical support, to students with a wide range of health and wellbeing issues. Teachers must also be culturally responsive; they must reach out, establish and build strong relationships with students, their families, and the

wider community. The committee acknowledges that the task teachers' face is a challenging one.

The committee has recommended that, as a matter of urgency:

- **Indigenous history and culture be made a compulsory component for all teaching degrees; and**
- **all teachers already working in schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students complete in-service local Indigenous language, history and culture training as part of mandatory professional development.**

Literacy and numeracy is the essential foundation upon which education and further education is based. Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw a wide range of pedagogies used across Australia. It is clear that no single pedagogy will meet the needs of all students. Schools and teachers must be empowered to tailor their teaching to best meet the needs of their students. However, all pedagogies utilised by schools must be evidence-based and must adhere to the Australian curriculum. The committee has recommended that the Federal Government undertake a comprehensive review of all federally-funded pedagogies to ensure that they are effective and efficient.

Direct Instruction

Throughout the inquiry, the committee has seen little independent evidence supporting the benefits of Direct Instruction outside of its use as a remedial program.

The committee was concerned by the Australian Council for Educational Research's Evaluation findings that student attendance declined under the Cape York Aboriginal Academy Initiative, despite many stakeholders' perceptions that it had increased. In particular, the committee was very concerned by the Queensland Department of Education's findings that the Aurukun School was not providing the full Australian Curriculum to its students under the Good to Great Schools' Direct Instruction approach.

Given the evidence, the committee cannot support the continued use of Commonwealth funds to deliver Direct Instruction at this time. **The committee has recommended that no funding beyond 30 June 2018 be provided for Direct Instruction until the Federal Government conducts a review of schools utilising the program and finds that the program is providing a proven benefit to the educational outcomes of Indigenous students as well as demonstrating that:**

- **the full Australian curriculum is being provided;**
- **the cultural safety and responsiveness of the school is not being adversely impacted; and**
- **attendance rates are not declining.**

Boarding

The overwhelming evidence heard by the committee was that boarding, particularly mainstream boarding, is not meeting the needs of Indigenous students. A significant proportion of students who attend schools away from home drop out, and, return to community shortly after commencing. This can have devastating impacts on the student's motivation to study and their self-esteem. It can also discourage others within the community and places financial and administrative strain on both boarding facilities and schools within the local community. This 'revolving door' within Indigenous boarding must be addressed if educational attainment is to be improved.

Many boarding facilities identified areas that they could, and often desperately wanted to, improve but were prevented from doing so by resource constraints. Some facilities seemed uncertain how best to support Indigenous students and provide the level of medical and mental health support and cultural safety students require to thrive. The committee has made recommendations regarding:

- establishing a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy that requires boarding facilities to meet agreed standards for the health, wellbeing and cultural safety of Indigenous students;
- funding boarding facilities to meet these standards; and
- the introduction of comprehensive education coordination services for students from remote communities.

The committee found that the most effective and efficient outcomes were being achieved by public boarding facilities in regional centres, which provide students and families access to a range of quality public and independent secondary schools, as close to home as practicable. **The committee has recommended that additional public accommodation be established in key regional centres, so that students can attend schools in their local area rather than going to school in another region.**

Funding

The committee acknowledges that education is the purview of the states and territories. Nonetheless, the Commonwealth has a responsibility to ensure that the next generation of Indigenous youth are receiving the best education opportunities possible. All Federal Government programs and programs receiving Federal Government funding must be evidence-based and incorporate clear and effective performance measurement to ensure that they are effective.

The committee is concerned that the amount of ABSTUDY assistance provided for boarding fees is not reflective of the actual costs of boarding. The committee was disappointed by reports that long processing times for ABSTUDY applications have significantly delayed some students from commencing their school year.

Given the large number of concerns raised in relation to ABSTUDY, the committee believes that a thorough review of ABSTUDY needs to be undertaken, examining how it is calculated and administered.

The committee has made recommendations regarding:

- reviewing how ABSTUDY is calculated and administered, to ensure that Indigenous students are given the support necessary to thrive and to ensure optimal equity and efficiency of operations;
- confirming a student's eligibility for ABSTUDY before the end of each school year to provide certainty to students and schools; and
- reviewing private organisations that provide scholarship programs to Indigenous students to attend independent boarding schools, to ensure programs provide value for money, are equitable, and support a wide range of students of varying backgrounds and abilities.



List of recommendations

After reviewing all of the evidence, the committee has developed recommendations that it believes will - together with the efforts of Indigenous peoples, organisations, and state and territory governments - work to close the gap between education outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Out of the recommendations listed below, the committee believes that recommendations 8, 9, 11, 12 and 14 should be implemented as a matter of urgency and be given priority by the Federal Government. These recommendations are marked 'priority' for ease of reference.

1 Introduction

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Federal Government invest in the comprehensive collection and analysis of data regarding the characteristics that influence student achievement to create a strong evidence base and understanding of how to improve Indigenous student attendance and achievement.

2 Barriers to achievement

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, be accepting of and provide more opportunities for school-age Indigenous mothers to continue with their studies. This will require a model that acknowledges their maternal responsibilities, through the provision of part-time programs, specific boarding schools or other education models. It may also require the establishment of new, or the modification of existing, facilities to address their needs.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Federal Government establish a capital works fund to allow schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students to equip all classrooms with sound-field amplification technology by 2020.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with state and territory governments, agree to a clear and consistent policy in relation to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) being recognised as a disability for the purposes of school and support service funding.

Recommendation 5

Once a consistent policy position is determined in relation to FASD, the committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, establish a FASD screening and management program which includes:

- access to FASD screening for all students who are deemed to require it; and
- working with schools to raise awareness of FASD and providing professional development for all teachers at schools where FASD has been identified.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, establish and implement an integrated model of health and education delivery to locate medical services within school grounds or as close to them as possible in remote and very remote locations with a substantial number of Indigenous students by 2020 so that health care is seen as integral to the provision of education services.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health examine ways of allowing a greater flow of information between schools and health professionals, so that schools can obtain relevant and appropriate medical information in relation to students, but in a way that does not breach the *Privacy Act 1988*.

3 Cultural safety and community engagement

Recommendation 8 (Priority)

The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Minister for Education take a proposal to the Council of Australian Governments to:

- make English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) training a compulsory component for all teaching degrees;
- require all teachers already working in schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students to complete in-service ESL/D training as part of mandatory professional development; and
- where relevant, an opportunity be provided to teachers to undertake local language training if this will assist in performing their functions, improving communications with their students, as well as forging better relations with the community.

4 Engagement programs

Recommendation 9 (Priority)

The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Federal Government review and reform its policy approach and processes for evaluating grant applications under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to provide funding parity to education engagement and mentoring programs catering to girls, comparable to that of similar programs catering to boys, so as to ensure gender equity and equivalence of program provision.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, ensures that non-sports based school engagement and mentoring programs have the same opportunities to receive government funding as sports-based engagement and mentoring programs particularly where these programs are gender based. There must be equivalence of funding and opportunity.

5 Teaching and pedagogies

Recommendation 11 (Priority)

The committee recommends that the Minister for Education take a proposal to the Council of Australian Governments to:

- make Indigenous history and culture a compulsory component for all teaching degrees; and

- require all teachers already working in schools with a significant number of Indigenous students to complete in-service local Indigenous language, history and culture training as a part of mandatory professional development.

Recommendation 12 (Priority)

The committee recommends that no funding beyond 30 June 2018 be provided for Direct Instruction until the Federal Government conducts a review of schools utilising the program and finds that the program is providing a proven benefit to the education outcomes of Indigenous students as well as demonstrating that:

- the full Australian curriculum is being provided;
- the cultural safety and responsiveness of the school is not being adversely impacted; and
- attendance rates are not declining.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Federal Government undertake a comprehensive review of all federally-funded pedagogies to ensure the pedagogy is improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, delivering the Australian curriculum, and providing value for money.

6 Boarding**Recommendation 14 (Priority)**

The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, establish additional public boarding accommodation in key regional centres, so that students can attend schools in their local area rather than going to school in another region.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government, in consultation with states, territories and Indigenous leaders, create a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy that will:

- require boarding facilities to meet the standards outlined in the *Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences*;
- establish and require boarding facilities to meet a National Indigenous Cultural Standard; and
- recognise and appropriately account for the physical and mental health needs of Indigenous students.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government:

- require boarding facilities receiving federal funding, such as ABSTUDY, to meet the standards set out in a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy; and
- increase federal funding provided to boarding facilities through ABSTUDY, so that the standards set out in a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy can be met.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government, through the Prime Minister and Cabinet Regional Network Offices, introduce education coordination services for Indigenous boarding students from remote and very remote communities that will be responsible for:

- providing assistance and coordinating applications for ABSTUDY and other forms of financial assistance;
- liaising with families, students, and schools to ensure the best fit for the student and clarify expectations for all parties;
- coordinating and negotiating absences and return for cultural and family business; and
- collecting and tracking student data regarding attendance, retention, educational performance, and outcomes (employment, tertiary studies, etc.).

7 Funding**Recommendation 18**

The committee recommends that the Federal Government conduct a thorough review of how ABSTUDY is calculated and administered to ensure that Indigenous students are given the support necessary to thrive and to ensure optimal equity and efficiency of operations.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the Federal Government confirm a student's ongoing eligibility for ABSTUDY before the end of each school year to provide certainty to students and schools, and reduce the delays for students at the start of each new school year.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the Federal Government conduct a thorough review of private organisations that provide scholarship programs to Indigenous students to attend independent boarding schools, to determine whether they provide value for money, are equitable, and are supporting a range of students of varying backgrounds and abilities.

Interim report

The committee notes that it has yet to receive the Government's response to the recommendations made in its Interim Report: First steps for improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The recommendations are listed below.

The committee reaffirms its support for these recommendations, insofar as they do not conflict with the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of Human Services undertake an independent review of ABSTUDY with a view to the program being redesigned and the new system being fully operational at the latest by 30 June 2017.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Australian Government allocate an additional portion of the remaining funds available through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to girls' education programs, comparable to that of boys' programs previously allocated funding through the Strategy, so to ensure gender equity.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that in evaluating future grant applications, the Australian Government ensure that there is equity in the number and especially the type of girls' and boys' education programs funded, and if necessary, undertake to fund additional programs to ensure gender equity.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that, in the 45th Parliament, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs refer to the Indigenous Affairs Committee the Inquiry into educational opportunities and boarding arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Introduction

- 1.1 Education provides opportunities and choices for the future. Evidence shows that improving education outcomes is critical to improving the quality of life for a community. The difference it makes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples¹ was highlighted by the Prime Minister in February 2017 when he noted that ‘the data tells us that there is no employment gap...between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians with a university degree’.²
- 1.2 There is no shortage of examples of Indigenous people who have worked hard to achieve significant education and employment outcomes, often overcoming substantial disadvantage to do so. Throughout the inquiry, the committee was continually impressed by the energy and enthusiasm for learning displayed by Indigenous students from across Australia.
- 1.3 The committee was also heartened by the dedication of parents, teachers and elders who were working together to support student attendance and education outcomes.
- 1.4 Nonetheless, the gap in attendance and education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is an unavoidable fact that must be addressed.

¹ For ease of reading, this report will be using the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

² The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP, Prime Minister, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 14 February 2017, p. 2.

Conduct of inquiry

- 1.5 On 16 September 2015, during the 44th Parliament, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, asked the House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs to inquire into and report on key aspects of educational opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous students up to school leaving age, including but not limited to:
- access to, participation in, and outcomes of, pre-schooling;
 - the provision of boarding school education and its outcomes;
 - access to, participation in, and benefits of, different school models for Indigenous students in different parts of Australia;
 - engagement and achievement of students in remote areas;
 - impacts on, and support for, families and communities whose children experience different models of educational services;
 - best practice models, both domestically and internationally; and
 - comparisons of school models in the transition to further education and employment outcomes.
- 1.6 The committee received 61 submissions and 11 supplementary submissions. It held 15 public hearings in Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales, and Canberra, hearing from over 200 witnesses. The committee conducted an anonymous online questionnaire regarding individual's education experiences, which received almost 550 responses.
- 1.7 On 4 May 2016, in anticipation of the dissolution of Parliament for a general election, the committee tabled an *Interim Report: First Steps*. The report made four recommendations:
- Recommendation 1:** The committee recommends that the Department of Human Services undertake an independent review of ABSTUDY with a view to the program being redesigned and the new system being fully operational at the latest by 30 June 2017.
- Recommendation 2:** The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Australian Government allocate an additional portion of the remaining funds available through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to girls' education programs, comparable to that of boys' programs previously allocated funding through the Strategy, so to ensure gender equity.
- Recommendation 3:** The committee recommends that in evaluating future grant applications, the Australian Government ensure that there is equity in the number and especially the type of

girls' and boys' education programs funded, and if necessary, undertake to fund additional programs to ensure gender equity.

Recommendation 4: The committee recommends that, in the 45th Parliament, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs refer to the Indigenous Affairs Committee the Inquiry into educational opportunities and boarding arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- 1.8 As at the time of tabling, the committee has not yet received a government response to these recommendations.
- 1.9 On 19 October 2016, at the start of the 45th Parliament, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, asked the committee to recommence the inquiry under the same terms of reference.
- 1.10 During the 45th Parliament, the committee also conducted two online questionnaires, one aimed at peak bodies and the other at teaching staff, including teaching assistants involved with educating Indigenous students, which received 384 responses.
- 1.11 In the 45th Parliament, the committee received 68 submissions, 11 supplementary submissions, 25 exhibits and held 19 public hearings, as well as site visits in Western Australia, Victoria, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Canberra at which the committee heard from 177 witnesses. A list of submissions and exhibits received during the 44th and 45th Parliaments is at Appendix A.
- 1.12 The committee offers its sincere thanks to all of the schools, individuals, and organisations that hosted it. These visits were invaluable to the inquiry and gave the committee a full appreciation of the scope of the issues being raised. Witnesses and site inspections are listed at Appendix B.

Acknowledgements

- 1.13 The committee acknowledges and thanks the members of the House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs from the 44th Parliament for their efforts gathering evidence for this inquiry; in particular, it acknowledges the Chair, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone.
- 1.14 The committee also thanks the secretariat staff who worked on the inquiry, both during the 44th and 45th Parliaments. Finally, the committee thanks all those who contributed to the inquiry by making submissions, providing additional information, hosting a site visit or appearing at a public hearing. The committee also thanks the state and territory governments for supporting the committee's inquiry by providing submissions and access to schools.

Structure of report

1.15 The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 lists the currently available data regarding access, attendance and educational outcomes;
- Chapter 2 considers some of the barriers that many Indigenous students face throughout their education, ranging from early childhood through to secondary school;
- Chapter 3 explores the key elements of culturally safe environments and the importance of teaching through language and culture;
- Chapter 4 considers a number of programs and initiatives developed to encourage Indigenous students to attend and engage with school to achieve their education goals;
- Chapter 5 discusses the importance of quality teaching, teacher training, and ongoing support and professional development for teachers as well as considering some of the pedagogies and education programs utilised by schools;
- Chapter 6 considers Indigenous experiences of living away from home for study, examining both the opportunities and challenges presented by boarding; and
- Chapter 7 outlines the funding arrangements for schools, programs and living away from home for study and considers Federal assistance for students living away from home for study and explores the costs of boarding and the federal funding available to meet these costs.

Data

1.16 The data concerning the education outcomes for Indigenous students continues to be of great concern. When the committee requested data during public hearings, it often found that the schools and state and territory governments did not collect and compile much of the information it requested. It appears that the data that is available and being relied on is a snapshot of information from limited sources. Therefore, the data only represents part of the picture regarding Indigenous education.

1.17 This chapter presents data received by the committee from submissions or outlined in the *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Education and Indigenous Wellbeing* paper. It outlines:

- the number of Indigenous students and where they are enrolled;

- attendance rates and attendance levels;
 - literacy and numeracy results;
 - Year 12 attainment; and
 - further education and employment outcomes.
- 1.18 The remainder of the report explores the challenges and social issues Indigenous students often face on their path to educational success.

Attendance

- 1.19 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) advised the committee that in 2014 there were 192,500 Indigenous students enrolled in approximately 8,000 of Australia's 9,400 schools of which:
- 40 per cent (%) were in metropolitan areas;
 - 40% were in provincial areas;
 - 10% were in remote areas; and
 - 10% were in very remote areas.³
- 1.20 In 2014, 85% of Indigenous students were enrolled in government schools, 10% were enrolled in Catholic schools and 5% were enrolled in independent schools.⁴

Early childhood

- 1.21 Participation in early childhood education has been shown to improve the transition to full-time school. It is a strong predictor of future social, educational and occupational success, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Federal Government's early childhood education strategy aims for universal access for all children in the year before full-time schooling.⁵
- 1.22 PM&C advised the committee that:
- Since 2008, the Commonwealth Government has provided over \$2.8 billion through a series of National Partnership Agreements on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education to support States and Territories to increase preschool participation. Universal access aims to ensure that a quality preschool programme is available in the year before full-time school, for

³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁵ Department of Education and Training, 'Universal Access to Early Childhood Education', <https://www.education.gov.au/universal-access-early-childhood-education>, accessed 29 September 2017.

600 hours a year, delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher who meets National Quality Framework requirements. National Partnership arrangements include a strong focus on lifting participation rates for Indigenous children.⁶

- 1.23 The 2017 Closing the Gap Report affirmed that 'Australian governments remain committed to closing the gap in the developmental outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by increasing their participation in quality early childhood education'.⁷
- 1.24 In 2015, nationally, 87% of Indigenous children were enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full-time school, compared with 98% of non-Indigenous children nationally. Of the Indigenous children enrolled, 92% were recorded as having attended⁸ early childhood education (see Figure 1.1).⁹

Figure 1.1 Proportion of children enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling by Indigenous status and state/territory, 2015 (per cent)



Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 29.

- 1.25 Early childhood education attendance decreases with remoteness. In 2015, 95% of Indigenous children in both major cities and regional centres were enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling and were recorded as having attended.¹⁰ This was only

⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 2.

⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 26.

⁸ Present for at least one hour during the reference period. The census date for the 2015 Collection is Friday 7 August 2015, with the one-week reference period spanning 3 of August to 9 August 2015. Some jurisdictions may adopt a two-week reference period, which means the permissible period spans 27 July to 16 August 2015 inclusive.

⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 29.

1% lower than non-Indigenous children. This figure drops markedly for Indigenous children in remote areas, with 82% attendance, a full 13% drop against non-Indigenous students (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Proportion of children enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full-time schooling by Indigenous status and remoteness, 2015, (per cent)



Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 29.

Primary and secondary

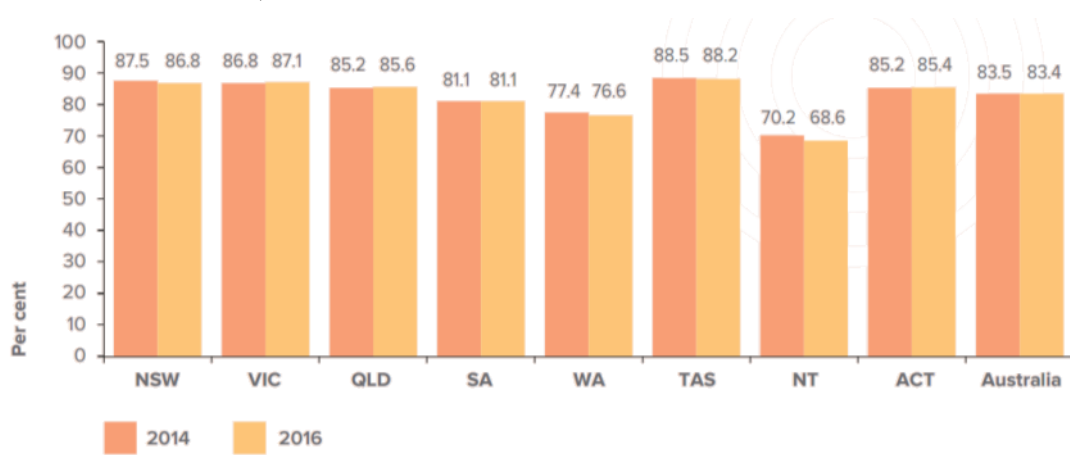
- 1.26 It is during primary and secondary schooling that the attendance rates for Indigenous students drops significantly, and with the decline in attendance comes a correlating decline in education attainment.
- 1.27 The Closing the Gap Report (Figure 1.3) stated that, in Semester 1 of 2016, the national school attendance rate (Year 1 to 10) for Indigenous students was 83.4%, almost 10% lower than the comparable rate for non-Indigenous students at 93.1%.
- 1.28 Of those students attending school, only 49% of Indigenous students attended 90% or more of the time, compared to 79.3% of non-Indigenous students.¹¹
- 1.29 School attendance and attendance levels decrease with remoteness. In 2016, the attendance rate for Indigenous students in inner regional areas was 86.9%, compared with 66.4% in very remote areas (Figure 1.4).¹² Of those attending school, 59% of students in inner regional areas attended 90% or more of the time, compared with 21.9% of students in very remote areas.¹³

¹¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 35.

¹² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 36.

¹³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 36.

Figure 1.3 Indigenous student attendance rates (per cent) Year 1 to 10 combined, by state/territory, Semester 1, 2014 and 2016



Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 36.

Figure 1.4 Student attendance rates (per cent) Year 1 to 10 combined, by Indigenous status and remoteness, Semester 1, 2016



Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 36.

1.30 In addition to this, many students living in very remote communities may be highly mobile throughout the school year. The Northern Territory Department of Education advised the committee that on any one day, approximately 20% of Indigenous students in very remote communities may be “out of community”.¹⁴

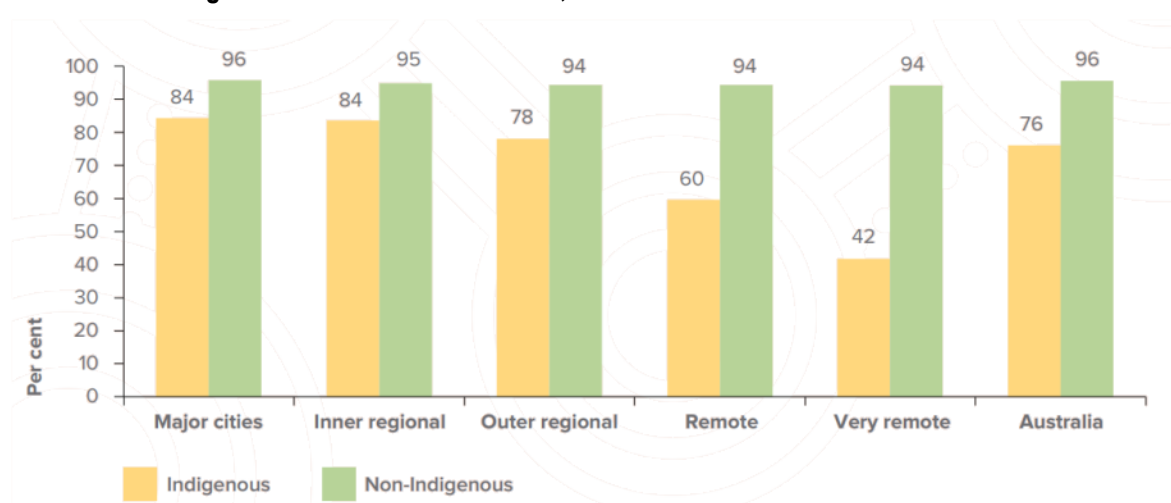
Literacy and numeracy

1.31 Given the correlation between attendance and educational attainment, it is no surprise that there is a gap between literacy and numeracy standards for those students who attend regularly in comparison to those who attend less often.

¹⁴ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

1.32 Just as attendance rates are lower in remote areas, NAPLAN results for Indigenous students significantly decrease in these areas. PM&C advised the committee that ‘educational attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is strongly correlated to location,’ noting that ‘students in remote and very remote areas are significantly less likely to achieve at or above national minimum standards, as measured by NAPLAN, than those in metropolitan and provincial areas’.¹⁵ This is illustrated in Figure 1.5.

Figure 1.5 Proportion of students reaching National Minimum Standards for Year 5 numeracy by Indigenous status and remoteness, 2016



Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 39.

Year 12 attainment

1.33 Year 12 marks the completion of a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education and is considered a key factor in the formal development of skills and knowledge for all Australian students. The Federal Government has a target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020.¹⁶

1.34 The 2017 Closing the Gap Report asserted that this target is on track, with the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Year 12 attainment closing by 14.7% since 2008.¹⁷ In 2014–15, 61.5% of Indigenous peoples 20 to 24 years old had achieved Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 45.4% in 2008.¹⁸

1.35 As with literacy and numeracy, Year 12 attainment varied with remoteness. As illustrated in Figure 1.6.

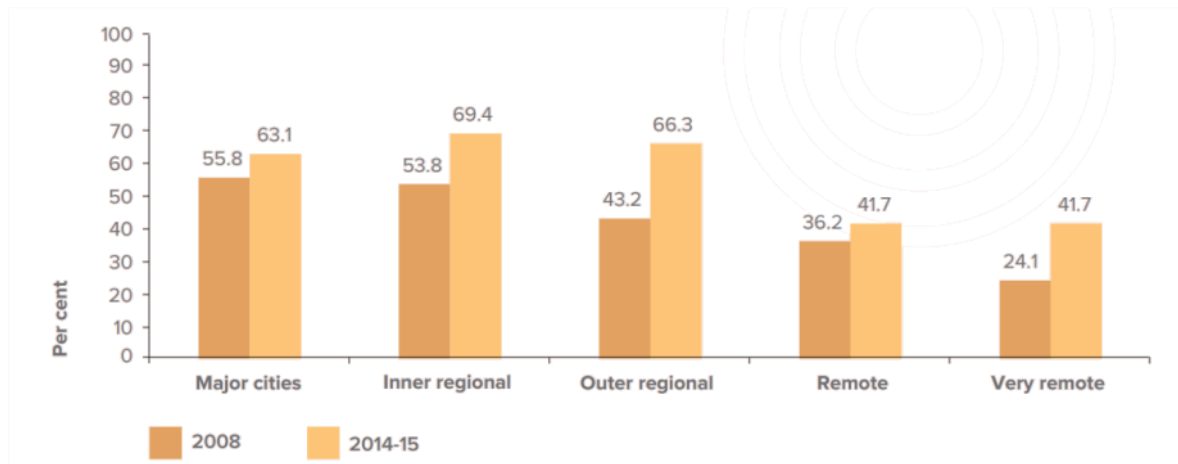
¹⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 4.

¹⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 44.

¹⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 44.

Figure 1.6 Proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year-olds with Year 12 or equivalent attainment, by remoteness, 2008 and 2014–15

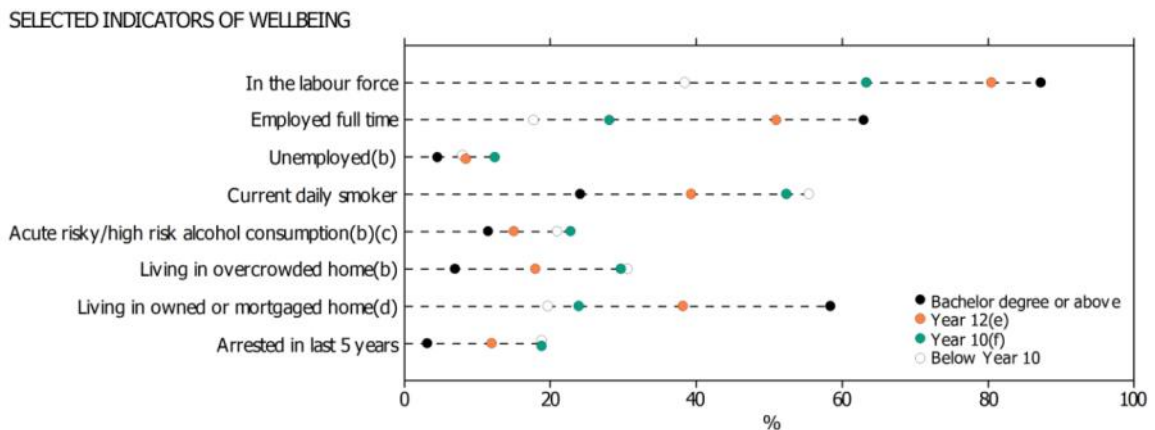


Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 43.

Further education and employment

1.36 The 2011 ABS *Education and Indigenous Wellbeing* paper highlighted the correlations between higher levels of education and a range of measures of wellbeing. These included economic participation, income, health outcomes, social participation and crime and justice (Figure 1.7).¹⁹

Figure 1.7 Highest educational attainment achieved, Indigenous persons 18 years and over, 2008, Selected Indicators of Wellbeing



Source Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and Indigenous wellbeing*, *Australian Social Trends*, March 2011, p. 3.

1.37 PM&C advised the committee that Indigenous young people have higher rates of unemployment and are significantly less likely to be engaged in education or training.²⁰

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and Indigenous Wellbeing*, *Australian Social Trends*, March 2011, p. 3.

²⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

- 1.38 The likelihood of Indigenous young people being engaged in employment or education is also influenced by remoteness. PM&C noted that 84% of Indigenous youth living in very remote areas are not engaged in employment or education, compared with 52% living in major cities.²¹

Vocational Education and Training and apprenticeships

- 1.39 All students may access Vocational Education and Training (VET) while studying to attain their Year 12 certificate. In 2015, 14,577 Indigenous secondary students aged from 15 to 19 participated in a VET course. Of these, 12% were undertaking a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship.²²
- 1.40 PM&C advised that employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians who complete a Certificate III or above are equivalent to those of other Australians.²³

University

- 1.41 The number of Indigenous students undertaking study at university has almost doubled between 2005 (8,330) and 2015 (16,062). Indigenous graduates have very high levels of employment and find work more quickly, on average, than non-Indigenous graduates. The 2017 Closing the Gap Report noted that, in 2016, more than 74% of Indigenous graduates were in full-time employment, compared with 70.9% of non-Indigenous graduates.²⁴

²¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

²² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 45.

²³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

²⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 46.

Access to quality data

- 1.42 In relation to access to quality data, Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Executive Director, Australian Indigenous Education Foundation highlighted the challenge:

We all know that saying 'you cannot manage what you cannot measure'. Part of the problem we face at the advisory council is the lack of quality data on attendance in schools. This is one of the Closing the Gap targets but actually the Commonwealth only gets data... twice a year...on attendance from the states and territories. It is really difficult to be able to design ideas and solutions around lifting attendance and educational outcomes when the quality of information that is being received is very poor so a lot of work needs to go into that.²⁵

- 1.43 Dr William Fogarty, a Senior Research Fellow at the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University, cautioned that, when formulating policy, too much weight is placed on more readily available data, such as NAPLAN scores and attendance rates, when policy makers also need to give weight to the causal factors behind poor attendance, which may be a result of what is taught and how it is taught.²⁶
- 1.44 In its report into Indigenous primary school achievement the Productivity Commission agreed, explaining that, for many of the characteristics which influence student achievement, both at the school and student level, no data is available (Figure 1.8).

²⁵ Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Executive Director, Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, and Member, Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2016, p. 18.

²⁶ Dr William (Bill) Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 March 2016, pp. 1-2.

Figure 1.8 Characteristics which influence student achievement, observed and unobserved in Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data

	Observed in the dataset	Unobserved – data exist but not included in dataset	Unobserved – data do not exist
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remoteness • State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local unemployment rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries and educational facilities
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School sector • Number of enrolments • Staff numbers • Attendance rate • Finances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average satisfaction of teachers • Teacher and principal turnover • Principal characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School policies • School culture • Educational resources • Extracurricular activities
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Indigenous students • % LBOTE students • % parents by education / occupation category 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • School satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive abilities • Attitudes • Aspirations
Teacher		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Gender • LBOTE • Experience • Qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching style • Attitudes
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental education • Parental occupation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent LBOTE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent engagement • Home learning activities
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Gender • LBOTE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and disability • Attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive abilities • Attitudes • Aspirations

Grouping of characteristics in the statistical analysis:

■ School-level ■ Student-level ■ Unobserved

a The figure provides examples of characteristics. It is not an exhaustive list. **b** The figure categorises unobserved characteristics according to whether relevant information exists at a national level. Unobserved data that exist include data that are believed to be held in administrative records. **c** 'LBOTE' is an acronym for 'language background other than English'.

Source Productivity Commission, *Indigenous Primary School Achievement*, June 2016, p. 5.

Committee comment

- 1.45 The significant and persistent gap in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students appears to relate directly to attendance rates. As a significant proportion of Indigenous students live in remote areas and are, therefore, less likely to attend school on a regular basis, the gap is likely to continue. The committee believes that it is important to provide education to students in remote areas comparable to that received by students living in metropolitan areas. It is also vital that the families of Indigenous students encourage students to attend.
- 1.46 If governments cannot understand why something is occurring, they cannot formulate targeted policy to address it. Governments have been aware of the gaps in attendance and education outcomes since at least the 1980s. Yet in the three decades since the first targets for improved achievement were set, data regarding the factors causing this gap has not been consistently collected and evaluated.
- 1.47 As such, the committee supports the Productivity Commission's observation that a better evidence base and understanding of how to improve the achievement of Indigenous students is needed to improve policy outcomes.

Recommendation 1

- 1.48 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government invest in the comprehensive collection and analysis of data regarding the characteristics that influence student achievement to create a strong evidence base and understanding of how to improve Indigenous student attendance and achievement.**

Barriers to achievement

- 2.1 Education is proven to provide an individual with greater opportunities and choices in life. The significant disadvantages facing Indigenous students, including food insecurity, overcrowding, and exposure to substance abuse and other anti-social behaviours compromise their ability to grasp this opportunity.
- 2.2 Many students also face challenges relating to physical and mental ill-health, such as ear health and hearing loss, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and trauma and mental ill-health.
- 2.3 Family and community wellbeing can affect engagement and achievement for all students. Evidence to the inquiry regarding these issues in some Indigenous communities was stark.
- 2.4 Preschools and schools across the country work hard to assist disadvantaged students and often provide food, clothing and access to health care. Many partner with health care providers to assist both students and their families with medical issues.
- 2.5 This chapter will examine the barriers faced by many Indigenous students to gaining a good education.

Food insecurity, overcrowding and exposure to anti-social behaviour

- 2.6 Many students experience food insecurity, overcrowding, and exposure to substance abuse and other anti-social behaviours within their homes and the community. The tension between assisting family and attending school leaves students with difficult choices.

- 2.7 Ms Ineke Wallis, a former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, told the committee about the challenges experienced by the young people in her community:

I think the biggest issue comes down to housing, because you have at least 20, 25 people living in a house. You have a family per room – a family in the lounge room, a family on the verandah, tents surrounding with families living in there. One toilet and one shower to share, and usually the toilets do not even work... There is always noise – someone belting someone because they come home drunk – or the amount of suicide, rape and youth that die from being sick because of living in a house that is not clean, and ear and eye problems. Everything is so sad. It is just so hard to find a way.

These kids still go to school – some of them. Some just drop out and go: 'No way. That's too hard. I would rather be here and try to help family.' The ones that do go to school need that support and guidance of somebody there saying, 'You can do this,'¹

- 2.8 In Wadeye, the committee also heard that families are suffering from food security issues and overcrowding, leaving school to fill the gap. Ms Cheryl Pilkington, Team Leader, Save the Children, told the committee that 'Most of our children that do make it to school will go to school, have breakfast and leave. They go there for food because there is no food at home.'²

- 2.9 Mr Aminandaba Fuyana, Team Leader, Territory Families in Wadeye, told the committee that they are working together with Save the Children and Remote School Attendance Officers (known as the Yellow Shirts) to support families to develop a routine of coming to school:

I think the challenge that, at this point, we face is that, with some of the kids we normally work with, there might be some issues of negligence at home or some risk factors. In addition to that, they might be non-school-attendees, which has been a challenging issue. We try our level best to be with the community, early in the morning, supporting parents and mums to get the kids up for school, and then they develop a routine of coming into school every day. Once that inner strength comes into effect, we then develop a routine of bringing in the Yellow Shirts, who are driving around picking up the kids. Once that progresses well, we keep on

¹ Ms Ineke Wallis, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, *Committee Hansard*, 26 May 2017, pp. 12–13.

² Ms Cheryl Pilkington, Team Leader, Intensive Family Support Service and Play2Learn Program, Save the Children, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 26.

working together until we reach a point when we pull out, and that shows that the family is moving progressively well with the children now getting into a routine of coming to school daily. This has been a bit challenging, but we still have not given up and, in our partnerships working with agencies like the Yellow Shirt mobs and Save the Children, we try as much as we can to have joint visits in some aspects and some joint consultations with the families, sitting down to talk about the issues with the kids – what is going on and what the problems are.³

- 2.10 Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, explained the important role that her school plays in providing a safe and stable environment for students, even outside of school hours:

For a lot of our children, our school is the only safe place in their life. It's their anchor. The school doesn't close in the holidays because the kids come. They know that I'm there and they know that other people work during the holidays. We also run our camps, but we can't take all of the children on camps in the holidays. You see kids just popping in – 'Can I use the computer room, Miss?' 'Sure; of course you can.' 'Can I make something to eat?' 'Yes.' We're happy to do those things.⁴

- 2.11 The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), urged schools to consider teacher and staff attitudes when supporting disadvantaged students and emphasised the importance of understanding the level of disadvantage faced by some students:

Staff attitudes are all-important in Congress' Preschool Readiness Program. Many of the children participating live in the town camps, and experience a range of barriers accessing preschool such as family movement, parental incarceration, poverty and health issues. Some schools exclude children on the basis of health issues that are actually easily treatable and manageable at school, such as nasal and ear discharge. Other reasons for exclusion can include if the child isn't wearing a uniform or isn't toilet-trained. Congress staff believe that teachers need to understand the level of disadvantage the children may experience at home and adjust their approach to support these children accordingly. The program psychologist describes this as 'You have to have the mindset to let

³ Mr Aminandaba Fuyana, Team Leader, Remote Family Support Service, Territory Families, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 25.

⁴ Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 30.

some things go, choose your battles. For example you can't worry about children not wearing shoes or hats – first you need to be at the gate welcoming each child to school. You need to remember why children are at school, they are here to learn and have a successful time, not to wear hats and shoes. That can come later when the relationship is there.⁵

- 2.12 In November 2017, the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (Royal Commission) emphasised the importance of supporting families and communities to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young adults:

The life trajectory of children and young people in care and detention was repeated over and over. The commission was told about children born to families in crisis, struggling with addictions, mental health issues, domestic violence and the many challenges of poverty.

Instead of receiving the support those families needed to care for their children we heard of removal from the family and often the community. Once in the child protection system we heard of inappropriate placements, dislocation from community and culture and a lack of support or follow through to address the trauma so many children had suffered in their young lives. As children absconded from places where they did not feel at home or where they felt unsafe and lonely or to be with other children who had become their family, the next step was contact with the criminal justice system and ultimately detention.⁶

Education in detention

- 2.13 During the inquiry, the committee visited Tivendale School, the education facility located at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in Darwin. Mr Brett McNair, the Acting Principal, advised the committee that the school has between 12 and 60 students in the centre at any one time and that more than 95% of students are Indigenous. He explained that:

We are staffed as a special school, so we have a ratio of teachers to students of approximately six to one, and a lot of our students have been identified previously as having some type of special needs learning difficulty or behaviour difficulty. The

⁵ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *The Journey 'to Big School': supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transition to primary school*, May 2014, p. 10.

⁶ Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, *Report*, Volume 1, November 2017, pp. 9-10.

circumstances leading to them being inside Don Dale would also indicate that there has been an amount of trauma in their lives, so we operate with an understanding of that. We also have a range of programs to cope with the range of abilities that we have in the school and to try to allow for transitions to different areas of either employment or re-engagement with education, or certificates or qualifications which will help them to gain further employment or continue their training on the outside.⁷

2.14 However, the Royal Commission's findings painted a confronting picture of children and young people's experiences of education in detention in the Northern Territory, including that:

- the delivery of education was not adequately informed by assessment of each student's individual learning needs and that special education support services were under-used;
- the grouping of students into classes based on their security classification, instead of age or educational attainment, undermined the delivery of education;
- education services failed to provide Indigenous students with the opportunity to enhance their English literacy by using Indigenous language interpreters or teachers skilled in major language groups;
- some children and young people were disproportionately punished with suspension or arbitrarily excluded from education without adequate regard to alternative means of behaviour management and planning to ensure their continued engagement with education; and
- students did not receive transition support to maintain their engagement with education on their return to the community and information about a student's education in detention was not automatically shared outside the detention centre school, constraining continuity of education and engagement.⁸

Committee comment

2.15 The committee is deeply concerned by the impact that poor family and community wellbeing is having on student attendance, achievement and wellbeing. However, it is the responsibility of the family of a student to provide a stable home environment, which means ensuring a child is safe,

⁷ Mr Brett McNair, Acting Principal, Tivendale School, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 21.

⁸ Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, *Report*, Volume 2A, November 2017, pp. 398-418.

clothed, well fed, can sleep at night without interruption and is at school daily.

- 2.16 The committee is shocked by the Royal Commission's findings regarding the treatment of children living in the detention, care and protection systems of the Northern Territory. It is essential that these systems recognise the challenges these children face and work together with communities to ensure that children are safe, educated, and given the support that they need to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.
- 2.17 The children facing these challenges today are the parents and carers of the next generation of Indigenous students. As such, the education of today's students is critical to improving the health, education, and employment of not only themselves but their children and future generations.
- 2.18 The committee was encouraged by the passion and dedication of families, students, community members, teachers and social workers, who are working together to strengthen and support communities all around Australia. These challenges are complex and will require significant investment and concerted effort from governments, communities, and individuals to effect change.

Early childhood education

- 2.19 Australian and international evidence shows that early childhood education lays the foundation for future learning. Throughout the inquiry, the benefits of early childhood education were universally recognised, with many submissions emphasising the importance of early childhood education in ensuring positive health, wellbeing and education outcomes.⁹ The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) explained that:

The advantages of attending a quality preschool programme are most significant for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and

⁹ For example: Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; World Vision Australia, *Submission 12*, 44th Parliament; Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament; Save the Children Australia, *Submission 59*, 44th Parliament; Wollotuka Institute, *Submission 15*, 44th Parliament; South Australia Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People, *Submission 23*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 36*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; CIT Yurauna Centre & Northside Community Service, *Submission 10*, 45th Parliament; Queensland Government, *Submission 26*, 45th Parliament; and Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 12*, 45th Parliament.

helps close achievement gaps with other children of the same age.¹⁰

- 2.20 Save the Children Australia explained that early childhood is the most important period in a child's life for brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health:

A child who does not receive the required nutrition, stimulation and other required support during these early years commences primary school without being 'school-ready' and the cycle of disadvantage has already begun.¹¹

- 2.21 Given the evidence that supports the importance of early childhood education, it is not surprising that many of those children who do not attend school in their early years, struggle within the education system later. The Palm Islander Community Company agreed, explaining that:

...educational success hinges on being socialised, school ready and learning to read during the early years of schooling. Our children need support to achieve parity in this regard, if they come to school too far behind the starters line they never catch up and their life outcomes from that point on are severely compromised.¹²

- 2.22 Ms Patricia Strachan, Executive Director, South Australian Department of Education, told the committee that early childhood education centres can also be used to encourage family health and wellbeing by providing visiting on-site health services. She pointed to one successful example, stating that:

... the suite of programs that are offered in those centres are actually based on the needs of the community. It brings in other service providers, so not only is it about education, but it is about the other supports they can come in for. There are visiting services and there are child and family health services. I think what we do is a wraparound model, so we get some early parenting, and they have fathers groups, they have cooking classes – they have a whole range of things.¹³

¹⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

¹¹ Save the Children Australia, *Submission 59*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

¹² Palm Islander Community Company, *Submission 49*, 45th Parliament, p. 1.

¹³ Ms Patricia Strachan, Executive Director, State-wide Services and Child Development, South Australia Department of Education and Child Development, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 26 February 2016, p. 17.

- 2.23 By encouraging parents to attend school grounds for other activities, it reduces any fears or negative memories they may have that relate to their education and can produce a positive impact on their child's attendance rates.¹⁴

Committee comment

- 2.24 Participation in early childhood education is a strong predictor of future social, educational and occupational success. Therefore, the committee fully supports the Federal Government's early childhood education strategy, together with all state and territory efforts, which aim to provide universal access for all children in the year before full-time schooling.

Family responsibilities and young mothers

- 2.25 Some participants noted that Indigenous students are likely to have significantly greater responsibilities within the family than non-Indigenous students, which may impact attendance, engagement and academic achievement.
- 2.26 Ms Chloe Barwick, University of Newcastle, told the committee:
A lot of the Aboriginal students had large responsibilities at home, which took most of their focus towards home and feeding their siblings and making sure the house was clean and things like that that a parent should do – their focus was going towards that and they were dropping off in schools.¹⁵
- 2.27 However, Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan's research into Indigenous students' experiences at boarding schools found that while students often have more responsibilities and demands relative to their non-Indigenous schoolmates, 'participants did not describe their ongoing role at home in negative terms, or suggest that the role they played within the family diminished their commitment to education'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Supporting Transition to School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: What it means and what works*, June 2013, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ Ms Chloe Barwick, Student Teacher, University of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, p. 29.

¹⁶ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 118.

- 2.28 In 2011, the teenage birth rate¹⁷ among Indigenous women (78 babies per 1,000 women) was nearly five times the teenage birth rate for all women (16 babies per 1,000 women).¹⁸ The 2015 review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (Wilson Review) noted that ‘at many of the communities the review visited, young mothers drop out of school due to pregnancy and do not return’.¹⁹
- 2.29 The Cape York Foundation stated that ‘multiple studies have shown that despite the challenges of disadvantage and teenage parenting, many young women view motherhood as an opportunity to find purpose, stability and maturity’.²⁰
- 2.30 In acknowledging the high teenage birth rate, Mr Duncan Murray, Chief Executive Officer, Cape York Partnership, told the committee:
- One of the more challenging, needy and important cohorts is 13- to 16-year old or 13- to 17-year old girls who are already mothers. About 18 months ago, we turned our mind...to starting a school specifically for that purpose.²¹
- 2.31 As a result, the Cape York Girl Academy was established, which is a boarding school that caters specifically for young Indigenous mothers and their babies.²² The Cape York Partnership informed the Committee that:
- The Cape York Girl Academy has an early learning centre on campus for the children of its students...the key benefits of this model are that the children will get to see their mothers throughout the day (all meals will be had with the girls feeding their own children), and the students will be able to learn appropriate ways to educate and care for children.²³

¹⁷ Births to females less than 20 years of age.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Demographic, Social and Economic Characteristics: Fertility and Births, 4704.0 – *The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, October 2010.

¹⁹ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 103.

²⁰ Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament, p. 8.

²¹ Mr Duncan Murray, Chief Executive Officer, Cape York Partnership, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 18.

²² Cape York Partnership, Cape York Girl Academy, <http://capeyorkpartnership.org.au/game-changers/girl-academy/>, accessed 11 September 2017.

²³ Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament, p. 8.

- 2.32 A further school model developed to assist young mothers, is a part-time schooling program. The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales told the committee that the Macleay Vocational College in Kempsey, NSW, provides part-time programs for young mothers:

We have a number of girls who are on part-time programs due to their maternal duties. It is important for us to maintain contact with these young girls to assist both their educational outcomes and the influence on their children and community in the future.²⁴

Committee comment

- 2.33 The mothers of the next generation of Indigenous children are instrumental in breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Tragically, the education of Indigenous girls is frequently under resourced and under prioritised. Investment in Indigenous girls is urgently required to ensure that all students, regardless of gender or circumstance, are empowered to achieve their education goals.
- 2.34 The committee was saddened to hear that after falling pregnant, many Indigenous girls drop out of school and delay or sacrifice their education to care for their child. Becoming a mother should not deny girls the opportunity to gain a full education.
- 2.35 The committee was very impressed by the Cape York Girl Academy's model of boarding, which provided for mothers and their babies to live together and learn together. More programs are required that support and allow school-age mothers to live with their children while continuing their education.

Recommendation 2

- 2.36 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, be accepting of and provide more opportunities for school-age Indigenous mothers to continue with their studies. This will require a model that acknowledges their maternal responsibilities, through the provision of part-time programs, specific boarding schools or other education models. It may also require the establishment of new, or the modification of existing, facilities to address their needs.**

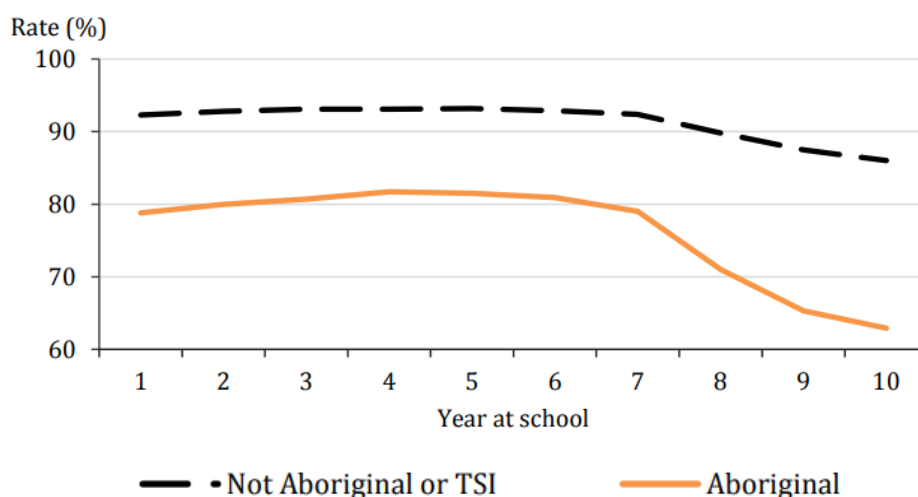
²⁴ Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament, p. 18.

Adulthood

2.37 Whilst attendance rates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students decline as students reach secondary school (Figure 2.1), this decline increases substantially for Indigenous students.²⁵ The Northern Territory Department of Education explained that:

Indigenous and non-Indigenous cohorts have markedly different enrolment profiles. While non-Indigenous enrolments are highest at the beginning of schooling and trend down very slowly through schooling, Indigenous enrolments increase gradually through the primary years and then drop rapidly at the start of secondary school.²⁶

Figure 2.1 Average attendance, Year 1 to Year 10, by Indigenous status of student



Source Kirsten Hancock et al, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, May 2013, p. 57.

2.38 Mr Ted Tucker, Principal, Kulkarriya Community School, noted that this marked decline coincides with the age students are culturally considered adults:

Once our kids get to high school we have more difficulty with them because it seems that at around about the 12, 13, 14 years of age kids in communities start to make decisions for themselves about whether they want to come to school and whether they want to get involved in all sorts of other activities. It is almost that that is the condition where you become an adult and you start making decisions for yourself. We work pretty hard to try to overcome

²⁵ Kirsten Hancock et al, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, May 2013, p. 55.

²⁶ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, p. [151].

that. Our process is in trying to get kids connected to the school, to keep them connected with the school and to plot them a future pathway.²⁷

- 2.39 Ms Joanne Turner, consultant, Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation, explained that:

The age that students will disengage from secondary school is a big issue everywhere. As soon as someone has reached a certain age of maturity and gone through initiation, they quite often do not want to be associated with school because that is kids stuff.²⁸

- 2.40 The Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Chair of the Martu Schools Alliance, told the committee that it is 'quite difficult for the boys, particularly once they have gone through initiation, to go back into a school setting with all the young kids because, culturally, they are men'.²⁹

- 2.41 Some schools, such as the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Schools in Western Australia, acknowledge when children are culturally considered adults by creating a separate space within the school for those students and treating them as adults, despite them being at school.³⁰

Committee comment

- 2.42 The committee acknowledges that the age students are considered adults is much younger within Indigenous communities than in non-Indigenous communities. Therefore, the Committee is encouraged to hear that some schools with a high Indigenous population are creating a separate space for students who have gone through initiation, and who are culturally considered adults, so that those students retain a connection with the school and continue with their education. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, culturally appropriate education is an important part of student engagement and retention. Recognising the adult-student is an important retention strategy, but one that requires funding and support.

²⁷ Mr James (Ted) Tucker, Principal, Kulkarriya Community School, *Committee Hansard*, Fitzroy Crossing, 27 June 2017, p. 14.

²⁸ Ms Joanne Turner, Consultant, Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 12.

²⁹ The Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Chair, Martu Schools Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 25 May 2017, p. 4.

³⁰ Ms Joanne Turner, Consultant, Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 12.

Health and wellbeing

2.43 Evidence to the inquiry clearly demonstrated that physical and mental ill-health is a significant challenge for many Indigenous students throughout their education.³¹ In particular, ear health and hearing loss; FASD; and trauma and mental wellbeing. The Wilson Review found that:

Respondents to the review drew attention to a range of specific and general health issues that impact on learning. Most prominent among these was otitis media and the consequent conductive hearing loss. Other areas referred to included social and emotional problems, some arising from trauma; speech and language difficulties; foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; and developmental issues associated with early illness and nutrition. There was a widespread view, shared in the literature, that addressing such issues will require integrated approaches across different services and departments.³²

2.44 The Review noted that ‘it is impossible to manage difficult behaviour without understanding the underlying reasons for those behaviours and engaging in positive efforts to improve wellbeing and engagement as critical first steps’.³³

Ear health and hearing issues

2.45 A number of submissions highlighted the impact that ear health and hearing issues can have on attendance and educational achievement.³⁴ The

³¹ For example: National Rural Health Alliance, *Submission 31*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; World Vision Australia, *Submission 12*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Submission 32*, 44th Parliament; Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; Save the Children, *Submission 59*, 44th Parliament; South Australia Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People, *Submission 23*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Stars Foundation, *Submission 57*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisation, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament; Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament; and Children and Young People with Disability Australia, *Submission 13*, 45th Parliament.

³² Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 184.

³³ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 175.

³⁴ For example: Ms Tracey de Grussa, *Submission 1*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisations, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament; Children and Young

2017 Australian Medical Association (AMA) Report Card on Indigenous Health highlighted otitis media and called for a national strategic approach to ending chronic otitis media and its life-long impacts in Indigenous communities, explaining that:

Indigenous children experience some of the highest rates of chronic suppurative otitis media (CSOM) in the world. Chronic otitis media is linked to poorer social determinants of health such as: poverty; unhygienic, overcrowded conditions; and an absence of health services...For most non-Indigenous Australian children, otitis media is readily treated. The condition passes within weeks, and without long-term effects. But for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, otitis media is not adequately treated. It persists in chronic forms over months and years...it has life-long impacts.³⁵

2.46 In 2014, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare noted that children in many Indigenous communities 'suffer from chronic ear disease, in particular otitis media, at rates that well exceed the 4% threshold at which a disease is considered a major public health problem'. It explained that:

Ear disease, particularly where it leads to hearing loss, is a large contributor to poor educational achievement and higher unemployment and, as a consequence, greater contact with the criminal justice system later in life.³⁶

2.47 Children and Young People with Disability Australia noted that 'otitis media and associated hearing loss have been found to be a significant barrier to access to education for Aboriginal students, particularly when appropriate support is not provided'.³⁷

2.48 The Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisations agreed, asserting that:

...without practical communication tools being provided in our schools and an interdepartmental collaborative approach between Health and Education our Aboriginal students will continue to be

People with a Disability Australia, *Submission 13*, 45th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*.

³⁵ Australian Medical Association, *2017 Report Card on Indigenous Health: A National Strategic Approach to Ending Chronic Otitis Media and its Life Long Impacts in Indigenous Communities*, November 2017, p. 3.

³⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, November 2014, p. 2.

³⁷ Children and Young People with a Disability Australia, *Submission 13*, 45th Parliament, p. 9.

set up to fail as a result of a 'pandemic' of Otitis Media (middle ear infection) which means many literally can't hear their teacher.³⁸

- 2.49 Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Department of Education and Training, told the committee about its Deadly Ears Program, which provides services through the Deadly Ears Team to 11 outreach locations. The team consists of audiologists, ear, nose and throat (ENT) staff, anaesthetists, and a broad mix of nursing staff. The team regularly travels to each location for a week to conduct clinics and surgery. Postsurgical care plans for treated children are developed and passed to primary health providers to implement. Any children with conditions outside the scope of the Deadly Ears team are referred to specialist ENT services.³⁹
- 2.50 The House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport tabled its report *Still waiting to be heard...: Report on the Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia* on 14 September 2017. This report identified the Deadly Ears Program as a best practice example and recommended that it be implemented nationally, with a 'focus on expanding access to hearing health services in regional and remote locations and reducing the waiting lists for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children requiring hearing health treatment'.⁴⁰

Sound-field amplification in classrooms

- 2.51 Sound-field amplification is a tool that allows control of the acoustic environment in a classroom, which has been found to assist students living with hearing loss. Teachers wear small microphones that transmit sound to a receiver system attached to loudspeakers around the classroom. The goal of sound-field amplification is 'to amplify the teacher's voice by a few decibels, and to provide uniform amplification throughout the classroom without making the speech too loud for normal hearing children'.⁴¹
- 2.52 Ms Judith Ketchell, Executive Principal, Tagai State College on Thursday Island, told the committee that the college is seeking to establish sound

³⁸ Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisations, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament, p. [3].

³⁹ House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, *Still waiting to be heard...: Report on the Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia*, September 2017, p. 50.

⁴⁰ House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, *Still waiting to be heard...: Report on the Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia*, September 2017, p. 69.

⁴¹ Robyn Massie et al, 'Sound-field Amplification: Enhancing the Classroom Listening Environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children', *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 33, 2004, p. 47.

amplification systems across all of its 17 primary and secondary campuses:

The issue there is: how are we providing the best learning place for students? Infrastructure is a major issue. In terms of sound amplification systems...for students that are severely hearing impaired, we do not have sound amplification systems as a standard in our campuses, and you know that at different times of the year, especially when it is a heavy wet season, the hearing loss varies. It fluctuates. We recognise that there are times during the year when it is worse for children. [We are] looking at a way of putting systems into our classrooms to help students who are hearing impaired.⁴²

- 2.53 During its site visit at Worawa Aboriginal College in Victoria, the committee received a demonstration of the school's sound-field amplification technology. The college explained that they had noticed a significant improvement in engagement from students since they began using it.
- 2.54 Mr Button advised the committee that the Queensland Government is investing in amplification technology in classrooms and training teachers in its use.⁴³
- 2.55 In its submission to the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport's inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia, the Northern Territory Government advised that:
- A challenge for schools is accessing group (classroom) rehabilitation devices such as sound field amplification. Funding from the Australian Office of Hearing Services to Australian Hearing only funds individual devices and there are significant challenges in children accepting and using hearing aids. Where children require assisted learning in the classroom, there are additional complexities.⁴⁴
- 2.56 The House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport also recommended that the Department of Health, together with the Department of Education and Training create a hearing health support

⁴² Ms Judith Ketchell, Executive Principal, Tagai State College, *Committee Hansard*, Thursday Island, 9 March 2016, p. 12.

⁴³ Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Northern Territory Government, *Submission 93*, House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia, p. 9.

fund for Indigenous students, which would be responsible for the progressive installation of sound-field amplification systems in the classrooms of all regional, rural, and remote schools with significant Indigenous student populations.⁴⁵

Committee comment

- 2.57 The committee was encouraged to find that levels of hearing loss and impairment have improved slightly over the last four years. However, the number of Indigenous students who are living with hearing issues remains very high. Early screening, diagnosis and treatment, and management are imperative to address the pandemic of otitis media plaguing Indigenous communities.
- 2.58 The committee agrees that, without proper support, students with hearing issues are being set up to fail. Students cannot be expected to learn from a teacher they cannot hear. Classrooms and teachers must be equipped to allow for free and easy communication with students in order for students to have a chance to learn. Considering the staggering proportion of Indigenous students who are living with hearing issues, the committee is of the view that all classrooms in schools with a significant proportion of Indigenous students should be equipped with sound-field amplification technology.
- 2.59 Furthermore, the committee strongly supports the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport's recommendation that the Department of Health, together with the Department of Education and Training create a hearing health support fund for Indigenous students, which would be responsible for the progressive installation of sound-field amplification systems in the classrooms of all schools with significant Indigenous student populations.

Recommendation 3

- 2.60 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government establish a capital works fund to allow schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students to equip all classrooms with sound-field amplification technology by 2020.**

⁴⁵ House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, *Still waiting to be heard...: Report on the Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia*, September 2017, p. 69.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

- 2.61 FASD is the largest cause of non-genetic, at-birth brain damage in Australia.⁴⁶ It is considerably more prevalent in Indigenous communities, with some communities, such as Fitzroy Crossing, being found to have the highest rates in the world.⁴⁷ FASD has been repeatedly identified, in various House Standing Committee Reports, as a significant issue impacting Indigenous communities.⁴⁸
- 2.62 In 2012, the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs tabled a substantial report regarding the prevention, diagnosis, and management of FASD. The report noted that FASD is clearly not an Indigenous-specific problem, but that FASD affects Indigenous communities and culture in significant and particular ways.⁴⁹ The report highlighted the critical importance of community-led initiatives to reduce high-risk consumption patterns and the impact of alcohol in Indigenous communities. It also called for the development and management of a national FASD diagnostic and management services strategy.⁵⁰
- 2.63 The committee is pleased to note that, in April 2016, the Australian Guide to the Diagnosis of FASD, containing the Australian FASD Diagnostic Instrument was released. The Guide facilitates and standardises the diagnosis of FASD in Australia.⁵¹

⁴⁶ House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *FASD: The Hidden Harm: Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, November 2012, pp. 11–12.

⁴⁷ James Fitzpatrick et al., 'Prevalence of fetal alcohol syndrome in a population-based sample of children living in remote Australia: The Lililwan Project', *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 51(4), 2015, p. 450.

⁴⁸ House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*, June 2011, p. 101; House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *FASD: The Hidden Harm: Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, November 2012, pp. 11–12; House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Alcohol, hurting people and harming communities: Inquiry into the harmful use of alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*, June 2015, pp. 106–107; House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, *Still waiting to be heard...: Report on the Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia*, September 2017, p. 69.

⁴⁹ House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *FASD: The Hidden Harm: Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, November 2012, p. 33.

⁵⁰ House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *FASD: The Hidden Harm: Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, November 2012, pp. xvii–xxii.

⁵¹ Professor Carol Bower and Professor Elizabeth Elliott AM, *Report to the Australian Government Department of Health: Australian Guide to the diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)*, April 2016, pp. 2–3.

- 2.64 In an education context, students living with FASD may exhibit behaviour characteristics believed to reflect underlying brain differences. Ms Jane Weston and Ms Sue Thomas have developed a resource for teachers, *Understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, which outlines the difficulties that people living with FASD experience, such as:
- developmental difficulties;
 - executive functioning difficulties: such as planning, organising, strategising, paying attention to and remembering details, and managing time and space; and
 - learning difficulties: including:
 - ⇒ difficulty understanding cause and effect;
 - ⇒ speech, language and communication delays/disorders;
 - ⇒ cognitive difficulties; and
 - ⇒ difficulty in understanding mathematical concepts, such as time and money.⁵²
- 2.65 The resource notes that there are many barriers and challenges to learning for children and young people living with FASD, but asserted that:
- Many children with FASD have learning strengths around literacy and practical subjects, such as visual arts, performing arts, sport and technologies...it is important that teachers cater to the specific needs of each individual child, and build personalised learning plans for this diverse group of students...best practice teaching for children and young people with FASD focuses on 'engagement' and social and emotional learning. It is important to provide learning opportunities that allow students to experience success. It has been shown that success and strength-based approaches build emotional resilience – vital for children and young people with FASD to grow and better understand the boundaries of their abilities and disabilities.⁵³
- 2.66 Mr Timu King, a former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, told the committee that students living with FASD need 'information to be quite concise' as he advised that 'it is very hard for them to learn from

⁵² Jane Weston and Sue Thomas, *Understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD): A resource for teachers*, 2014, pp. 18–19.

⁵³ Jane Weston and Sue Thomas, *Understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD): A resource for teachers*, 2014, p. 17.

mistakes.’ Therefore, students ‘need to be shown the correct answer the first time, and then [be] given an opportunity to demonstrate it’.⁵⁴

- 2.67 Throughout the inquiry, the committee heard that many schools and teachers are struggling to properly assist students with FASD. Ms Sue Thomas, the Marulu Strategy Coordinator, at Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women’s Resource Centre, advised the committee that:

...at the moment FASD is not recognised as a disability. So, while Fitzroy school knows that they have a cohort of children with FASD and there are more children who have been diagnosed post the 'little ones' research, it does not trigger any additional funding.⁵⁵

- 2.68 Mr Jared Lawson, Principal, Broome Primary School, explained that in his school:

There is absolutely no doubt we self-fund an awful lot of extra support for students who are in our schools who probably are FASD or have other difficulties that because of the disconnect pre coming to school have not been diagnosed or funded.⁵⁶

Committee comment

- 2.69 The committee was very impressed by the comprehensive resource for teachers developed by Ms Jane Weston and Ms Sue Thomas. The committee commends the work being done by the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women’s Resource Centre to raise awareness of FASD and provide students, families, teachers, and schools with strategies to support students as they undertake their education and face the challenges of living with FASD.
- 2.70 Early diagnosis of children and young people living with FASD is essential to their development and education. As such, the committee is very concerned that many students who are suspected of living with FASD remain undiagnosed and unsupported. The committee acknowledges FASD is complex and requires specialists to diagnose. Nonetheless, a diagnosis is the foundation upon which all other support and management strategies are placed.

⁵⁴ Mr Timu King, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 May 2017, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ms Sue Thomas, Marulu Strategy Coordinator, Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women’s Resource Centre, *Committee Hansard*, Fitzroy Crossing, 27 June 2017, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Mr Jared Lawson, Principal, Broome Primary School, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 29 June 2017, p. 3.

2.71 However, the committee notes that, even with a diagnosis of FASD, the level of additional funding that a school receives to provide necessary learning support is often unclear and may vary between states and territories.

Recommendation 4

2.72 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with state and territory governments, agree to a clear and consistent policy in relation to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) being recognised as a disability for the purposes of school and support service funding.**

Recommendation 5

2.73 **Once a consistent policy position is determined in relation to FASD, the committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, establish a FASD screening and management program which includes:**

- **access to FASD screening for all students who are deemed to require it; and**
- **working with schools to raise awareness of FASD and providing professional development for all teachers at schools where FASD has been identified.**

Trauma and mental wellbeing

2.74 Although many Indigenous children grow up in safe environments, others experience trauma, which impacts mental wellbeing and engagement in education. Many families and communities are unable, or are still working, to heal the trauma of past events, including displacement from Country, institutionalisation, and abuse. Indigenous children may also experience a range of distressing life events including:

- hospitalisation or death of close family members;
- exposure to violence, both as observers and as subjects of violence; and
- family disintegration (with kin networks fragmented due to forced removals, relationship breakdown, substance abuse, and possibly incarceration).⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, *Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children*, July 2013, pp. 2–3.

- 2.75 Children experiencing traumatic stress symptoms generally have difficulty regulating their behaviours and emotions:

They may be 'clingy' and fearful of new situations, easily frightened, difficult to console, and/or aggressive and impulsive. They may also have difficulty sleeping, lose recently acquired developmental skills, and show regression in functioning and behaviour.⁵⁸

- 2.76 Professor Judy Atkinson told the committee that 'behaviour is language', explaining that children's behaviour 'is telling us what is happening in their lives'.⁵⁹ This was illustrated in the following story submitted to the inquiry:

Billy⁶⁰ is seven years old. Recently on a school excursion, when a police car went past with its siren blaring, Billy erupted into extreme aggression on other children and the teachers who were with the children on the excursion. During that time he had to be held for his own protection and the protection of the other children. The next day the Principal sat with him to talk about what had happened in the bus as his behaviour made it unsafe. She asked him: 'Billy, do you ever feel scared?' hoping to open a conversation about how his behaviour had affected the other children and the teachers. His response was 'Oh I am always scared Aunty', opening for the Principal, a deeper understanding of the world in which he lives and the way he has learnt to cope with overwhelming feelings of fear, terror and panic.⁶¹

- 2.77 Professor Atkinson told the committee that the University of Wollongong now offers a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Trauma Recovery Practice:

We just graduated 52 students, and over 40 of them were Aboriginal. They are working across Australia in the field. I am highlighting that we need another course now that provides specific skills in how to de-escalate heightened situations or behaviour in children who come into a school and are distressed. Maybe over the weekend there has been a lot of drinking, rough drugs in town, and many schoolteachers and even principals do

⁵⁸ Jane Weston and Sue Thomas, *Understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD): A resource for teachers*, 2014, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Professor Valerie (Judy) Atkinson, *Submission 43*, 45th Parliament, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Not his real name.

⁶¹ Professor Valerie (Judy) Atkinson, *Submission 43*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2-3.

not have the capacity to respond to them in a good way to de-escalate their behaviour, so it becomes worse, not better.⁶²

- 2.78 The Independent Schools Council of Australia submitted that it is imperative that any measures to address negative student behaviours focus on seeking to understand the trauma that may be the impetus for these behaviours.⁶³

Committee comment

- 2.79 It is a tragic reality that, whilst many Indigenous children grow up in safe environments, others experience trauma. As Professor Atkinson stated, 'behaviour is language'. As such, it is a language that teachers and schools must learn to understand if they are to support students' mental wellbeing.
- 2.80 It is the committee's view that it would be beneficial for all teachers working with Indigenous students to undergo professional development regarding trauma-informed teaching practices.

Linking health services and schools

- 2.81 The importance of health and education services working together, particularly in remote communities and boarding schools, has been highlighted throughout the inquiry.⁶⁴ The Wilson Review had similar findings, noting that 'the notion of education and health working collaboratively has many perceived benefits to both families and children'. It noted that 'many remote school staff made comments to the review

⁶² Professor Valerie (Judy) Atkinson, Patron, We Al-li Pty Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 June 2017, p. 1.

⁶³ Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

⁶⁴ For example: Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Submission 32*, 44th Parliament; Catholic Agricultural College Bindoon, *Submission 5*, 44th Parliament; Martu Schools Alliance, *Submission 56*, 44th Parliament; Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; One Tree Community Services, *Submission 35*, 45th Parliament; Northern Territory Council of Government Schools Organisation, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament; Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament; North Queensland Cowboys, *Submission 49*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament; and Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament.

about the lack of communication between the two agencies resulting in service provision problems'.⁶⁵

- 2.82 The integration of early childhood education and health services for mothers and young children is common to most states and territories, with some offering services specifically catering to Indigenous mothers and children.
- 2.83 In the Northern Territory, integrated services in remote communities are offered through Child and Family Centres located on school sites.⁶⁶ The Northern Territory Department of Education explained that:
- Integrated CFCs provide support to local Indigenous children (birth to eight years) and their families with complex support needs, including a safe place to access learning and development services and enable timely referral and access to health and wellbeing services.⁶⁷
- 2.84 PM&C informed the committee that the Federal Government is prioritising investment in early childhood through the Community Child Care Fund, which 'will offer grants for the integration of child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of disadvantaged Indigenous communities'.⁶⁸
- 2.85 Despite the importance of health and education services working together, there appears to be less integration after a child begins primary school; nonetheless the inquiry heard evidence of successful models of integration in primary and secondary schools.
- 2.86 For example, Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, told the committee that her school has an on-site medical clinic, which provides a wide range of general practice and allied health services.⁶⁹ Ms Downey emphasised the link between good health and educational achievement, stating that:

If you're sick, if you have medical issues and other health issues, how are you going to succeed in school? To me, it's a no brainer. Right from the get go, it's always been our vision that you need to

⁶⁵ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 103.

⁶⁶ Northern Territory Government, 'Early childhood support for remote children and families', <https://nt.gov.au/learning/early-childhood/early-childhood-support-for-remote-children-and-families>, accessed 12 September 2017.

⁶⁷ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 27.

look after the whole child – not just one aspect of their development.⁷⁰

- 2.87 In Townsville, the committee visited the health and wellbeing centre at Shalom Christian College. Ms Sandy Hindmarsh, Deputy Principal, told the committee that:

We have been trying to come up with a model that is the most responsive to the students' needs... We're trying to work from a comprehensive primary healthcare model that is a health worker led model, which is the most culturally responsive model, and something that is evidence-based and also that there is parent, family and community buy-in for that model. Students need to understand why they are going to a health practitioner, what that means, and families need to be present – so everybody needs to be very aware of what they're getting from the service, and also getting the best service that they can.⁷¹

- 2.88 Ms Hindmarsh explained that the on-site facilities allow students to access healthcare in a space where they feel comfortable and safe and minimises the amount of time that students might need to take off school to access healthcare services.⁷²

- 2.89 Mr Selwyn Button, Queensland Department of Education and Training, told the committee that the Queensland Government has partnered with the Rural Health Outreach Provider, CheckUP, and implemented a new strategy to identify appropriate allied health providers to deliver services at schools in remote communities, tailoring services to individual student needs. Mr Button explained that allied health professionals work with students, schools, and families to develop individual treatment and support plans to meet each student's health and wellbeing needs.⁷³

- 2.90 Mr Michael Pepper, Principal, St Mary's College in Broome, stated that:

With regard to student wellbeing, our school is provided with two days of support by psychologists from the Department of Education plus St Mary's College also employs a full-time social worker. It is apparent from the two days of psych time that this is

⁷⁰ Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 31.

⁷¹ Ms Sandy Hindmarsh, Deputy Principal, Shalom Christian College, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Townsville, 30 August 2017, p. 26.

⁷² Ms Sandy Hindmarsh, Deputy Principal, Shalom Christian College, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Townsville, 30 August 2017, p. 27.

⁷³ Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 24.

less than required to meet the needs of many of our students, especially our Aboriginal students with learning or social and emotional needs. For 2018, we are working towards increasing the allocation of time with the Department of Education psychologist, as we see this critical to support student wellbeing and to be able to complete the required diagnostic testing to identify specific learning, social and emotional needs.⁷⁴

Committee comment

- 2.91 Throughout the inquiry, the committee witnessed the benefits of linking health services and schools. The integration of health services and early childhood is well recognised; however, the committee is of the view that this integration should not be limited to early childhood education.
- 2.92 The committee was particularly impressed by the Murri School's model of integration for health and education. The provision of on-site medical services for students allows for stronger relationships between students, families, communities, teachers, and schools. It promotes early detection and diagnosis and allows for schools to work together with families to implement management plans to ensure that each student is given the necessary support to succeed in their education.
- 2.93 The importance of early diagnosis and knowledge of each individual student's health and wellbeing needs has been emphasised. Without a clear understanding of what a student's needs are, teachers and schools cannot hope to provide the support necessary to empower students to meet their education goals. The committee acknowledges the importance of protecting the privacy of students' medical information; however, more should be done to integrate the delivery of education and healthcare services and allow schools to work directly with health providers to the benefit of students.

⁷⁴ Mr Michael Pepper, Principal, St Mary's College, Broome, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 29 June 2017, pp. 9–10.

Recommendation 6

- 2.94 The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, establish and implement an integrated model of health and education delivery to locate medical services within school grounds or as close to them as possible in remote and very remote locations with a substantial number of Indigenous students by 2020 so that health care is seen as integral to the provision of education services.

Recommendation 7

- 2.95 The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health examine ways of allowing a greater flow of information between schools and health professionals, so that schools can obtain relevant and appropriate medical information in relation to students, but in a way that does not breach the *Privacy Act 1988*.

Cultural safety and community engagement

- 3.1 It is important for all human beings, no matter what stage of life, to feel a sense of belonging to a group or clan. Whether they choose to identify as Catholic or Jewish, European or Asian, bookworm or adrenalin seeker, individuals feel a sense of pride and belonging when with peers. Throughout the inquiry it became very clear that many Indigenous students do not feel this sense of belonging when at school. This is because they attend schools that do not accept the relevance of, or acknowledge, understand or celebrate their culture, which results in children not feeling culturally safe.
- 3.2 This lack of cultural safety brought into sharp contrast some of the key differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of school. It highlighted the ways in which schools and the education system need to adapt and work together with Indigenous students, parents, carers and communities to ensure that students receive support to overcome these challenges and achieve their potential.
- 3.3 This chapter considers some of the challenges that many Indigenous students face throughout their education and explores the key elements of culturally safe environments and the importance of teaching through language and culture.

Cultural safety

- 3.4 Throughout the inquiry, it was very clear that cultural safety fostered by a strong connection and engagement with community was the essential foundation upon which all successful education and support programs were built. A number of submissions emphasised the importance of cultural safety, noting that school environments that support and celebrate

Indigenous cultures and identity have a marked impact on attendance, engagement, and education outcomes.¹ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner defines cultural safety as:

An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.²

3.5 Dr William Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow, Australian National University, explained the problems that arise when students do not feel culturally safe at school:

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in remote Australia, face a great and deep dilemma in engaging with the current education system. On the one hand, education can be a pathway to social mobility and can offer great economic returns and education can be the key to alleviating social disadvantage. In this way education can be empowering. However, education that does not allow for learning in your own language and that is not inclusive of your social, cultural or economic values is not empowering; it is disempowering.³

3.6 A strong connection and engagement with a student's parents and community is essential to encouraging school attendance. Mr Darren Godwell, Chief Executive Officer, Stronger Smarter, explained that poor attendance can be:

[...] a lag indicator of the level of confidence that students have in both the teacher and going to that classroom. It is also a lag indicator of the level of confidence the parents have in the school

¹ For example: Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Victoria, *Submission 48*, 44th Parliament; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Supplementary Submission 46.1*, 44th Parliament; Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle, *Submission 15*, 44th Parliament; Assistant Professor Dr Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament; Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament; Professor Jeannie Herbert AM, *Submission 8*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 36*, 44th Parliament; National Rural Health Student Network, *Submission 54*, 44th Parliament; CIT Yurauna Centre & Northside Community Service, *Submission 10*, 45th Parliament; Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, *Submission 18*, 45th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament; Yirara College, *Submission 33*, 45th Parliament; and Kon and Shoba Kalos, *Submission 15*, 45th Parliament.

² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, *Social Justice Report 2011*, p. 123.

³ Dr William Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 March 2016, p. 2.

and the trust they have in those educators to send their children there.⁴

- 3.7 When considering poor parental and community engagement, schools and school programs must be cognisant that many parents and members of Indigenous communities were traumatised by their own experiences of the education system, because they did not feel safe or welcome in their school environment. Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer, University of Newcastle explained that:

I do not think you can look simplistically at the lack of community engagement and say that parents are not concerned about their kids' education. It is not as simple as that.

We have to be smart enough to know how to better engage the parents in the learning experience of our kids. That is a totally different exercise from just saying that our parents are not engaged. I cannot stress enough that we need to change our thinking about the way we perceive education and the relative role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in the systems.⁵

- 3.8 Schools must, therefore, not only work to provide culturally safe spaces for students, but also for their families. Mr Mitchell Dahlstrom, former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, told the committee that the cultural centre at his school assists in engaging Indigenous parents. He stated that:

Whenever Indigenous parents came in to have meetings, it was a nice space to go into. Although it was in the school, it was not in a classroom. I think classrooms feel like they belong to the teachers, so you are going into their territory; whereas, when you go into a space like that, it is sort of a more level playing field for everybody that is involved in the discussion.⁶

- 3.9 Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean, University of South Australia, explained:

Holding culturally safe spaces in schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to meet and hold meetings within the school is also paramount.⁷

⁴ Mr Darren Godwell, Chief Executive Officer, Stronger Smarter Institute, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 5 February 2016, p. 3.

⁵ Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer, Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, p. 4.

⁶ Mr Mitchell Dahlstrom, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 May 2017, p. 11.

⁷ Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean of Indigenous Scholarship, Engagement and Research, University of South Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 March 2016, p. 2.

- 3.10 Particularly in remote communities, schools are important facilities for the entire community. The benefits of providing a culturally safe school environment extend far beyond a child's schooling years. For example, it has been found that schools being culturally unsafe for students and the community can have consequential impacts on adult civic engagement.
- 3.11 The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters' inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 Federal election, heard evidence that the negative experiences that some Indigenous adults had with schools, both as students and parents, meant that the choice of schools as polling places acted as a significant deterrent to voting.⁸
- 3.12 Across Australia, state and territory governments have various policies and guidance to assist schools to create culturally safe environments.
- 3.13 One of the most comprehensive policies has been put in place by the Western Australian Government. In 2015, the Western Australia Department of Education and Training launched its Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework, which 'sets expected standards for staff when working with Aboriginal students, their families and communities'.⁹ From 2017, schools are 'expected to use self-assessment against the framework in school improvement planning'.¹⁰
- 3.14 The Framework sets out cultural standards, together with performance descriptors and indicators for each standard. There is also a continuum against which schools can reflect on individual and whole-school progress and develop strategies to move towards becoming culturally responsive. The continuum comprises four stages:
- **cultural awareness:** the recognition of differences and similarities between cultural groups;
 - **cultural understanding:** representing a shift in emphasis from awareness to behaviours and attitudes;
 - **cultural competence:** the ability to understand, interact and communicate effectively and sensitively with people from a cultural background that is different to one's own; and
 - **cultural responsiveness:** the ability to understand, interact and communicate effectively and sensitively with people from a cultural

⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, *The 2013 Federal Election*, April 2015, pp. 110-112.

⁹ Western Australia Department of Education, *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*, 2015, p. 3.

¹⁰ Western Australia Department of Education, 'Aboriginal Education', <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/navigation/aboriginal-education/>, accessed 6 September 2017.

background that is different to one's own, and demonstrating this ability with proficiency.¹¹

- 3.15 The committee noted that the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework still allowed for flexibility and responsiveness to individual communities. This is an important point of connection with community, with many submissions noting that a 'one-size-fits-all' policy approach to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students does not work.¹²

Committee comment

- 3.16 All students have a right to feel safe, included, valued, and supported at school. All Australian schools, regardless of the number of Indigenous students enrolled, should provide culturally safe environments for students.
- 3.17 The evidence clearly demonstrated that cultural safety, fostered by strong connection and engagement with community, is the essential foundation upon which all educational and support programs must be built in order to succeed.
- 3.18 Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw and heard from a number of programs supporting student attendance and achievement. The common elements present in all of the successful programs were flexibility, cultural safety, buy-in from the family and connection with community. Strong relationships between students, families, teachers, schools, health services, and communities are vital. Time and again it has been shown that, without a foundation of cultural safety and strong connections, any program, no matter its funding or resources, will fail.
- 3.19 The committee was impressed by the Western Australia Department of Education and Training's Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework and commends it to other states and territories. It details a clear continuum against which schools and teachers can measure their progress and provides an element of accountability.

¹¹ Western Australia Department of Education, *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*, 2015, p. 16.

¹² For example: Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament, p. 5; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Supplementary Submission 46.1*, 44th Parliament, p. [7]; Northern Territory Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Smith Family, *Submission 44*, 44th Parliament, p. 7; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament, p. 5; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, pp. 3-7; and Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament, p. 16.

Teaching through culture

3.20 Dr Christopher Matthews, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance, emphasised the importance of 'teaching in a way that utilises...cultural understanding'. He told the committee that students are often expected to memorise and regurgitate information without any context or understanding, and as a result are not learning the concepts behind the information or how to apply it.¹³

3.21 Dr Matthews explained that teaching is most effective when taught through a cultural lens to provide context and support student understanding:

I went to one school and a teacher came straight up to me – it is amazing what teachers do – and said, 'These kids can't multiply. I can't teach them maths, because they can't multiply.' I went, 'Okay, sure.' Then I sat down with one of the Ngunga teachers... We got together and started talking about seeing maths as more of a bunch of symbols put together to tell the story that is connected to the world that is around us. She presented this idea straight to the kids. They did a brainstorming session where the kids were confronted with two times three is equal to six and they were asked, 'What does this mean to you?' They wrote down all the language words – it was not just times, it was divide, plus and minus – that could connect them to that symbol. So we did that and then she set out a whole bunch of times tables, and the kids sat down and they were circling the symbols and writing the language words next to it and then working out the answer. I think that is a powerful approach instead of sitting there going to two times three equals six.¹⁴

3.22 Professor Thomas Cooper, YuMi Deadly Centre, Queensland University of Technology, agreed, asserting that:

The most powerful way to learn mathematics is to go from the whole to the part, to see the compass to build structures in the mind and to enable the new knowledge to fit into it. The best way to do that is actively, by movement or activity. But it has got to be related to the culture of the students. If I were in university and most of my students were African refugees, say, it would be their culture that I would be starting from and moving back into. But in

¹³ Dr Christopher Matthews, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 5 February 2016, p. 18.

¹⁴ Dr Christopher Matthews, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 5 February 2016, p. 18.

an Indigenous community it is Indigenous culture. Elders always say, 'We want them to be really good at maths but we want them to be strong on their culture.' The first thing is to try and maintain both, and I believe you can, very strongly. I believe a lot of the problems with Indigenous students is that it is not done.¹⁵

Teaching through language

- 3.23 Indigenous languages are the foundation upon which the capacity to learn, interact and to shape identity is built. In 2012, the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs found that there are high numbers of Indigenous students in urban, regional and remote areas with a first language or dialect other than Standard Australian English.
- 3.24 In 2012, the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs recommended that all teachers working in schools with Indigenous students should be required to complete English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) and cultural awareness training as part of mandatory professional development. The committee also called for ESL/D training to be made a compulsory component for all teaching degrees.¹⁶ The Federal Government agreed, in principle, to both recommendations.¹⁷
- 3.25 The Australian Education Union (AEU) highlighted a study on bilingual education which found that children who are monolingual in a language other than English need explicit teaching of the English language, by trained ESL/D teachers, before they can learn through English as the medium of instruction. As a result, the AEU stated:

We believe students who have an Indigenous language or dialect as their first, second or third language should attract appropriate ESL support and funding and call for well-resourced, appropriately staffed bilingual education programs, where communities choose to support bilingual programs in local schools.¹⁸

¹⁵ Professor Thomas Cooper, YuMi Deadly Centre, Queensland University of Technology, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 5 February 2016, p. 18.

¹⁶ House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, September 2012, pp. 156–157.

¹⁷ Australian Government, *Response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs report: Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*, June 2013, pp. 12–13.

¹⁸ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, p. 36.

- 3.26 In the current inquiry, whilst the majority of submissions acknowledged the important role that Indigenous languages play in terms of connection to culture and kinship, views regarding bilingual education and teaching in Indigenous languages were mixed.¹⁹
- 3.27 Whilst the Central Land Council (CLC) acknowledged the importance of English proficiency, it cautioned against the belief that the solution lies in largely removing Indigenous languages from schools. It asserted that:
- Aboriginal people in Central Australia have long viewed education success in terms of students that are confident in their Arrernte, Warlpiri or Pitjantjatjara identities, the incorporation of local language and knowledge frameworks, alongside strong mainstream education outcomes... This includes a long-standing desire for the delivery of bilingual programs in remote schools. Where language, culture and country visits are incorporated into school programs, community engagement with the school increases.²⁰
- 3.28 Mr James Tucker, Principal, Kulkarriya Community School, noted that:
- [I]n terms of learning standard Australian English, our kids are learning standard Australian English from the moment they walk in the door. The community is happy with that process at the moment. Different leadership in community or a different school board might see that differently. As I said, we have had pretty stable governance for the last 10 to 15 years. It is pretty clear that the school board and the school committee want the kids to be able to speak and understand Australian English, they want them to be able to do some numeracy and they want them to have the things to compete in the dominant culture.²¹
- 3.29 However, Mr Tobias Nganbe, Managing Director, Thamarrurr Development Corporation, told the committee that, in Wadeye, it is not necessary for students to be taught language and culture at school because they are fully immersed in culture and language at home and in

¹⁹ For example: National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University, *Submission 53*, 44th Parliament; Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; World Vision Australia, *Submission 12*, 44th Parliament; Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament; Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament; Save the Children, *Submission 59*, 44th Parliament; Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle, *Submission 15*, 44th Parliament; and Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament.

²⁰ Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 16.

²¹ Mr James (Ted) Tucker, Principal, Kulkarriya Community School, *Committee Hansard*, Fitzroy Crossing, 27 June 2017, pp. 18-19.

community. Rather, he asserted there needs to be a greater focus on teaching students English and the 'western way of doing things'. He noted that:

I am not jealous, but my feelings are not good when I see a Yolngu kid in Darwin doing their own thing, going to the store and getting a bus with their parents; whereas with our mob, the Murrinh-Patha people, are still not comfortable, they are still not confident, because of the English language. They need to operate in English. The money does not come with Murrinh-Patha. And then all of the things that are happening in this community – English is the language that, as far as I am concerned, the school must really focus on.²²

Committee comment

- 3.30 Australia is a nation of many cultures and languages, where a good proportion of students speak a language other than English at home. There are many students who enter the Australian education system, at a range of year levels, who had been living overseas and may have very limited English comprehension. It is widely understood and accepted that students that speak English as a second language or dialect (ESL/D students) are not less intelligent or less capable than students for whom English is a first language. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that learning English while being instructed in English is challenging and often requires intensive support.
- 3.31 Throughout the inquiry, the committee was disappointed to hear that the ability to speak an Indigenous language is rarely recognised in the same way as the ability to speak a foreign language. The committee is of the view that all ESL/D language students should have access to an Intensive English Language program as well as in-classroom support; regardless of whether the student's first language is an Australian Indigenous language or a foreign language.
- 3.32 The committee notes the differing views regarding teaching Indigenous languages in schools. This wide variety of opinion highlights that, as with many other policies and programs, one size does not fit all. Policy regarding the balance between English and Indigenous languages being taught must be steered by the community. The committee agrees with the CLC's assertion that, where a community is committed to the

²² Mr Tobias Nganbe, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Thamarrurr Development Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, pp. 3–4.

implementation of a bilingual program, local schools should be supported to implement the program.

- 3.33 However, the committee acknowledges that for many schools it may not be possible or practical to provide bilingual education in an Indigenous language. This may be because the school has only a small number of Indigenous students, or because the Indigenous students at a school may be from a range of different culture and language groups. Nonetheless, all schools should value and celebrate the Indigenous languages spoken by students and local communities and encourage and support students to maintain and strengthen their first languages.

Recommendation 8 (Priority)

- 3.34 **The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Minister for Education take a proposal to the Council of Australian Governments to:**
- **make English as a Second Language or Dialect (ESL/D) training a compulsory component for all teaching degrees;**
 - **require all teachers already working in schools with a substantial number of Indigenous students to complete in-service ESL/D training as part of mandatory professional development; and**
 - **where relevant, an opportunity be provided to teachers to undertake local language training if this will assist in performing their functions, improving communications with their students, as well as forging better relations with the community.**

Indigenous teachers and leadership

- 3.35 Evidence received by the committee clearly demonstrated that schools place high value on the work of Indigenous teachers, whether they are qualified teachers or working as assistant teachers, liaison officers, and other staff.²³

²³ For example: Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; Assistant Professor Dr Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament; Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory

- 3.36 Ms Taneshia Atkinson told the committee that the support she received from the full-time Indigenous liaison officer ‘really did help me further my education’. She explained that:

I had an Aboriginal liaison officer – I went to Kingscliff High School in northern New South Wales – who was just one of the most remarkable women I have met. She took me under her wing and she really mothered me. She was a positive role model for me and she really encouraged me to finish high school...I believe that the fact that I was provided with a culturally appropriate space and an Aboriginal liaison officer really did help me further my education.²⁴

- 3.37 Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, Australian National University, explained that her research found that ‘having more Indigenous staff – specifically Indigenous teaching staff and also Indigenous support staff – was one of the greatest strengths of the schools that had them’.²⁵

- 3.38 Mr Mark Tunmuck Smith, Youth Service Coordinator, Thathangathay Foundation, told the committee that the involvement and engagement of community elders in his school had a significant impact on attendance and encouraged educational achievement:

I will just go back to my school years in Wadeye...It was different back then because there were a lot of elders, and we used to respect a lot, and we used to do the right thing in school... The right thing is making sure you listen to your teachers, you listen to what you get told and you make sure you stay focussed... Nowadays, I see kids disrespecting their parents and walking off from school, when they should be in school learning.²⁶

- 3.39 Mr Romulo Tchernia, Director, and Mr Russell Melphi, Support Staff, Thathangathay Foundation, agreed, explaining that when they were at school, the presence of elders had a significant impact on whether or not they attended.²⁷

Council, *Submission 2*, 44th Parliament; and Broome Senior High School, *Submission 46*, 45th Parliament.

²⁴ Ms Taneshia Atkinson, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 May 2017, p. 9.

²⁵ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 22.

²⁶ Mr Mark Tunmuck Smith, Youth Service Coordinator, Thathangathay Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, pp. 13–14.

²⁷ Mr Romulo Tchernia, Director, and Mr Russell Melphi, Support Staff, Thathangathay Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 14.

- 3.40 The More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) was a national five-year research project undertaken by the University of South Australia and funded by the Federal Government, that sought to increase the:
- number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in teaching positions in Australian schools;
 - capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and
 - retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in teaching positions.²⁸
- 3.41 The MATSITI Final Report noted that between 2012 and 2015, the number of Indigenous teachers increased by 16.5% due to recruitment and improved levels of Indigenous identification.²⁹
- 3.42 The CLC asserted that ‘increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers per school and providing them with training and professional development...is a critical factor necessary for improving education outcomes’.³⁰

Committee comment

- 3.43 It is clear that an increase in Indigenous teachers, teaching assistants and liaison officers with a connection to the community would not only provide an element of cultural safety in schools, but would also help to provide consistency and stability in terms of staff resources.
- 3.44 The committee agrees with the CLC’s calls for expansions of Aboriginal Assistant Teacher allocations and programs to address the barriers to increasing the number of Indigenous teachers. The committee supports the call for the Australian Council of Australian Governments Education Council to recommit to a more equitable ratio of teachers to Indigenous students.
- 3.45 The committee commends the work undertaken by the MATSITI.

²⁸ Professor Peter Buckskin, *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative: Final Report*, September 2016, p. 12.

²⁹ Professor Peter Buckskin, *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative: Final Report*, September 2016, p. 6.

³⁰ Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 18.

Engagement programs

- 4.1 Throughout the inquiry, the committee was consistently surprised and concerned about the lack of data available regarding attendance and education outcomes for Indigenous students. Whilst programs and initiatives that encourage students and their families to engage with school are critical in addressing non-attendance and the resultant poor NAPLAN scores, they must be based on an accurate understanding of what is causing the issues in the first instance.
- 4.2 Noting the lack of data, and that there is no silver bullet for such a complex problem, the committee focussed on gathering evidence about programs that appeared successful and the reasons for that success. As the committee received evidence, it became clear that there was a huge disparity between the number of programs available to boys in comparison to girls. This chapter considers some of the common narratives of these programs and initiatives and illustrates this with case studies.

Gender differences

- 4.3 PM&C noted that, in 2015, the average school attendance rate (Year 1 to 10) for Indigenous girls was 84.3% compared to 83.2% for Indigenous boys. Furthermore, 50.7% of Indigenous girls attended school 90% or more of the time, compared with 47.7% of boys.¹

¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Supplementary Submission 43.1*, 44th Parliament, p. 7.

- 4.4 PM&C advised that 'Indigenous girls outperform Indigenous boys in reading across all year levels and across all remoteness areas'.² The 2017 Closing the Gap Report explained that the gap between girls and boys is considerably larger for Indigenous students than for non-Indigenous students, noting that 'for reading literacy, on average 15 year-old Indigenous males are performing about one-and-a-third years of schooling below their Indigenous female peers'.³
- 4.5 However, in 2016, Dr Nicholas Biddle and Ms Anneke Meehl conducted research exploring the differences in participation and education outcomes for Indigenous students. Dr Biddle and Ms Meehl cautioned that, despite Indigenous girls' relative high performance, 'it would be incorrect and, indeed, dangerous to assume that Indigenous girls no longer require support to achieve positive education outcomes'.⁴
- 4.6 Dr Biddle and Ms Meehl found that, despite more Indigenous females completing Year 12, Indigenous males are more likely to hold post-school qualifications:
- In 2011, 45% of working-age Indigenous males had a postschool qualification, compared with 42% of Indigenous females... This disparity was greatest in the area of certificate attainment: 33% of working-age Indigenous males had a certificate compared with only 23% of Indigenous females.⁵

Gender equity

- 4.7 Throughout the inquiry, the evidence clearly demonstrated that there is a significant disparity between the availability of, and funding for engagement and mentoring programs for girls compared to that provided for boys. It is essential that all coeducational schools that offer an engagement or mentoring program for boys also offer a comparable program for girls.

² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Supplementary Submission 43.1*, 44th Parliament, p. 7.

³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2017*, p. 40.

⁴ Dr Nicholas Biddle and Ms Anneke Meehl, 'The gendered nature of Indigenous education participation and attainment', *Working Paper No. 106/2016*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, p. 12.

⁵ Dr Nicholas Biddle and Ms Anneke Meehl, 'The gendered nature of Indigenous education participation and attainment', *Working Paper No. 106/2016*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, p. 4.

- 4.8 Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, gave evidence to the inquiry on two occasions, emphasising the importance, relevance, and need for gender equity:

...the holistic wraparound support to place based, school based programs supporting young Aboriginal women is absolutely essential if we are ever to close the gap. If we do not have young, educated, empowered women, these girls will be having babies very soon, and the chances are that their children will not have the benefit of educated, employable, empowered mothers that are going to then be able to create a positive future pathway for them. So we know absolutely – and I know I am not telling anyone here anything – that it is the empowerment and education of women that changes not just the future life course for them, in terms of their health, social skills, employment and wellbeing outcomes, but also the future of their families and communities.⁶

- 4.9 The disparity in funding for school-based ‘academy-style’ programs was acknowledged by Dr James Watterston, Director-General, Queensland Department of Education and Training. He explained that:

Fundamentally, we have been trying to seed fund similar organisations that focus on girls...So we are growing the market. I think we have four programs that we are piloting now. The plan is to get equity right across the state, to make sure any young Indigenous people who are struggling with engagement and support around the school day, which is what Clontarf and other organisations do, are able to access that support. So we are not going to be rolling back from here, we want to push this right out.⁷

- 4.10 Role Models and Leaders Australia, which runs the Girls Academy program, stated that ‘there is a serious gender imbalance in investment in Indigenous education support programs’.⁸ It observed that ‘investment in boys outweighs investment in girls by approximately 300%’⁹. Mr Ricky Grace told the committee that:

...it is humbling to see the thirst in these girls’ eyes for a program. The humbling part for me is to see something that they have been wanting for a long time. Especially in places where they are

⁶ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 32.

⁷ Dr James Watterston, Director-General, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 23.

⁸ Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Prospectus: Girls Academy Program 2017*, p. 8.

⁹ Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Prospectus: Girls Academy Program 2017*, p. 8.

looking to the side and smelling bacon and egg breakfasts for the boys and then nothing for them.¹⁰

Equity of funding

4.11 In its interim report for this inquiry, the committee found that ‘there is an urgent need to provide additional funding to ensure that the number and type of girls’ programs funded and delivered is comparable to that of boys, particularly in the area of integrated school based programs’.¹¹

4.12 PM&C advised that, in 2014, 60 academies had full-time staff based in the school for the entire day, every school day. However, of these, Clontarf had been funded for 48 boys-only academies, in contrast to the 12 girls-only academies run by Role Models and Leaders Australia.¹²

4.13 The decision-making process regarding allocation of funding appears to be marked by a distinct lack of transparency and unwillingness to explain the basis upon which decisions were made. When asked about the funding disparity between girls programs and boys programs, Ms Liz Hefren-Webb, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), explained that:

We are not resourced to fund activities for every Indigenous child in every school...[D]ecisions have to be made about allocation of resources, and that is what has been made.¹³

4.14 A further barrier for funding girls programs appears to be the requirement in some states for the engagement program to be a sports-based program. As Mr Alan Bradley, Board Member, SHINE, highlighted:

Even though we met all of the other criteria, we are not a sports-based program, so we did not meet the guidelines. There has not been an opportunity for state-based funding for us. Despite a number of different programs which have been sports based being funded through various means, we have not met any of the guidelines for those programs in order to receive state funding, which is an interesting point because the Federal Government has said to us: 'It's interesting that you don't have any state support. If

¹⁰ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, pp. 20–22.

¹¹ House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Interim Report: First Steps for improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, 2016, pp. 19–23.

¹² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Supplementary Submission 43.1*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

¹³ Ms Liz Hefren-Webb, First Assistant Secretary, Schools, Information and Evaluation, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 April 2016, p. 16.

you don't have state support, why should we support you?' So there is a question mark hanging over our IAS money there.¹⁴

- 4.15 Mr Grace told the committee of his shock at the discovery that inequity of funding was permissible under Australia law.¹⁵ He explained that many Indigenous girls face significant barriers to education:

Gender inequity and investment in programs for Aboriginal girls versus boys is of great community concern, and we seek to address this with the government, corporate and philanthropic sectors. Indeed, the barriers to education faced by girls around teen pregnancy, domestic violence and the carrying of domestic duties for parents, siblings and relatives present a strong case for girls requiring equal, if not more, support to that of boys.¹⁶

- 4.16 Ms Goddard agreed, noting that when she was General Manager for Development at the Clontarf Foundation the most common comment she received was 'this is great for boys but what about the girls?' She explained that:

...the boys would be going off on trips and engaging in lots of different activities and experiences and the girls would have to go and do a car wash to fundraise to drive to the next town...So it was a huge contrast in terms of the experiential opportunities that were available to the girls, when there was a highly established and full-time funded model for boys.¹⁷

- 4.17 After the committee visited Kununurra District High School and saw both the Clontarf and Girls Academies in action, the Principal, Mr Peter Thatcher, explained that 'it is on the record that the Girls Academy is not funded anywhere near the Clontarf program'. A fact which is clearly demonstrated by the difference in resources each academy enjoyed at the school. Clontarf has five staff, allowing for a 25 to 1 ratio; compared with the Girls Academy's two staff allowing for a 50 to 1 ratio. Mr Thatcher also noted that 'Clontarf has two troop carriers, a bus et cetera – they have got

¹⁴ Mr Alan Bradley, Board Member, SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc., Committee Hansard, Geraldton, 2 May 2017, p. 36.

¹⁵ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, Committee Hansard, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 18.

¹⁶ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, Committee Hansard, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 22.

¹⁷ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, Proof Committee Hansard, Canberra, 19 April 2016, p. 3.

it all – whereas the Girls Academy at the moment is nowhere near as well funded'.¹⁸

- 4.18 Similarly, Ms Cath Winfield, Deputy Principal, Broome Senior High School, told the committee that the Clontarf Academy has seven staff for the 158 boys in the program, whereas the Girls Academy has three staff for its 127 girls.¹⁹
- 4.19 The Stars Foundation called for the Federal Government to ensure that, wherever funding is provided to boys programs such as Clontarf, equivalent funding be provided to girls programs, noting that 'to not do so leaves the Commonwealth open to the criticism of discriminatory policies and of failure to treat young Aboriginal women equitably'.²⁰
- 4.20 In June 2017, Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan noted with some consternation the continued discrepancy in funding between girls and boys programs stating that '\$40 million was granted to the mentoring and support of young men just last week, compared to \$9 million for young women'.²¹

Committee comment

- 4.21 The committee remains deeply troubled by the significant disparity between the availability and funding for engagement and mentoring programs for girls compared to that provided for boys. What is worse is that this disparity appears to be compounded by governments limiting funding for engagement and mentoring programs to sports-based programs.
- 4.22 It is essential that all coeducational schools that offer an engagement or mentoring program for boys also offer a comparable program for girls. These girls are the mothers and carers of the next generation of Indigenous students. As such, their education is critical to improving the health, education, and employment of not only themselves but their children and future generations.
- 4.23 The committee raised concerns regarding this matter in its interim report; however, to date, the committee has received no government response regarding its recommendations. The committee remains concerned that public funds are unintentionally contributing to the further entrenchment

¹⁸ Mr Peter Thatcher, Principal, Kununurra District High School, *Committee Hansard*, Kununurra, 28 June 2017, pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ Ms Cath Winfield, Deputy Principal, Broome Senior High School, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 29 June 2017, p. 30.

²⁰ Stars Foundation, *Submission 57*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

²¹ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 June 2017, p. 9.

of gender inequality for young Indigenous women and their access to educational opportunities.

- 4.24 The committee wishes to reiterate that it does not support any redirection of funding to girls programs at the expense of currently funded boys programs. The funding provided to Clontarf, and other organisations delivering boys programs, is vital and the results it has achieved emphasise the necessity of continuing this funding. The committee also acknowledges that the Federal Government has recently funded other programs targeting girls; however, these are not academy models and do not have the same full-time on-site mentoring staff.
- 4.25 The committee recommends that, in future rounds of grants applications under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Federal Government ensure that the number and especially the type of boys' and girls' education engagement and mentoring programs are funded equitably, and if necessary, undertake to fund additional programs to rectify gender inequity.

Recommendation 9 (Priority)

- 4.26 **The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Federal Government review and reform its policy approach and processes for evaluating grant applications under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to provide funding parity to education engagement and mentoring programs catering to girls, comparable to that of similar programs catering to boys, so as to ensure gender equity and equivalence of program provision.**

Attendance strategies

- 4.27 Regular attendance is directly linked to academic achievement. A 2013 report prepared for the Department of Education found that there is no 'safe threshold' of absence before academic achievement is impacted:

In all analyses, average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased.²²

²² Kirsten Hancock et al, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, May, 2013, p. v.

- 4.28 Furthermore, the effects of absence accumulate over time. The report noted that ‘absence from school was related to academic achievement in numeracy, reading and writing not only in the current year, but in future years as well’.²³

Remote School Attendance Strategy

- 4.29 The Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) is a Federal Government initiative that commenced in 2014. It is intended to lift school attendance levels in selected remote communities:

[RSAS] Team members are local people from the community. They may be mums, dads, caregivers, aunties, uncles or grandparents who want to help kids in the community get to school.

School attendance teams work closely with teachers, parents and the community to develop a community plan to identify ways to ensure all children in the community go to school every day.²⁴

- 4.30 PM&C advised that the RSAS is operating in 77 schools across 74 remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, and New South Wales, where attendance rates are below 70% or 80%.²⁵
- 4.31 PM&C advised the committee that ‘weekly attendance data show RSAS is having positive results in the majority of participating schools, particularly those in the Northern Territory and Queensland’. In the Northern Territory there was an overall 3.2% increase in the attendance rate across participating government schools from Term 2, 2013 to Term 2, 2015. In Queensland there was an overall 3% increase in the attendance rate across participating government schools from Term 2, 2013 to Term 2, 2015.²⁶

School Enrolment and Attendance Measure

- 4.32 The School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) is a Federal Government initiative that commenced in 2013 in a number of communities in the Northern Territory. It is intended to support parents

²³ Kirsten Hancock et al, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, May 2013, p. v.

²⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, ‘Remote School Attendance Strategy’, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/remote-school-attendance-strategy>, accessed 15 September 2017.

²⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 9.

²⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, pp. 9–10.

and carers to ensure that their school-age children are enrolled in school and attending school regularly.²⁷ SEAM has two elements:

- **enrolment:** under which, if parents or carers fail to provide information about their child's enrolment to the Department of Human Services, and do not have a reasonable excuse for doing so, welfare payments may be suspended; and
- **attendance:** under which, if a student is identified as having low school attendance within a SEAM community, their parents or carers, will be required to participate in a compulsory conference to discuss the barriers to regular attendance, and agree to improve their child's attendance under a school attendance plan. If these requirements are not met, certain welfare payments may be suspended.²⁸

Concerns

- 4.33 Some participants raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of RSAS and SEAM. The Central Land Council noted that 'policy initiatives aimed at improving remote attendance, such as the SEAM and the RSAS, have failed to considerably improve attendance'.²⁹
- 4.34 Ms Cheryl Pilkington, Team Leader, Save the Children in Wadeye, criticised the SEAM program, telling the committee that the program does not work as an incentive for attendance and only exacerbates food insecurity.³⁰
- 4.35 Ninti One was also critical of the SEAM program, stating that:
- Despite the lack of evidence for the effectiveness of this program and calls for evaluation (Australian National Audit Office, 2014), the program has continued.³¹

Committee comment

- 4.36 The committee notes the criticisms regarding the impact of the RSAS and the SEAM. The committee supports the aims of the programs, but is concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the effectiveness and

²⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'School Enrolment and Attendance Measure', <https://www.pmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/education/school-enrolment-and-attendance-measure>, accessed 15 September 2017.

²⁸ Australian National Audit Office, *Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure*, Audit Report No. 51 (2013-14), pp. 14-15.

²⁹ Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 16.

³⁰ Ms Cheryl Pilkington, Team Leader, Intensive Family Support Service, and Play2Learn Program, Save the Children, *Committee Hansard*, Wadeye, 5 April 2017, p. 26.

³¹ Ninti One Limited, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

performance of the programs. All federal programs and programs receiving federal funding should have appropriate systems and procedures in place for collecting, analysing and reporting information and data to measure performance.

Engagement programs

School-based 'academy-style' programs

- 4.37 Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw a number of 'academy-style' programs aimed at improving attendance and engagement. Many of these programs use sport as a 'hook' to engage students; however there are some aimed at students interested in certain careers.
- 4.38 Regardless of the 'hook', these engagement programs encourage attendance and provide wide-ranging support for students. Most programs only cater to either boys or girls, very few cater to both. In addition to providing mentoring and education support, these programs strengthen:
- **cultural safety:** providing culturally safe spaces, connections to community, and celebrating Indigenous identities and cultures;
 - **health and nutrition:** providing food and educating students about nutrition, providing drug and alcohol education, as well as encouraging physical activity and sport;
 - **wellbeing:** strengthening resilience, mental health, and building confidence and self-esteem, as well as teaching and modelling respect and valuing differences;
 - **community engagement and leadership:** providing opportunities to support and lead teams as well as encouraging volunteering and giving back to community; and
 - **life skills and careers:** encouraging and supporting students to achieve academically and set post-school goals, as well as providing work-readiness training and often supporting students even after graduation.

Girls

- 4.39 As noted above, there is a significant disparity in the support provided to girls, compared to what is available for boys. A variety of academy-style programs has developed to cater to girls, with hooks ranging from sports such as basketball and netball to career-focussed hooks such as hairdressing.

Case study – Girls Academy

4.40 The Role Models and Leaders Australia Girls Academy is the largest school-based ‘academy-style’ program for girls and caters to 2,500 girls in 34 schools across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales. Mr Ricky Grace, Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, told the committee:

We are structured as an academy model, with a dedicated academy room in each of the schools where we operate. The room is a safe haven and sanctuary for the girls, where they know they can rely on our full-time professional staff to assist them in any way necessary, either through direct support or through referral, depending on the issue...The academy takes girls from 12 years old and works with them within the secondary school system until they complete their schooling. Girls receive up to six years of intensive mentoring and support from our team of skilled staff, 80% of whom are highly accomplished Aboriginal women.³²

4.41 Mr Grace told the committee that Girls Academy uses a ‘community-led locally-led approach’, explaining that ‘we work closely with local Aboriginal groups well before we go into the school...at every academy...there is an advisory committee [that] comprises local Aboriginal leaders, parents of the girls in that academy, and school leaders, as well as some corporate supporters’. Mr Grace explained that 80% of Girls Academy staff are local Aboriginal women who have been recommended as role models within the local community by the advisory committee. These women are then provided with professional development in a range of areas, including leadership development, conflict management, literacy, and financial literacy.³³

4.42 Mr Grace emphasised the importance of the strong relationships and trust that the girls have with the Girls Academy mentors:

If [the participants] are struggling with whatever issue, they tend to come to us because of that relationship that we have built. As you heard, it is a six-year mentoring program, so we build a really good relationship with these girls.³⁴

³² Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 18.

³³ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 21.

³⁴ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 19.

- 4.43 Mr Grace explained that Girls Academy is embedded in the school timetable, providing comprehensive support for girls throughout the school day, with programs tailored for the different age-groups of girls:

We provide breakfast programs. Some of the girls arrive maybe without having had breakfast, and it is hard I guess to have the energy to go through a full day and learn if you are not properly fed, so we provide breakfast programs. In most of the schools, we are embedded into the timetable. For instance, we will see the year 7s and year 8s twice a week; we will see the year 9s and year 10s at a different time; we will see the year 11s and year 12s at a different time. The programs that we provide for these year groups are made specifically to address the needs of that year group.

If there are students who are having trouble in school or having trouble settling in a classroom, our staff will oftentimes sit in the classroom with these girls just to help them settle in.³⁵

- 4.44 Role Models and Leaders Australia reported that, in its 5 years of operation of the Girls Academy program:
- over 5000 Indigenous girls have participated in the program;
 - Year 12 enrolments have increased by 276%;
 - Year 12 graduation rates have increased by 76%;
 - national academy attendance rates sat 11.2% higher than the all Indigenous student cohort; and
 - all participants graduated with a post-school plan, with 41% intending to undertake further education.³⁶

Case study – Stars Foundation

- 4.45 The Stars Foundation, based in the Northern Territory, offers similar academy-style support to female Indigenous students. The Stars Foundation, which commenced in mid-2015, after winning a tender against other providers, currently caters to approximately 450 girls in eight schools in the Northern Territory. The program is also due to commence in Townsville in 2018, catering for 250 girls across three high schools: Heatley Secondary College, Thuringowa State High School and Pimlico State High School over the next three years.³⁷

³⁵ Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 19.

³⁶ Role Models and Leaders Australia, *Prospectus: Girls Academy Program 2017*, p. 4.

³⁷ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, Correspondence, received 4 December 2017.

- 4.46 Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, highlighted the importance of utilising both male and female role models:
- Certainly in respect of Stars it was critical for us that we had men involved in support programs for young women. More than 40% of Aboriginal kids are raised in single parent families. Most of those are raised by mums, nannas, aunties. They are raised by women, so men are largely absent from young people's lives, whether it is girls or boys. For us it was essential that the girls had the opportunity to develop respectful, trusting relationships with strong male role models so that they could feel, look at and hear what those relationships were like, as well as seeing men and women working together respectfully, in a professional capacity and at a very, very high level.³⁸
- 4.47 Ms Goddard emphasised the importance of the guidance and experiences of Indigenous peoples in setting up and running the Stars Foundation. She noted that the Stars Foundation board is Chaired by Ms Marion Scrymgour, a well-known Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory³⁹ and passionate advocate for Indigenous peoples. Ms Scrymgour is also a role model for young Indigenous women, as the first Indigenous woman to be a minister in any government in Australia.⁴⁰
- 4.48 During its site visit at Casuarina Secondary College, Stars participants hosted the committee. The girls were friendly, confident, and articulate when telling the committee about what they were learning, both at Stars and at school. The committee also met a range of Stars staff, including transition staff, whose job it is to assist girls into employment or further education and training.
- 4.49 During the visit, the Principal, Mr Paul Matthews, emphasised the value of the program and the significant impact that it has had on improving the girls' attendance and performance. He described the program as a catalyst in attracting young women to attend school and to strive to achieve, to do their best.
- 4.50 The committee was impressed by the program's unique focus on providing girls with both strong female and male role models. It is essential that girls, particularly those who may not have positive male role

³⁸ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 33.

³⁹ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 34.

⁴⁰ 'NT Deputy Scrymgour makes history', *The Age*, 26 November 2007, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/11/26/1196036806597.html>, accessed 30 November 2017.

models in the lives, be given the opportunity to develop respectful trusting relationships with male role models and to see positive and respectful interactions between men and women. These girls are the mothers and carers of the future and these experiences will assist them to develop and build positive relationships with the men in their lives.

- 4.51 The Stars Foundation advised that, in 2017, 47 of the 50 girls who commenced Year 12 with Stars completed Year 12, of which at least 32 are expected to achieve their Northern Territory Certificate of Education (NTCE). In addition, the majority of girls who did not achieve their NTCE are likely to return for Year 13 and complete the NTCE in 2018.⁴¹

Case study – SHINE

- 4.52 The SHINE program is based in Geraldton and currently has on-site salons at John Wilcock College and Geraldton Senior College. SHINE is a school-based engagement program for girls, which uses hairdressing as its ‘hook’.

- 4.53 Ms Mandy Jolley, Director, SHINE, told the committee that she founded the program after noticing a lack of services for the ‘large number of girls that were not interested in sport’ who were ‘lost, they had nothing to do and no one to talk to’.⁴² Ms Jolley explained that:

It is important too to make it clear that it is not about just hairdressing. That is just the hook. The girls are constantly complaining that they are not hitting the basins enough, because we are bringing in so many different dynamic presenters to ensure we are covering exactly what the girls need. The actual curriculum of the program changes and can be [tailored] for that particular group. There might be a high level of sexual assault, so there will be different presenters that will come in to address these situations. Being such a small group is very powerful, so we tend to break down a lot of the issues quite quickly. I think that is where the success is.⁴³

- 4.54 During its site visit at John Wilcock College, the SHINE participants hosted the committee in a tour of their salon and explained how they are taught, not only hairdressing, but how to run and work in a salon. The girls explained that they are given experience interacting with clients and

⁴¹ Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director, Stars Foundation, Correspondence, received 4 December 2017.

⁴² Ms Mandy Jolley, Director/Founder, SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc., *Committee Hansard*, Geraldton, 2 May 2017, p. 30.

⁴³ Ms Mandy Jolley, Director/Founder, SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc., *Committee Hansard*, Geraldton, 2 May 2017, p. 30.

are taught how to take and manage appointments both in person and over the phone. One girl told the committee that the program not only supported her at school but also taught her how to be confident, proud, and feel beautiful.

- 4.55 The committee was impressed by the program's model, which provided a school-based 'academy-style' program whilst also allowing the girls to experience and build confidence within a workplace environment. Not only does this increase the chances of employment after school, but it also caters to those young people who may not be interested in sport and would not be attracted by a sporting 'hook'.

Boys

- 4.56 There may be a smaller variety of school-based 'academy-style' programs directed at boys; however, the number of academies for boys significantly outnumbers those for girls.

Case study – Clontarf Academy

- 4.57 The Clontarf Foundation is by far the largest school-based 'academy-style' program in Australia. It currently caters to over 5,600 boys in 92 schools across Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy, explained that:

In New South Wales it is based on Rugby League, in the western and southern states it is based on Aussie Rules, and the passion that the boys have for that is the carrot to get them interested in the program. It is completely voluntary... They come up and get a note and do that themselves, which gives them a buy-in... there is that carrot, but then they realise pretty quickly that it is not a football program and that it is about a lot more than that.⁴⁴

- 4.58 Any Indigenous boy enrolled at the school is eligible to participate in Clontarf Academy. However, in order to remain in the program, boys must endeavour to:
- attend school regularly;
 - apply themselves to the study of appropriate courses; and
 - embrace Clontarf's requirements for behaviour and self-discipline.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy, Clontarf Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Dubbo, 23 March 2016, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2016*, p. 2.

4.59 Mr Lee told the committee that boys must maintain high attendance rates to play football games, attend camps and other activities. He explained that, if a boy is not at school, the Clontarf staff will 'go and see what is going on: send a text, make a call, do what we need to do'. Boys are held accountable for their attendance by both Clontarf staff and their fellow participants.⁴⁶

4.60 Mr Lee highlighted the important role that Clontarf plays in making boys feel welcome, valued and respected by the school. He explained that the boys 'know that they are getting respected and they pass that back in kind and then they start to enjoy school'. He noted that the boys 'start to feel as though they belong in Clontarf and they belong in school' and that this 'changes the entire dynamic of them turning up'.⁴⁷

4.61 Mr Christopher McDonald, Regional Manager, New South Wales, Clontarf Foundation, told the committee that Clontarf strengthens relationships within the school, particularly between boys and their teachers:

Some teachers might be having issues with particular students. We open the door to all the staff at school and say: 'Come up and try and develop a different sort of relationship with that student. Give them a game of table tennis, come to our footy training, share a bacon and egg roll with them – have something in common with them, apart from, "I am your science teacher; sit down and do your science work.'" Our door is open for all staff to access. Those teachers who have developed or changed their relationship with their students have put in as well. We have got these kids back to school.⁴⁸

4.62 Mr Lee explained that Clontarf also strengthens and builds connections between the community, families, and the school:

It is because of that contact and relationship we have with the families that they are all coming to the parent-teacher interviews and taking more of an interest in their children's education. So it is a real win that we have with communities, homes and schools that probably would not be there otherwise.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy, Clontarf Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Dubbo, 23 March 2016, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷ Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy, Clontarf Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Dubbo, 23 March 2016, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Mr Christopher McDonald, Regional Manager, New South Wales, Clontarf Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Dubbo, 23 March 2016, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy, Clontarf Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Dubbo, 23 March 2016, p. 17.

- 4.63 In 2016, the Clontarf Foundation reported that, the average annual cost per boy was \$7,350, against a budget of \$7,500, and that across all of its academies:
- there was a retention rate⁵⁰ of 92% against a target of 90%;
 - there was an attendance rate of 79% against a target of 80%, and that 61% of Academy members had an attendance rate of 80% or better;
 - 384 boys completed Year 12; and
 - 85% of the boys who completed Year 12 in 2015 remained in jobs or further education after 12 months of leaving school, against a target of 80%.⁵¹

Skills-focussed programs

- 4.64 Some programs focus on providing students with practical experience and qualifications to prepare them for employment and life after school. Many of the secondary schools that the committee visited throughout the inquiry provided opportunities for students to undertake vocational education and training (VET) courses during their studies.
- 4.65 However, as with ‘academy-style’ programs, many of these appeared to be providing greater opportunities for boys rather than girls. That said, some notable examples of skills-focussed engagement programs include:
- **Kimberley Education for Life:** delivered by Kununurra District High School, which incorporates a paid school-based traineeship comprising two days per week on the job experience and a Certificate II in their chosen industry;⁵² and
 - **EarthTec:** delivered by Yirara College, which provides training on heavy machinery, such as bobcats and excavators, using both simulators and actual machinery.⁵³ The college also offers a wide range of competency-based short courses with a focus on life and work skills, together with a number of VET classes as well as work experience through partnerships with a range of local businesses.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ The number of Academy members at the end of the year who are either still at the school, at another school or educational institution, or who are in employment or undertaking training, expressed as a percentage of the total number of boys enrolled in the Academy at the start of the year.

⁵¹ Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2016*, p. 6.

⁵² Kununurra District High School, *Kimberley Education for Life*, <https://kununurradistricthigh.com/kefl/>, accessed 14 September 2017.

⁵³ Mr Roger Ashcroft, Principal, Yirara College, *Committee Hansard*, Alice Springs, 4 April 2017, pp. 14–15.

⁵⁴ Yirara College, *Submission 33*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2–3.

Case study – Learning on Country

- 4.66 A number of submissions highlighted the work of the Learning on Country Program (LoCP).⁵⁵ The program was established in 2013 and is primarily aimed at students from Year 10 to Year 12, with introductory activities for Year 7 to 9. It was initially run on four sites in Arnhem Land: Maningrida, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands (Yirrkala), and Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island).⁵⁶
- 4.67 LoCP provides an 'innovative educational approach that brings together Indigenous land and sea Rangers, schools, scientists, and Indigenous land owners "on country" and in classrooms to learn literacy and numeracy, science and work skills as well as local Indigenous knowledge'.⁵⁷ Dr William (Bill) Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University, told the committee that the LoCP utilises connections with communities, culture, and the land to engage students and improve attendance:
- But it is engagement in terms of community engaging in the educational program...about 65% of all the activities were done with community in some way or another, which is a big difference from perhaps your standard literacy and numeracy program that is delivered with chalk and talk but not a lot of context around it...this program certainly seems to be one that is engaging community in school in a new way and that has some good, solid pathways to further study and employment.⁵⁸
- 4.68 Dr Fogarty and Professor Mick Dodson, noted that the program was still in the early stages, but outlined key outcomes of the LoCP to date, including:
- improved attendance and retention of students;
 - increased awareness and access to pathways of employment for students;
 - intergenerational transfer of knowledge;

⁵⁵ For example: Dr Bill Fogarty and Professor Mick Dodson, *Submission 53*, 44th Parliament; Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament; and Madjulla Inc., *Submission 25*, 45th Parliament.

⁵⁶ Dr William Fogarty et al, *Learning on Country Program: Progress Evaluation Report*, May 2015, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Dr William Fogarty et al, *Learning on Country Program: Progress Evaluation Report*, May 2015, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Dr William (Bill) Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 4 February 2016, p. 7.

- improved engagement from the wider community in schooling; and
- demonstrable employment outcomes.⁵⁹

4.69 The progress evaluation report for the program, commissioned by PM&C, recommended that 'both the NT and Federal governments consider funding a staged rollout of the program beginning in January 2018', noting that:

The program has been well designed and early indications are that the model is capable of enduring common setbacks faced in remote circumstances (e.g. exponentially high staff turnover). Anecdotally, there is demand and support for the program in communities outside the trial sites.⁶⁰

Academic mentoring programs

4.70 Many of the secondary schools that the committee visited throughout the inquiry provided academic mentoring programs for students wishing to undertake university studies following secondary school. Below are a couple of examples of such programs.

Case study – Follow the Dream/Partnerships for Success

4.71 The Follow the Dream/Partnerships for Success program is operated by the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation, which caters to approximately 1,100 students, running 33 programs in 28 communities in Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and New South Wales.⁶¹ The program provides after school tuition, individual mentoring support, and case management in cooperation with schools:

It enables Aboriginal secondary school students who apply and are selected to participate to complete Year 12, enter tertiary studies or undertake other post school training or employment. These students are encouraged to go on to tertiary studies – university, TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships and employment.⁶²

⁵⁹ Dr Bill Fogarty and Professor Mick Dodson, *Submission 53*, 44th Parliament, pp. 17–18.

⁶⁰ Dr William Fogarty et al, *Learning on Country Program: Progress Evaluation Report*, May 2015, pp. 1–4.

⁶¹ Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation, <http://pff.com.au/locations/across-australia/>, accessed 14 September 2017.

⁶² Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation, <http://pff.com.au/programs/follow-the-dream/>, accessed 14 September 2017.

Case study – Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Program

4.72 A number of submissions drew the committee’s attention to the success of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Program (AIME).⁶³ AIME provides a structured educational program that students can access throughout secondary school. Mr Benjamin Abbatangelo, Co-Chief Executive Officer, AIME, explained that:

The way the program works is that we sort of drop a school of life on top of the education system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids come onto a university site for 50 one-hour sessions across their high school experience. The main foundation of this is that we're not saviours for the kids; we're simply a service stop for the kids that they can come to build their confidence, self-belief and strength in identity before going back to their schools to engage with the curriculum set out there and make the most of that. Importantly, throughout the year, we send university students out to the schools for 15 to 20 weeks to do one-on-one tutoring with the kids.⁶⁴

4.73 In 2015, AIME connected approximately 4,500 secondary students with more than 1,800 mentors across 37 locations, partnered with 18 Australian universities. By 2018, AIME is expected to cater to 10,000 Indigenous secondary students each year. AIME has three delivery modes:

- the AIME Institute delivered on campus at its partner universities;
- tutor squads deployed in schools with university student mentors; and
- one-to-one coaching, with post-school transition and career support.⁶⁵

4.74 The AIME program has achieved high rates of success whilst remaining cost effective. AIME told the committee that it is ‘the most cost-effective in Australia’, with a total annual cost of less than \$3,000 per student. AIME measures school progressions, Year 12 completion rates and university admissions of its participants, as well as tracks students who progress into further education, training or employment, reporting that:

- almost 100% of its participants progressed from Years 7 to 10;

⁶³ For example: Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament; Professor Jeannie Herbert AM, *Submission 8*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 36*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Supplementary Submission 18.2*, 44th Parliament; Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament; Balga Senior High School, *Submission 39*, 45th Parliament; and Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 23*, 44th Parliament.

⁶⁴ Mr Benjamin Abbatangelo, Mentor and Co-Chief Executive Officer, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Indigenous Corporation, *Submission 3*, 44th Parliament, p. [4].

- 94.8% of its participants progressed from Year 10 to Year 11 – higher than the non-Indigenous rate of 94.7%; and
- 93.2% of its Year 12 participants completed school – 6.7% above the non-Indigenous rate of 86.5%.⁶⁶

Outside the safety nets

- 4.75 Despite the achievements of these programs, the evidence clearly demonstrated that there are many students who are sitting ‘outside the safety nets’.
- 4.76 The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia explained that many states and territories have independent special assistance schools that cater for students at high educational risk, known in Western Australia as Curriculum and Reengagement in Education (CARE) Schools:
- ...some of the CARE schools have up to 70% Indigenous students...Often these students come from homes where meals and healthcare are irregular and the supportive home environment afforded most young Australians is often not their experience. Many of the young people in CARE schools have had a number of encounters with the justice system and the schools continue to support these students when in remand and in correctional facilities. The reason for this is that the school is often the only consistent thing in their lives and should a student be absent from school due to incarceration transition back to school is essential once they are released.⁶⁷
- 4.77 The Edmund Rice Education Australia’s Youth+ initiative operates a number of Flexible Learning Centres across Australia that cater to ‘the complex needs of young people who have been disenfranchised from mainstream education’.⁶⁸ Ms Amy Campbell, Head of Wellbeing, Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre, told the committee that:
- ...we are developing our relationship and our connections with the local schools that support the same cohort of young people as we do to try to work out where those young people are that are being missed in the system...The school principal will contact us themselves and say, 'We have a young person who might like support from the Flexible Learning Centre,' at which point we will go out and meet the family in their home and see if that is

⁶⁶ Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Indigenous Corporation, *Submission 3*, 44th Parliament, p. [4].

⁶⁷ Association of Independent Schools (Western Australia), *Submission 32*, 44th Parliament, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre, *Submission 9*, 45th Parliament, p. 3.

something they want to pursue. Then we can follow on with the enrolment process from there.⁶⁹

- 4.78 In Brisbane, the committee spoke with Kurbingui Youth Development, which runs a range of programs that focus on addressing isolation, homelessness, poverty, discrimination and unemployment for Indigenous youth.⁷⁰ Mr Kevin Maund, Program Manager, Kurbingui explained that:

There were young kids coming in who were having trouble and they had other issues. They were couch surfing, not completing school and those sorts of things. Youth Development was established out of that.⁷¹

Committee comment

- 4.79 The committee supports programs and initiatives that seek to encourage regular attendance and engagement. However, all such programs and initiatives must be evidence-based and incorporate clear and effective performance measurement to ensure that they are effective.
- 4.80 School-based 'academy-style' programs that combine a wide range of wrap-around support and education elements, presented in a culturally safe environment, with a 'hook', such as hairdressing or sport, have proven to be an effective way of engaging and supporting students at school. These programs are achieving significant outcomes for Indigenous students and the committee commends these students as well as the staff that have worked diligently to support their students' achievements.
- 4.81 However, the committee was concerned to hear that programs which did not utilise a sport-based 'hook' were not being given the same recognition and support as those that did. A wide variety of 'hooks' are vital to ensure that all students are engaged, not only those who enjoy sport.
- 4.82 Many of the programs appeared to be working in isolation and without the benefit of the discoveries and experiences of similar programs operating elsewhere. It is important to ensure that the delivery of engagement programs is coordinated so that programs are first established in communities and schools that will most benefit from the programs and to avoid double delivery.

⁶⁹ Ms Amy Campbell, Head of Wellbeing, Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre, *Committee Hansard*, Geraldton, 2 May 2017, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Kurbingui Youth Development, <http://kurbingui.org.au/about/>, accessed 15 September 2017.

⁷¹ Mr Kevin Maund, Program Manager, Kurbingui Youth Development Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 1.

- 4.83 The committee commends the success of ‘academy-style’ mentoring programs such as Stars, SHINE, Clontarf, and Girls Academy as successful examples of programs with full-time mentors in place in schools and sees the value in the expansion of these programs. The committee was also impressed by AIME’s academic mentoring model, in particular its remarkable outcomes and efficiency.
- 4.84 The committee is pleased by the progress and achievements of the Learning on Country program and supports the progress evaluation report’s recommendation that the Federal and Northern Territory governments fund a staged rollout of the program commencing in January 2018.

Recommendation 10

- 4.85 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in collaboration with states and territories, ensures that non-sports based school engagement and mentoring programs have the same opportunities to receive government funding as sports-based engagement and mentoring programs particularly where these programs are gender based. There must be equivalence of funding and opportunity.**

Teaching and pedagogies

- 5.1 High quality teaching is fundamental to both a positive school experience and good education outcomes. Even experienced teachers can struggle with the demands of teaching in remote schools.
- 5.2 Mr Noel Pearson encouraged upholding high standards and expectations, both of teachers and students:

Culture is often invoked as a justification for this lowering of expectations and standards. It will be invoked by indigenous community members as well as those developing policies and delivering programs, as a justification for not upholding rigorous standards that apply in the mainstream. We must be careful to ensure that we are not unconsciously using culture as an excuse for failure, poor performance and under-achievement.¹

- 5.3 The Stronger Smarter Institute agreed, noting that 'Australian society has conditioned us to have low expectations of Indigenous students' and that 'public discourse around educational underachievement and failure frequently relies on deficit accounts that attribute blame to disadvantaged groups'.² It explains:

A teacher who believes children's achievement is limited by their social group reduces their belief in their own capacity as a teacher to teach these children. This can impact on teacher-student relationships...or cause teachers to adopt 'defensive' teaching strategies where they simplify content and reduce demands on

¹ Noel Pearson, 'Bending to Dysfunction, Bending to the Problems', *Cape York Partnership Position Paper*, 11 February 2004, pp. 1-2.

² Stronger Smarter Institute, *High Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Quality Learning Environments in all Australian Schools*, Stronger Smarter Institute Limited Position Paper, 2014, pp. 2-8.

students...This can all potentially contribute to poor student achievement and disengagement.³

- 5.4 This chapter discusses the importance of quality teaching, teacher training, and ongoing support and professional development for teachers. The chapter considers some of the pedagogies and programs utilised by schools to close the gap in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, particularly relating to literacy, illustrated by case studies.

Teacher training

- 5.5 A number of submissions emphasised the importance of training teachers – even highly experienced teachers – to meet the needs of Indigenous students.⁴ Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer, University of Newcastle, told the committee that many teachers are trying hard to meet the needs of Indigenous students but ‘flounder because of very poor preparation.’⁵
- 5.6 Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, told the committee that teachers, especially newly graduated teachers, are:
- ...not equipped to deal with the broad range that needs to happen in our classrooms, because one size does not fit all...we have a team of mentor teachers who work with every teacher in the school to ensure that their planning is up to standard and up to scratch. If a teacher is struggling, their learning will also be scaffolded – like we scaffold the children's learning, we scaffold the teachers' learning.⁶

³ Stronger Smarter Institute, *Submission 33*, 44th Parliament, pp. 6–7.

⁴ For example: The Wollotuka Institute, *Submission 15*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Dr Nicholas Biddle and Assistant Professor Dr Jessa Rogers, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Victoria, *Submission 48*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament; Stronger Smarter Institute, *Submission 33*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 36*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; and Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament.

⁵ Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer, The Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, p. 9.

⁶ Ms Philomena Downey, Principal, The Murri School, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 28.

- 5.7 The Australian Education Union told the committee that:
- ...it is very important that we have programs at university that look at working with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and address the cultural obligations of working with local communities but also that we can go a step further and put in mentoring programs for our new educators when they go out into these schools, because quite often you will find very experienced people that have been working in these schools that can assist in terms of that teacher's professional development as they begin their career.⁷
- 5.8 Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan told the committee that many teachers and staff receive no cultural awareness training, and that 'even people coming out of teachers college now are saying that there is no compulsory teacher training around cultural awareness'.⁸

Cultural awareness and teacher attitudes

- 5.9 Some submissions noted the importance of teacher training in cultural awareness, especially when preparing to work with Indigenous students, and the impact it can have on teacher attitudes towards students.⁹
- 5.10 Mr Warren Mundine AO told the committee that research showed that 40% of early learning teachers working with Indigenous children 'did not have a good view...of where these kids were going to end up'. He explained that these attitudes can have a profound impact on students:
- ...kids pick up that body language and pick up the way you act. We then see the later results of those kids, when they are going from infants into the primary and the high school area, you can see that that has had a major effect on them. So it is very important to work on those areas we are talking about – the cultural training

⁷ Ms Correna Haythorpe, Federal President, Australian Education Union, *Committee Hansard*, Campbelltown, 22 March 2016, p. 21.

⁸ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 June 2017, p. 6.

⁹ For example: The Wollotuka Institute, *Submission 15*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Dr Nicholas Biddle and Assistant Professor Dr Jessa Rogers, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Victoria, *Submission 48*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament; Stronger Smarter Institute, *Submission 33*, 44th Parliament; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 36*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; and Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament.

and the awareness – but also going there with energy to show these kids that the world is their oyster, in a sense.¹⁰

- 5.11 Reconciliation Victoria noted that ‘longer term achievements will always rely on the attitudes embedded in principals, teachers, and other workers’.¹¹
- 5.12 Ms Rebekah Shurley, a former Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, told the committee that:
- I am often greatly concerned by some of the remarks I hear from my teaching peers. When I was doing my bachelor's degree, there were some interesting conversations. I will never forget one incident. We had to do a one-semester course on Indigenous cultural awareness and the topic of the Stolen Generation came up – I should tell you at this point that my mum was part of the Stolen Generation. I was one of only a few Indigenous students in the class. But some of the non-Indigenous students were really quite vocal – asking why we even needed to do this course and what the point of it was. They said: 'Why are we learning about the Stolen Generation? That was ages ago. It is not even relevant anymore.' I was sitting there knowing that my mother had been taken, and I was listening to these people saying, 'It was not us; why do we have to learn about it?' I found that really heartbreaking. I was thinking: 'These are the people who are going to be my teaching peers when I graduate. These are the people who are educating future generations. If that is the attitude they are taking into their classrooms, what are they going to then pass on?'¹²
- 5.13 Mr Michael Donovan, University of Newcastle, emphasised the importance of training teachers to build strong relationships with students, families and the community. He explained that teachers must be able engage with student perspectives and viewpoints.¹³
- 5.14 The Stronger Smarter Institute explained that its program:
- ...supports educators to enhance their personal leadership skills to fully understand how their beliefs might impact their teaching.

¹⁰ Mr Nyunggai Warren Mundine AO, Chairman, Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2016, p. 13.

¹¹ Reconciliation Victoria, *Submission 48*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

¹² Ms Rebekah Shurley, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 26 May 2017, pp. 17–18.

¹³ Mr Michael Donovan, Lecturer, The Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, p. 14.

The Stronger Smarter approach asks teachers to take responsibility and 'put a mirror on ourselves as educators.' Within a High-Expectations Relationship, the teacher has to contemplate and understand not only the 'baggage' of the child, but also the baggage they carry themselves. It can be too easy to blame the community and the social issues of the children. The Stronger Smarter approach challenges teachers to ask themselves the confronting questions: What is happening in my classroom that is valuable to Indigenous students? What am I doing that contributes to failure, absenteeism or disengagement?¹⁴

Teacher retention

- 5.15 Mr Andrew Penfold AM told the committee that 'there is a very high churn of teachers in remote schools [and that] the churn is extremely high so you are never getting sustainable quality teaching'.¹⁵
- 5.16 Mr Penfold noted that states and territories have schemes, programs and incentives in place to encourage teacher retention. However, he told the committee that the programs focus on tenure rather than performance and, as such, have not led to any improvement in teaching quality. Mr Penfold called for teacher incentive programs to focus on and reward performance and educational outcomes rather than tenure alone.¹⁶
- 5.17 Mr Peter Johnson, Chair, More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI), explained that retention challenges inescapably stem from the fact that teachers moving to a remote community are dislocating from friends, family and their community:

The whole issue of who goes out to these schools is problematic in the first place, regardless of what program they go through. For someone to go out to a remote community or even to an isolated town in New South Wales and to teach in that area they are dislocating from their friends, their family and their community. How you incentivise them to get out there is an issue. Many

¹⁴ Stronger Smarter Institute, *High Expectations Relationships: A Foundation for Quality Learning Environments in all Australian Schools*, Stronger Smarter Institute Limited Position Paper, 2014, p. 8.

¹⁵ Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Member, Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2016, p. 14.

¹⁶ Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Member, Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2016, p. 14.

governments have tried many different things to compensate people for that dislocation.¹⁷

- 5.18 However, the 2015 review into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (Wilson Review) stated that the average length of service for teachers in the Northern Territory was 6.9 years and 5.7 years for assistant teachers. The review asserted that ‘despite urban legends about the exceptionally short tenure of teachers in remote and very remote schools, the data shows that median tenure is between two and three years’.¹⁸
- 5.19 Nonetheless, almost 30% of teachers in remote and very remote government schools are in their first year of teaching, as illustrated in Table 5.1 below, after which retention rates drop markedly.

Table 5.1 Northern Territory Government remote and very remote schools teacher tenure

Service in current school	Number of teaching staff	Percentage
1st year	362	27.9
1 to 2 years	247	19.1
2 to 3 years	173	13.3
3 to 4 years	112	8.6
4 to 5 years	77	5.9
5 to 6 years	53	4.1
6 to 7 years	52	4.0
7 to 8 years	28	2.2
8 or more years	192	14.8

Source Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 191.

Committee comment

- 5.20 It is clear that cultural safety, fostered by strong connection and engagement with community, is the essential foundation upon which all education and support programs must be built. Teachers, their attitudes, pedagogies, and the ways in which they teach are integral to creating the environment necessary for students to achieve their education goals.
- 5.21 High quality teaching is a critical factor in improving education outcomes for Indigenous students. However, the committee acknowledges that the task set before teachers is an incredibly challenging one. Teachers and staff must be able to skilfully deliver the Australian curriculum to students with a broad range of abilities. They are required to provide and tailor

¹⁷ Mr Peter Johnson, Chair, MATSITI Evaluation Panel, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, p. 19.

¹⁸ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 191.

education and practical support to students with a wide range of health and wellbeing issues. Teachers must also be culturally responsive; they must reach out, establish and build strong relationships with students, their families, and the wider community.

- 5.22 The committee commends the work of the Stronger Smarter Institute in training and empowering teachers to establish and maintain high-expectations relationships in the classroom. Nonetheless, the committee is concerned to hear that many teachers feel underprepared and ill-equipped and that many schools report that teachers, particularly new teachers, are struggling. The committee is of the view that more must be done to train, equip and support teachers, both new and experienced, to meet the challenges of providing high quality teaching and support for Indigenous students.

Recommendation 11 (Priority)

- 5.23 **The committee recommends that the Minister for Education take a proposal to the Council of Australian Governments to:**
- **make Indigenous history and culture a compulsory component for all teaching degrees; and**
 - **require all teachers already working in schools with a significant number of Indigenous students to complete in-service local Indigenous language, history and culture training as a part of mandatory professional development.**

Pedagogies

- 5.24 Literacy is an essential foundation upon which education and employment is based. Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw a wide range of pedagogies used in different schools. However, the two pedagogies that were most discussed in the evidence provided to the committee were Scaffolding Literacy and Direct Instruction.

Scaffolding Literacy/Accelerated Literacy

5.25 Scaffolding Literacy, also known as Accelerated Literacy, is the result of a number of years of research, trials, and projects throughout Australia.¹⁹ The program aims to not only teach spelling, grammar, and vocabulary but to also teach ‘the ways of thinking – the discourses, or cultural knowledge – that underpin what these mean’, explaining that ‘this knowledge is an essential part of being able to decode text and therefore succeed educationally’.²⁰

5.26 Dr David Rose, Reading to Learn, explained that:

The term ‘scaffolding’ means you are supporting a student to do something that is well beyond what they can do independently, and repeated practice at that enables them then to function independently over time. Then you withdraw the scaffolding.²¹

5.27 Dr Rose further explained that the pedagogy is particularly effective for students from oral cultural backgrounds. He stressed the importance of ensuring that students with weaker literacy skills do not miss out on the mainstream curriculum and fall further behind their peers:

That is absolutely critical. If you are going to close the gap in the classroom, the weakest children have to be involved in what the top kids are doing. It all has to happen at the same time, which means that the teacher needs highly designed strategies for interacting with their whole class so they are supporting the weakest student to be able to do what the top kids are doing. That does not mean it does not break down into group and individual work, but it always starts off with highly designed teacher guidance so that all students can do the tasks.²²

¹⁹ National Accelerated Literacy Program, ‘Overview’, <http://www.nalp.edu.au/about-nalp/about-overview.html>, accessed 24 September 2017.

²⁰ National Accelerated Literacy Program, ‘What is AL?’, <http://www.nalp.edu.au/what-is-accelerated-literacy/overview-final.html>, accessed 24 September 2017.

²¹ Dr David Rose, Director, Reading to Learn, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 March 2017, p. 1.

²² Dr David Rose, Director, Reading to Learn, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 30 March 2017, p. 2.

Case study – Wongutha CAPS

5.28 Wongutha Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School (Wongutha CAPS) is a strong proponent of scaffolding literacy. It explained that, prior to implementing this pedagogy, the texts that were being used in its classrooms were low level readers, which did little to build the self-esteem or maintain the interest of its students, who are between 15 and 19 years of age. However:

Today Wongutha students are engaging in age appropriate texts that give them different world perspectives...[students can] access texts and authors appreciated by all young people in Australia...such as John Marsden, Tim Winton and James Moloney, as well as texts that relate directly to Aboriginal people.²³

5.29 Wongutha CAPS told the committee that, under the pedagogy, students are 'expected to improve at least two year levels in one year in their reading levels'. The school reported that, in 2014, there was an average improvement of 2.4 year levels across the school, 'two and a half times greater than what teachers were achieving before Scaffolding Literacy'.²⁴

Direct Instruction

5.30 Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction, 'combines explicit instruction pedagogy with a comprehensive curriculum, student assessment and scripted lessons...[to ensure] that advanced students can be accelerated and that no child is left behind'.²⁵ The program covers literacy and numeracy from kindergarten to Year 5.²⁶

5.31 Good to Great Schools Australia and the Cape York Partnership, quoting Professor Bill Loudon, explained that:

...Direct Instruction breaks each learning task down into its smallest component and requires mastery of simpler skills before proceeding to more difficult skills. Students are grouped according to their achievement, teachers are provided with closely scripted lesson plans, students respond to the teacher orally and as a

²³ Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament, p. 12.

²⁴ Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

²⁵ Good to Great Schools Australia, 'Effective instruction', <https://goodtogreatschools.org.au/our-products/effective-instruction/>, accessed 20 September 2017.

²⁶ Good to Great Schools Australia, 'Effective instruction', <https://goodtogreatschools.org.au/our-products/effective-instruction/>, accessed 20 September 2017.

group, and the group does not move on until everyone understands the material.²⁷

- 5.32 Ms Lyn McKenzie, Director, Good to Great Schools Australia, explained that:

...from the instruction point of view we have two different programs: direct instruction and explicit direct instruction. The direct instruction is their literacy and numeracy programs, and their explicit direct instruction is what we use in the teaching of the rest of the Australian curriculum.²⁸

- 5.33 Good to Great Schools Australia and the Cape York Partnership told the committee that 'there are no other, better, evidence-based approaches deserving greater priority for trial and implementation in Indigenous contexts', asserting that if the pedagogy appears to be failing, it is more likely to be a failure of the implementation of the pedagogy rather than a fault of the pedagogy itself.²⁹

- 5.34 They told the committee that the implementation of Direct Instruction 'does not necessarily mean there is a narrowing of the curriculum,' explaining that:

The Cape York Academy school has deliberately devoted additional time to literacy and numeracy to address the significant gap these students have, whilst providing an extended school day to fully address other areas of the Australian curriculum.³⁰

- 5.35 Yipirinya School, an independent Indigenous school, implemented Direct Instruction less than 12 months prior to speaking with the committee. The Principal, Ms Lorraine Sligar, told the committee about the school's experience:

...when I got to the school and did a reading test of the students, the results were absolutely abysmal. Some of the students in year 6 did not know the 26 letter sounds. I guess you could say we had a school where the literacy results were not good and something drastic had to happen, and I think Direct Instruction is a drastic remedy. It is drastic and it would not suit all schools, and it does

²⁷ Good to Great Schools Australia and Cape York Partnership, *Submission 28*, 45th Parliament, p. 9.

²⁸ Ms Lyn McKenzie, Director, Good to Great Schools Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 2.

²⁹ Good to Great Schools Australia and Cape York Partnership, *Submission 28*, 45th Parliament, p. 11.

³⁰ Good to Great Schools Australia and Cape York Partnership, *Submission 28*, 45th Parliament, p. 18.

not suit all schools. But, when you are a situation like the one we were in, it was the only answer that our school could have really looked at.³¹

- 5.36 Ms Sligar advised that Direct Instruction has ‘very much settled the students’ and provided structure and repetition. She told the committee that students are tested and placed in a class where they can succeed. However, she cautioned that the results of the pedagogy will take time to manifest, noting that ‘given the nature of where we were, with most of the year 6s not knowing letter sounds, we are not going to see NAPLAN results for quite a while with this’.³²
- 5.37 Direct Instruction has been the subject of some controversy – while some schools have achieved success, others have been criticised for failing to deliver the Australian curriculum.
- 5.38 In its interim report, the committee expressed its concern regarding the effectiveness of Direct Instruction/Explicit Instruction as a teaching approach for students of all ages, questioning the extent to which it can equip students for future opportunities. The committee acknowledged that the pedagogy may be of value in the earliest years of literacy and numeracy fundamentals, but noted that Direct Instruction appeared limiting for older students studying other subjects.³³
- 5.39 In 2013, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Evaluation of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) Initiative was unable to determine ‘whether or not the CYAAA Initiative has had an impact on student learning’ and noted that ‘student attendance has declined in two campuses during the period of the CYAAA Initiative despite the perception by many stakeholders that it has increased’.³⁴
- 5.40 ACER explained that its evaluation was hindered by the large amount of missing data from test results, and ‘further limited in that, ideally, participants in the interviews and discussions would have been chosen

³¹ Ms Lorraine Sligar, Principal, Yipirinya School, *Committee Hansard*, Alice Springs, 4 April 2017, p. 29.

³² Ms Lorraine Sligar, Principal, Yipirinya School, *Committee Hansard*, Alice Springs, 4 April 2017, p. 29.

³³ House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, *Interim Report: First Steps for improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, 2016, p. 24.

³⁴ Australian Council for Education Research, *Evaluation for the Cape York Aboriginal Academy Initiative for the Department of Education Training and Employment Queensland*, June 2013, pp. 9–10.

randomly rather than on the advice of CYAAA staff and local community members'.³⁵

Case study – Aurukun School

- 5.41 In March 2016, the committee travelled to the Cape York area and observed lessons being delivered via Direct Instruction/Explicit Instruction in schools in Coen and Aurukun. Good to Great Schools Australia described the Cape York Academy, which operates school campuses in Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale, as the 'showcase' for its Direct Instruction program.³⁶ Although it did acknowledge that 'Aurukun was [its] biggest challenge'.³⁷
- 5.42 In May 2016, the Aurukun School was closed after a series of violent episodes directed at teaching staff.³⁸ A number of media articles highlighted Direct Instruction as a key element of the unrest. The Guardian reported that Mr John Bray, a former Executive Principal at the school, said that:
- ...the rigidly-scripted curriculum had compounded student disengagement in Aurukun, along with the "complete distrust" of the school by parents amid the punitive approach of welfare reforms. Both were contributing factors to events leading to the town's schooling crisis... "[Direct Instruction] is inappropriate and the evidence is clear".³⁹
- 5.43 However, Mr Kon Kalos and Ms Shoba Kalos, a former Principal and Head of Curriculum respectively, disagreed, asserting that 2015 was 'a period of significant cultural and academic progress at the school' and 'a year marked by strong participation by all who attended the school'.⁴⁰

³⁵ Australian Council for Education Research, *Evaluation for the Cape York Aboriginal Academy Initiative for the Department of Education Training and Employment Queensland*, June 2013, pp. 9-10.

³⁶ Good to Great Schools Australia, *Submission 60*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

³⁷ Ms Lyn McKenzie, Director, Good to Great Schools Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 4.

³⁸ 'Aurukun teachers evacuated again over safety concerns' *ABC News*, 26 May 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-25/aurukun-teachers-evacuated-for-second-time/7444630>, accessed 21 September 2017.

³⁹ Joshua Robertson, 'Aurukun: Noel Pearson's syllabus partly to blame for school crisis, says former principal', *Guardian Australia*, 27 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/may/27/aurukun-imported-syllabus-partly-to-blame-for-school-closure-says-former-principal>, accessed 21 September 2017.

⁴⁰ Kon and Shoba Kalos, *Submission 15*, 45th Parliament, p. 1.

- 5.44 The local federal member, the Hon Warren Entsch MP, was reported as saying ‘we need to have a look at the effectiveness of the [education] programs and the impact that those programs have had on the community...for the hundreds of millions that we have spent in there I think we’re getting poor value for money’.⁴¹
- 5.45 In June 2016, the Queensland Department of Education and Training conducted a review of school education in Aurukun which found that ‘the school is not providing the full Australian curriculum to its students through the current approach’. Concluding ‘that the richness of schooling has been compromised by the pressure of delivering literacy and numeracy using only the DI approach’ and recommending that ‘going forward, a more balanced approach, contextualised for the Aurukun community, is required’.⁴²
- 5.46 In November 2016, it was reported that Good to Great Schools would withdraw its support from the school, reportedly stating that they ‘could not accept the unworkable conditions imposed by EQ restricting Direct Instruction teaching methods’.⁴³ The school has reverted back to non-partnership status and is being run by the Queensland Government. Dr James Watterston, Queensland Department of Education and Training, told the committee that:

...we have retained some elements of the curriculum that was in place, but what we have really focussed on is making sure that there is adherence to the Australian curriculum and that there is no difference in terms of the expectations and what students will learn in a remote community compared with a traditional metropolitan community. That is really fundamentally important, because, while you can drill and you can engage young people in learning the foundations of literacy and numeracy, if they are going to transition into the workforce or into another school environment or out of their own remote community they have to be able to apply those skills. We have certainly found in a range of remote communities that we work in that you really do need to

⁴¹ ‘Aurukun a “failed social experiment”, Queensland federal MP Warren Entsch says’, *ABC News*, 27 May 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-05-27/aurukun-failed-social-experiment-qld-fed-mp-warren-entsch-says/7450964>, accessed 21 September 2017.

⁴² Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Review of school education in Aurukun: School Improvement Unit*, June 2016, p. 5.

⁴³ ‘Indigenous leader Noel Pearson withdraws support for troubled Aurukun school’, *ABC News*, 10 November 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-10/indigenous-leader-noel-pearson-withdraws-support-arukun-school/8015112>, accessed 21 September 2017.

have a broad curriculum and a range of pedagogies rather than just one singular pedagogy.⁴⁴

Committee comment

- 5.47 Literacy and numeracy is the essential foundation upon which education and further education is based. Throughout the inquiry, the committee saw a wide range of pedagogies used across Australia. The committee is of the view that no single pedagogy will meet the needs of all students. Schools and teachers must be empowered to tailor their teaching to best meet the needs of their students; however, the committee is of the view that all pedagogies utilised by schools must be evidence-based and must adhere to the Australian curriculum.
- 5.48 The committee was impressed by the reported success of Scaffolding Literacy/ Accelerated Literacy. It is essential that pedagogies seeking to address weak literacy skills are able to do so without causing students to miss out on the mainstream curriculum and fall further behind their peers. The committee was pleased to hear that the pedagogy enabled and supported students to engage with age appropriate texts, instead of relying on low level or repetitive readers.
- 5.49 Since the tabling of the interim report, the committee's concerns regarding Direct Instruction have not been assuaged. The committee is particularly troubled by the Queensland Department of Education and Training's finding that, under the Good to Great Schools Direct Instruction program, Aurukun School was not providing the full Australian curriculum to its students.
- 5.50 The committee acknowledges that education is the purview of the states and territories. Nonetheless, the Federal Government is providing funding to deliver Direct Instruction and has a duty to ensure that funds are spent in the most effective and efficient manner. As such, the committee cannot support the continued use of Federal Government funds to deliver Direct Instruction at this time.
- 5.51 The committee also believes that all pedagogies used in schools, particularly those used to address issues with literacy and numeracy, must be assessed and evaluated to ensure they are not only working but are delivering the full Australian curriculum.

⁴⁴ Dr James Watterston, Director-General, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 20.

Recommendation 12 (Priority)

- 5.52 The committee recommends that no funding beyond 30 June 2018 be provided for Direct Instruction until the Federal Government conducts a review of schools utilising the program and finds that the program is providing a proven benefit to the education outcomes of Indigenous students as well as demonstrating that:
- the full Australian curriculum is being provided;
 - the cultural safety and responsiveness of the school is not being adversely impacted; and
 - attendance rates are not declining.

Recommendation 13

- 5.53 The committee recommends that the Federal Government undertake a comprehensive review of all federally-funded pedagogies to ensure the pedagogy is improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, delivering the Australian curriculum, and providing value for money.

Boarding

- 6.1 Living away from home for study is a key component in the delivery of education to many Indigenous students across Australia. For many students living in remote and very remote communities, they have little choice but to leave their community in order to attain Year 12 or higher qualifications. It is, therefore, essential that students are able to access a range of affordable, culturally safe boarding options to meet their health, academic, and social needs.
- 6.2 This chapter considers Indigenous students' experiences of living away from home for study, examining both the opportunities and challenges presented by boarding. It explores models of boarding – public and independent, regional and metropolitan – and considers the challenges of providing secondary education in small remote communities.
- 6.3 The chapter discusses the standards and services that boarding facilities offer and considers whether they are meeting the needs of Indigenous students. It considers the challenges faced by students and the phenomena of 'walking in two worlds'. Finally, the chapter examines why many students who live away from home for study return to community shortly after commencing.
- 6.4 The cost of boarding, ABSTUDY payments, application processes, and other funding matters are discussed in Chapter 7.

Living away from home for study

6.5 In 2014, ABSTUDY Living Away from Home benefits were paid to over 200 boarding schools and hostels on behalf of almost 4,300 students. There were also 300 students in 'other accommodation arrangements' supported by ABSTUDY.¹

6.6 Indigenous students study away from home for a range of reasons. Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, after interviewing a number of parents of students at boarding school, found that for parents from remote communities, boarding school was often the only option available for secondary education, with one stating that:

That's really what it comes down to; we have no choice...If we want to live where we want to live we've got no choice but for our kids to be sent away...²

6.7 For others, the quality of education available at home was the issue, with one student explaining that:

My main reason to get out of [remote community] was because the school there was horrible, and yeah...just not many people got through Year 12.³

6.8 Dr O'Bryan noted that for some parents, boarding schools provided opportunities that their children may not get elsewhere. A focus group of very remote parents explained that:

...mainstream schools, they have more activities, more things that they could do...⁴

6.9 Many parents wanted their children to maintain their culture and tradition whilst also gaining an understanding of their place in the wider world, with one parent explaining that:

I wanted them to not only...follow my pathway, but to...at least broaden their perspective [to understand that] our land stretches out and there's a lot more people out there to be talking to...⁵

¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 12.

² Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 118.

³ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 118.

⁴ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 118.

Models of boarding

- 6.10 Whilst the details of the services offered by each boarding facility vary, boarding generally comprises a boarding house or houses where students are provided with accommodation and meals. Students are supervised and supported by staff, often referred to as 'House Parents', who usually live on or near the boarding facility.
- 6.11 The committee encountered a number of different boarding models available to students living away from home, including:
- boarding schools;
 - independent boarding facilities;
 - state-owned residential colleges;
 - Federal Government hostels; and
 - informal arrangements.

Boarding schools

- 6.12 Throughout Australia, there are a number of schools that offer boarding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. These boarding facilities are usually located on or near the school campus and are generally only available to students attending the school that owns the boarding facilities.
- 6.13 The vast majority of these boarding schools are independent; however, there are some government boarding schools, such as Nhulunbuy High School in the Northern Territory,⁶ as well as boarding schools that work in close partnership with government, such as Kormilda College in Darwin.⁷
- 6.14 Examples of independent boarding schools that cater specifically for Indigenous students include Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville, VIC;⁸ Yirara College in Alice Springs, NT;⁹ Djarragun College in Gordonvale, QLD;¹⁰ and Wiltja Secondary College in Adelaide, SA.¹¹

⁵ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 119.

⁶ Nhulunbuy High School, <https://directory.ntschoools.net/SchoolProfile.aspx?name=Nhulunbuy%20High%20School>, accessed 11 July 2017.

⁷ Kormilda College, <http://www.kormilda.nt.edu.au/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

⁸ Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, <http://www.worawa.vic.edu.au/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

⁹ Yirara College, *Submission 33*, 45th Parliament; Yirara College, <http://yirara.nt.edu.au/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹⁰ Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament; Good to Great Schools Australia and Cape York Partnership, *Submission 28*, 45th Parliament; Djarragun College, <http://www.djarragun.qld.edu.au/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

Independent boarding facilities

- 6.15 There are a number of independent boarding facilities, many with links to sporting clubs and associations, catering for Indigenous students, operating in regional centres and cities. Students boarding at these facilities may choose to attend a range of affiliated government and non-government schools. Examples include AFL Cape York House in Cairns¹² and NRL Cowboys House in Townsville.¹³
- 6.16 Some independent boarding facilities focus on supporting Indigenous students as they transition into mainstream education in a capital city. These boarding schools are often affiliated with or supported by mainstream independent or government schools. Examples include the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS)¹⁴ and the Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School¹⁵.

State-owned residential colleges

- 6.17 In Western Australia and the Northern Territory, there are state and territory-owned and operated residential colleges and hostels located in regional centres that offer boarding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Students boarding at these residential colleges and hostels may choose to attend nearby government or independent schools.¹⁶ Examples include Broome Residential College¹⁷ and Callistemon House in Katherine East.¹⁸

Federal Government hostels

- 6.18 Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) is a Commonwealth company that provides accommodation for Indigenous peoples for a range of purposes, including accessing medical services and education. AHL operates nine hostels for Indigenous students living away from home to attend secondary school, which collectively provide accommodation for up to

¹¹ Wiltja Secondary College, <http://www.wiltja.sa.edu.au/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹² AFL Cape York House, <http://www.aflcy.com.au/afl-cape-york-house/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹³ NFL Cowboys House, <http://www.cowboysfoundation.org.au/programs/nrl-cowboys-house/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹⁴ Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, *Submission 18*, 45th Parliament; Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, <https://www.mits.vic.edu.au/>, accessed 6 July 2017.

¹⁵ Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School, <http://www.wesleycollege.net/Wesley-Life/Yiramalay-Wesley-Studio-School.aspx>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹⁶ Western Australia Department of Education, Country Boarding, <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/boarding/country/detcms/navigation/about-us/>, accessed 11 July 2017.

¹⁷ Broome Residential College, <http://broomeboarding.wa.gov.au/>, accessed 13 July 2017.

¹⁸ Callistemon House, <http://www.callistemon.org.au/>, accessed 13 July 2017.

300 Indigenous students.¹⁹ AHL 'services all Indigenous students...without reference to academic merit, means testing or other forms of selective intake'.²⁰ Examples include, Canon Boggo Pilot Hostel on Thursday Island, Kununurra Hostel, Kardu Durrikardu Numida Hostel in Wadeye, and Fordimail Hostel in Katherine.²¹

Informal boarding arrangements

- 6.19 The Department of Social Services (DSS) noted that informal boarding arrangements can be made for students who are living away from home with extended family, comprising 'an arrangement between the parent and whomever the parent chooses to send the children to'. DSS advised that there are approximately 300 informal boarding arrangements supported by ABSTUDY.²²

Committee comment

- 6.20 Throughout its inquiry, the committee visited a variety of boarding facilities, ranging from independent boarding schools with an Indigenous focus, to state-owned residential colleges that could be accessed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- 6.21 The overwhelming evidence received by the committee is that one size does not fit all. There are a wide range of boarding models and each has benefits as well as challenges. Students and families must be empowered to make informed decisions about what best suits their needs. Regardless of the model, the committee found that boarding facilities that worked with families, students and communities to properly understand and meet the needs of students, achieved the best outcomes.

Boarding vs local schools

- 6.22 Some submissions raised concerns regarding the shift away from the provision of secondary schooling in small communities in favour of boarding.²³ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, Australian National

¹⁹ Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 38*, 44th Parliament, p. 5.

²⁰ Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 41*, 45th Parliament, p. 2.

²¹ Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Prospectus*, <http://www.ahl.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-11/Prospectus.pdf>, accessed 13 November 2017.

²² Ms Emma Kate McGuirk, Branch Manager, Work and Study Payments, Department of Social Services, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 April 2016, p. 11.

²³ For example: Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament; Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament;

University, highlighted the lack of data regarding the benefits and impacts of boarding, and questioned ‘how can the government be so sure about pushing our kids into boarding schools when there is so little data...how can we be pushing this model when we do not even know that it works?’²⁴

- 6.23 However, others, such as the Association of the Heads of Independent Schools of Australia suggested ‘caution in assuming that local schools and colleges are the only and best answer to Indigenous education’, explaining that ‘boarding programs in interstate independent schools offer opportunities to Indigenous students that can never be matched in local community schools’.²⁵
- 6.24 Ninti One emphasised the importance of ensuring that families have a ‘well supported suite of options, locally and away from home [which] should include metropolitan and regional boarding options, short term away from home learning opportunities and access to learning in communities’.²⁶ Ms Priscilla Collins, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, emphasised the right to choose:

One size does not fit all students, and we think that families should have the ability to decide the best options and choices for their children and to choose between sending their child to school in their home community, in a nearby regional town or an interstate boarding school.²⁷

Wilson Review

- 6.25 In 2013, the Northern Territory Department of Education commissioned a review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, commonly referred to as the ‘Wilson Review’. The review found that:

The NT has made substantial efforts to deliver secondary schooling in remote settings for more than a decade, with limited success. Enrolments and attendance in these schools decline rapidly during the secondary years, NAPLAN results show low success rates and there have been very few Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) completions. The

Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament.

²⁴ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 22.

²⁵ Association of the Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 46*, 44th Parliament, pp. [31-32].

²⁶ Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

²⁷ Ms Priscilla Collins, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 7.

review found evidence of curriculum programs without a clear link to qualifications and with a narrow range of options.²⁸

6.26 The review argued that:

... secondary education for remote and very remote students should progressively be provided in urban schools (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy), with students accommodated in residential facilities...Implementation of these arrangements should be gradual...Negotiations with communities will determine where smaller remote schools can offer middle years programs, but senior secondary education should largely be delivered in urban settings.²⁹

6.27 Mr Andrew Penfold AM acknowledged the economic difficulties of providing quality secondary education in small communities but asserted that 'not all kids should be leaving their communities and going to boarding schools'.³⁰

6.28 The Independent Education Union (IEU) noted that 'access to boarding schools does not negate, or compensate for, lack of access to quality education in a student's home community'.³¹

6.29 Mr Anthony Considine, Northern Territory Department of Education, assured the committee that, despite the recommendations of the review, the department '[has] not shut down any secondary delivery in the bush...At the time the Wilson Review was delivered in its first form, the recommendation was to scale back secondary provision. After further consultation, that was not continued with'.³²

²⁸ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 22.

²⁹ Bruce Wilson, *A Share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015, p. 22.

³⁰ Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Member, Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2016, p. 16.

³¹ Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

³² Mr Anthony Considine, General Manager, Indigenous Education Review Implementation, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 15.

Regional boarding

6.30 A number of submissions informed the committee of increasing communications and tracking issues that arise when students go interstate to study. The Northern Territory Department of Education advised the committee that:

Our work with the health department has been about health checks for kids, and certainly there was very strong work last year in that area, but not with boarding, because that boarding area moves outside of our jurisdiction...³³

6.31 Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Department of Education and Training, informed the committee that the issues of communications and tracking of children does not just occur when the student leaves the state, but is an issue for those coming to boarding schools from outside:

Where we experience difficulties in transferring information is when we get kids predominantly from the territory who come across to our schools, and that is where we do have some issues around transfer of information. As I said, most of our kids will stay in Queensland but it is the kids who come from the NT and WA who come across to our boarding schools where there is a lack of information about those kids and how do we best support them as well.³⁴

6.32 In terms of tracking and the sharing of pertinent information regarding students, it appears it would be preferential for them to stay within the state, and certainly for the many students who suffer homesickness, living in a regional town closer to home may be beneficial.

6.33 A number of submissions noted the benefits of students from remote communities boarding in regional centres.³⁵ Ms Kristine Van, Broome

³³ Mr Anthony Considine, General Manager, Indigenous Education Review Implementation, Northern Territory Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 6 April 2017, p. 17.

³⁴ Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education, Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 22.

³⁵ For example: Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council, *Submission 61*, 44th Parliament; Richard Stewart and Rachel Elphick, *Submission 26*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 38*, 44th Parliament; Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament; and Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament.

Residential College, explained that boarding in a regional centre provides the 'best of both worlds':

Our catchcry is 'Keeping Kimberley kids in the Kimberley'. It is really great that students can come to a place to live where they actually know people. While they may not know each other, family relationships and kinship relationships are so important to an Indigenous person. If they have family or relationships in a boarding house, it makes it so much more successful. We also have a more relaxed lifestyle. The parents are able to visit because they are a lot closer. So not only do they have family in the college – when I say 'family', I mean that in a kinship sense – but people can come and visit, which is fantastic.³⁶

6.34 Mr Gregory Robson, Western Australia Department of Education, explained that in relation to Western Australian students:

...what we are trying to do in Kununurra and some of the other regional centres is build a critical mass, because that gives us the chance to specialise a bit more in the curriculum... We have to be much more strategic, and we have to link what we deliver, in my view, to the employment opportunities that are available in the surrounding community.³⁷

6.35 Mr Ned David, Chair, Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Educational Council, told the committee that 'the overwhelming position for most parents in the region is to have their kids attend secondary school here on Thursday Island, or in the Torres Strait...what we want is to increase the number of [boarding] beds available on Thursday Island'.³⁸

6.36 The Council noted that approximately 50% of secondary students leave the region to attend boarding school. The Council advised the committee that, the two boarding facilities on Thursday Island are at capacity and are insufficient to meet demand.³⁹

³⁶ Ms Kristine Van, College Manager, Broome Residential College, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 29 June 2017, pp. 24–25.

³⁷ Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley, Western Australia Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Kununurra, 28 June 2017, p. 19.

³⁸ Mr Ned David, Chair, Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Educational Council, *Committee Hansard*, Thursday Island, 9 March 2016, p. 3.

³⁹ Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council, *Submission 61*, 44th Parliament, pp. 28–30.

Committee comment

- 6.37 The committee acknowledges the economic difficulties of providing quality secondary education in small communities; however, this does not absolve state and territory governments from the responsibility of providing access to quality public secondary education. Indigenous students should be able to choose from a range of well-supported options for secondary education, public and independent, within their local region as well as further afield.
- 6.38 Boarding facilities, such as Broome Residential College and Kununurra Hostel, provide a high-quality public boarding option for students who wish to study without leaving their region. It may not be possible to provide secondary education in all small remote communities; but, by providing public boarding facilities in regional centres, students and families are given access to quality public and independent schools without needing to send their children to a capital city located thousands of kilometres away.
- 6.39 Given the evidence received, it is the committee's opinion that public boarding facilities in regional centres should be developed in consultation with communities within each region and tailored to meet the preferences and needs of Indigenous students from that region.

Recommendation 14 (Priority)

- 6.40 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, establish additional public boarding accommodation in key regional centres, so that students can attend schools in their local area rather than going to school in another region.**

Quality of boarding

6.41 A number of submitters emphasised the importance of ensuring that there are high standards for staff, facilities, and services across all models of boarding.⁴⁰ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, explained that:

You need to have highly qualified staff in boarding – standards...If Indigenous boarding is going to happen successfully, there needs to be an absolute emphasis on the pedagogy and methodology in the school, but there also needs to be equal resourcing and light shed upon the boarding side. It is often seen just as a place of feeding and watering. That does not work, and this is what I would see as critical.⁴¹

6.42 The IEU noted that ‘there is no federal legislation governing the operation of boarding schools, and while there is state legislation in New South Wales and Western Australia, boarding school operators in Queensland and the Northern Territory have effectively no legal obligations to boarders, staff or parents beyond those specified in site-specific contracts’.⁴²

6.43 In July 2015, a national standard for the management of boarding facilities was published by the Council of Standards Australia. This standard provides a common framework across jurisdictions and is designed to promote and safeguard the welfare of students in boarding.⁴³ However, the IEU noted that, while this partially addresses the gap in legislation, ‘the standards represent a guide to best practice within the sector rather than legal obligations’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ For example: Australian Parents Council, *Submission 16*, 45th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 40*, 45th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Australia, *Submission 21*, 45th Parliament; Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament; and Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament.

⁴¹ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, Wiltja Secondary College, *Committee Hansard*, Northgate, 26 February 2016, p. 3.

⁴² Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

⁴³ Council of Standards Australia, *AS 5725:2015 Boarding Standards for Australian schools and residences*, 2015.

⁴⁴ Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

- 6.44 The Northern Territory Department of Education recommended that the application of this standard be mandated across Australia ‘so parents are assured of quality care and wellbeing of their children’.⁴⁵ Boarding Training Australia agreed, asserting that boarding facilities must be held accountable to these standards and Indigenous boarding facilities should be regularly monitored.⁴⁶ This sentiment was also shared by Boarding Australia, which emphasised the need for quality assurance mechanisms for Indigenous boarding programs and called for the development of a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy.⁴⁷
- 6.45 Mr Bennett noted that informal boarding arrangements supported by ABSTUDY are not subject to any oversight:
- At the minute anybody can make an application to ABSTUDY to acquire funding. There is no audit; there is no check – nothing. There are no standards upon which a check could be made...I can only wonder how those houses are being funded. What worries me is there are no standards; there are no qualifications. You have got this gentleman and his wife looking after a very large number of children in various sites without any scrutiny whatsoever. I am not suggesting that anything improper is going on but, from a risk perspective, you would have to suggest the risk is significant... Anybody can open one of these things, and they do.⁴⁸
- 6.46 DSS advised the committee that they do not have any role in assessing the quality or standard of informal boarding arrangements.⁴⁹ Ms Cath Halbert, DSS, stated:
- This is a completely private arrangement between the family and the person providing the accommodation, except insofar as, of course, state and territory governments have child protection legislation and so on. There are no particular protections attached to ABSTUDY.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁶ Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Boarding Australia, *Submission 21*, 44th Parliament, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁸ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, Wiltja Secondary College, *Committee Hansard*, Northgate, 26 February 2016, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁹ Ms Emma Kate McGuirk, Branch Manager, Work and Study Payments, Department of Social Services, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 April 2016, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Ms Cath Halbert, Group Manager, Payments Policy Group, Department of Social Services, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 September 2017, p. 11.

Student/staff ratios

- 6.47 A number of submissions called for lower staff to student ratios in boarding facilities, with some pointing to the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body's finding:

The student/houseparent ratio for Indigenous students needs to be acknowledged as requiring to be about 8-10:1 rather than the 25:1 ratio on which most boarding schools operate, in recognition of the high demand nature of the special care and interventions needed to successfully transition these students.⁵¹

- 6.48 Wongutha CAPS told the committee that its current ratio of 18:1 is inadequate for Indigenous students:

Increasingly, young Indigenous students from remote communities are presenting with complex behavioural, mental health, emotional, physical and addiction issues that require very specific care and support that cannot be achieved effectively with current student : staff ratios.⁵²

Cultural safety

- 6.49 The importance of cultural safety, as outlined in Chapter 3, also applies to boarding students. A number of submissions emphasised the need for boarding facilities to be culturally safe and to provide cultural support to students.⁵³

⁵¹ Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body, *Position Paper: Boarding Schools*, 2000, p. 6.

⁵² Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament, pp. 3-4.

⁵³ For example: Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 46*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament; Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament; Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 38*, 44th Parliament; Professor Jeannie Herbert AM, *Submission 8*, 44th Parliament; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 40*, 45th Parliament; Boarding Australia, *Submission 21*, 45th Parliament; Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament; and Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, *Submission 18*, 45th Parliament.

- 6.50 Dr Marnie O'Bryan called for predominantly non-Indigenous boarding schools to 'look critically at their own school culture and ensure that they are culturally safe spaces for students to live and learn'.⁵⁴ One of the participant's in Dr O'Bryan's research asserted that:

Aboriginal kids are having an identity crisis, and school can actually help serve Australia's future by enabling them while they're at school to reconstruct who they are in a really positive way, and I think what you will find is that those kids then don't end up in the prisons and end up in the gangs and end up dead because they leave with a sense of – it is really, really cool to be black, it is really cool to be an Aboriginal person in Australia.⁵⁵

- 6.51 Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers explained that, as students do not have one single culture or identity, it is essential that students and families are consulted to ensure that a boarding facility is culturally safe:

In my experience, the best thing we can do is work with student groups and come up with some student-led initiatives because they know what works for them. They are experts on themselves. Schools are so quick to expect that students will fall in with everything and just get on with it. They do not ask what students are looking for and what makes them feel comfortable and safe.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 233.

⁵⁵ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 114.

⁵⁶ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 25.

Health and wellbeing

6.52 The health and wellbeing issues affecting students outlined in Chapter 2 equally apply to boarding students. A number of submissions emphasised the importance of ensuring that students are able to access appropriate health and wellbeing services while living away from home for study.⁵⁷ Boarding Training Australia asserted that:

All Indigenous residences need an on-site nurse and health facility, with other professional supports, health screening facilities, education and support in nutrition, mental health and personal development.⁵⁸

6.53 Wongutha CAPS noted that, as a minimum, their boarding staff are required to complete a Certificate IV qualification in Community Services and recommended that Indigenous boarding residences have an on-site nurse as well as access to counselling support services.⁵⁹

6.54 Similarly, Worawa Aboriginal College advised the committee that:

A visiting GP and other specialist services ensure that students receive a range of medical services on site to monitor their health and social and emotional wellbeing. An on-site Health Clinic staffed by a school nurse with experience in Remote Health ensures that physical health issues are dealt with quickly and professionally.⁶⁰

6.55 Mr Ricky Hanlon, Program Manager, AFL Cape York House, highlighted the success of individual case management for students:

Our wellbeing manager has just come on this year. The results we have seen in that space are absolutely fantastic in terms of the wellbeing of our boys and their health.⁶¹

⁵⁷ For example: Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, pp. 8-9; Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament, p. 5; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament, pp. 3-4, 8; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament, pp 3-4; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 3; North Queensland Cowboys, *Submission 49*, 44th Parliament, p. 3; Northern Territory Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament, pp. 2-3; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; pp. 23-24; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament, p. 7; Dr Maryanne MacDonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament, p. 13; and Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, p. 11.

⁶¹ Mr Ricky Hanlon, Program Manager, AFL Cape York House, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 32.

- 6.56 However, many submitters also spoke about the funding challenges of providing the necessary level of support to students.⁶² The Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory highlighted the need for appropriate funding:

Our schools also provide, or facilitate the provision of, programs that meet the health, socio-emotional, nutritional, and developmental needs of their students who, often, are suffering from the effects of significant trauma (e.g. PTSD), health challenges (e.g. Rheumatic Heart Fever, Scabies, Otitis Media etc.), and disabilities.

The cost of providing these programs is significant, not just the direct cost but also in the cost of training required to ensure staff in the classroom, the boarding house and even in the front office understand the background of the students with which they interact on a daily basis and every staff member contributes to the support those students, and their families, require to succeed.⁶³

- 6.57 Boarding Training Australia agreed:

Very few providers can afford the level of support usually needed for the Indigenous young people attending. While Close the Gap health funding is used in every other arena there is a glaring deficit here. There is a need for a “culturally appropriate” model of health screening, intervention and education, and pastoral care.⁶⁴

- 6.58 Dr Marnie O’Bryan reported that many boarding students said that ‘no one at home understood how to support them at school’ and that this ‘fed into a pattern of misunderstanding between home and school, where dissonant presumptions around who was responsible to offer what level of care left young people with no functional means of emotional support’.⁶⁵

⁶² For example: Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament, p. 5; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament, pp. 3-4, 8; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament, pp 3-4; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 3; Northern Territory Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament, pp. 2-3; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; pp. 23-24; Dr Maryanne MacDonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament, p. 13.

⁶³ Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Dr Margaret (Marnie) O’Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 126.

Committee comment

- 6.59 Throughout the inquiry, the committee was impressed by boarding facilities and their staff's desire and commitment to meeting the needs of Indigenous students. Yet despite the best intentions of many boarding facilities, the overwhelming evidence heard by the committee was that boarding, particularly mainstream boarding, is not meeting the needs of Indigenous students. In the case of one boarding facility, which the committee saw and believed was well below an acceptable standard, the committee notes that this facility has now closed.
- 6.60 Students living away from home for study should have access to high-quality, culturally safe boarding facilities. Many boarding facilities identified areas that they could, and often desperately wanted to, improve but were prevented by resource constraints. The committee heard evidence that others seemed uncertain how best to support Indigenous students, with some struggling to properly identify and provide the level of medical and mental health support and cultural-safety that students require to thrive.
- 6.61 The committee is of the view that all boarding facilities should meet the *Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences*. In addition to the boarding standards, boarding facilities should also be required to meet standards regarding cultural safety. In order to assist boarding facilities create culturally safe environments for Indigenous students, the committee is of the opinion that a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy be developed. This strategy should be developed in consultation with states, territories and the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council following comprehensive consultation with Indigenous families and students.
- 6.62 The committee believes that all boarding models should be required to meet certain standards, including informal boarding arrangements. The committee believes that, in order to qualify for Federal Government funding, such as ABSTUDY, any and all boarding facilities should be required to regularly demonstrate that they meet the *Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences* as well as the requirements of a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy.

- 6.63 As discussed in Chapter 2, it is an unfortunate reality that Indigenous children are more likely to have significant health and wellbeing concerns and therefore require substantial support to ensure that they are healthy and well while they are living away from home for study. Each student's medical and mental health needs will be different and, as such, support services must be able to meet each individual student's needs. To this end, the committee agrees that student/staff ratios should reflect the needs of the students they are caring for.

Recommendation 15

- 6.64 **The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government, in consultation with states, territories and Indigenous leaders, create a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy that will:**
- **require boarding facilities to meet the standards outlined in the *Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences*;**
 - **establish and require boarding facilities to meet a National Indigenous Cultural Standard; and**
 - **recognise and appropriately account for the physical and mental health needs of Indigenous students.**

Recommendation 16

- 6.65 **The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government:**
- **require boarding facilities receiving federal funding, such as ABSTUDY, to meet the standards set out in a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy; and**
 - **increase federal funding provided to boarding facilities through ABSTUDY, so that the standards set out in a National Indigenous Boarding Strategy can be met.**

Walking in two worlds – impacts on students who board

- 6.66 Evidence about the impact attending boarding school can have on students was also provided to the committee. Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, Australian National University, explained that students who attend boarding school 'are open about the fact that it

changes them', with students often describing their experience of boarding as 'walking in two worlds', with two sets of social and cultural norms.⁶⁶

6.67 Assistant Professor Rogers acknowledged that:

If you want to succeed in this colonised world, you have to learn the skills of the white man. That is what boarding school does. It teaches our kids how to be in two different worlds. We can skirt around that, but the more we actually explain that to our kids, the better they can understand it.⁶⁷

6.68 Mr Jeff Waia, Teacher, Tagai State College, acknowledged the utility of Western education; however he cautioned that:

...one must have a strong identity to be able to participate in the Western world. One must know the knowledge of code switching comfortably in their world. I understand and know that Western education is 'a skill'...The language of English is how to survive...The Torres Strait Islander world is interpreted through oral culture, so one's identity must be interpreted in oral languages, for the oral identity and the protocols and the laws of this society is written in oral languages. Therefore, one must understand those laws by knowing their languages first of all.⁶⁸

6.69 Ms Ashley Dorr, Wiltja Secondary College, emphasised the importance of preparing students to skilfully walk in two worlds. Ms Dorr explained that:

While being very careful with this idea of preserving culture, I think it is extremely essential that there is a sense in which we... show students the other way of working, the way of walking together in two worlds – in particular, a more mainstream world – because they come from such a different background. We hope that they emerge in the end as really well-rounded young people who can operate really comfortably in their communities but also be quite at home in the wider world.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Mr Jeff Waia, Teacher, Tagai State College, *Committee Hansard*, Thursday Island, 9 March 2016, pp. 8–9.

⁶⁹ Ms Ashley Dorr, Principal, Wiltja Secondary College, *Committee Hansard*, Northgate, 26 February 2016, p. 2.

Homesickness

6.70 Many submissions discussed the impact of ‘homesickness’ on retention.⁷⁰ Dr Marnie O’Bryan noted that many students she spoke with were ‘very anxious to explain exactly *what* they were missing when people presumed that they were *just homesick*’.⁷¹ Dr O’Bryan explained that:

Far beyond being a transient affliction and a normal part of transitioning to life away from home, many participants were at pains to explain that what schools understand by homesickness fails to take into account different social situations, cultural norms and the responsibilities that they had within their families and communities. Where being away at school meant that boarders were unable to fulfil obligations to loved ones, they described being consumed by the internal conflict that that occasioned.⁷²

6.71 Mr James Ballangarry, Student Teacher, University of Newcastle, explained that many students do not just feel homesick for their immediate family:

When we have homesickness, we do not have homesickness just for our immediate family. We have homesickness for our surroundings and for our extended family and entire community. It is much different in that sense. It is that balance. If we could do something to help students to get used to that balance... It is too much of a transition to come here. It is a big culture change.⁷³

⁷⁰ For example: Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 15; Remote Indigenous Parents Association, *Submission 47*, 44th Parliament, p. 7; Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, p. 4; Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 38*, 44th Parliament, p. 15; Richard Stewart and Rachel Elphick, *Submission 26*, 44th Parliament, p. 4, 6; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, p. [161]; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament, p. 6; North Queensland Cowboys, *Submission 49*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament, p. 23; Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, pp. 5–6; Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 23*, 45th Parliament, p. 11.

⁷¹ Emphasis in original.

⁷² Dr Margaret (Marnie) O’Bryan, *Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools*, 2016, p. 150.

⁷³ Mr James Ballangarry, Student Teacher, University of Newcastle, *Committee Hansard*, Newcastle, 21 March 2016, pp. 26–27.

Absences for family business

6.72 Not only do the requirements imposed by boarding schools impact a student's education, but so do requirements imposed by their families and community.

6.73 A number of submissions highlighted the impact of absences for family business as particularly challenging for students and boarding facilities to navigate.⁷⁴ Mr Barry Wallelt, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, explained that prolonged absences and miscommunication about when or whether students will return after absences for family business are challenging for boarding facilities:

One of the issues for the schools, of course – especially the boarding schools – is that they must maintain a certain level of ability to accommodate students. That includes the beds, the facilities, the teachers and all those sorts of things. You have students who may not return after a short break...so it is a very, very difficult job for a lot of these schools to maintain that balance between enrolment, facilities, ability to enrol and ability to educate.⁷⁵

6.74 Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers asserted that a balance must be struck between appropriately supporting a student's cultural needs and ensuring that they can attain the necessary skills to thrive, whether in further education or employment:

...there are heartbreaking stories of: 'I can't go home for sorry business, because someone in my community dies every second week and my school won't let me go home. My mum is calling me every night and I feel like I have got nowhere to belong, because I am stuck here and I can't get home to the important business that I need to undertake, and I feel like I am losing my culture.' It is a pretty bitter pill to swallow for some of our kids moving away. On the other hand, this is the world we live in. For any of us to make it in this world, we have to speak English. There is no school in

⁷⁴ For example: Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament, p. 1; Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament, p. 19; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 31*, 45th Parliament, p. 11; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 46*, 44th Parliament, p. [10]; and Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, *Submission 2*, 44th Parliament, p. 17.

⁷⁵ Mr Barry Wallelt, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 March 2016, p. 13.

Australia where you can speak an Aboriginal language and be tested on that for NAPLAN.⁷⁶

Student retention and ‘churn’

6.75 Some submissions noted that a significant proportion of students who live away from home for study return to community shortly after commencing.⁷⁷ PM&C noted that approximately one third of students receiving ABSTUDY in formal boarding arrangements move on and off payments during a school year.⁷⁸

6.76 Mr Steve Foster, Associate Principal, Tagai State College, explained that the majority of students who leave the Torres Strait for secondary education move back and forth between multiple boarding schools and community:

...when you track those students that have gone away to boarding school, you can see that, by the time they finish year 12 – if they finish year 12 – they might have been to five different boarding schools because of a number of issues. If you also track data and you put rigour around tracking that data, you will find that a majority of them somewhere in their senior schooling years end up back here at Tagai State College or TI for a number of reasons.⁷⁹

6.77 Dr Adele Schmidt, Research Officer, IEU, told the committee that the experience of going to boarding school and returning to community without completing the school year can negatively impact self-esteem and lead to behavioural problems:

...kids who come back from boarding school often come back with, for want of a better phrase, 'a chip on their shoulder'. They have gone off to boarding school – they were picked because they were smart and they thought that they could make it – and suddenly they have had their identity challenged. So they are back in the school and they are a little bit lippy with their elders. So

⁷⁶ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 24.

⁷⁷ For example: Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament, pp. 1–2; Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 15; Richard Stewart and Rachel Elphick, *Submission 26*, 44th Parliament, p. 3; Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Independent Education Union, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, p. 6; Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, *Submission 12*, 44th Parliament, p. 4; and Association of the Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 46*, 44th Parliament, p. [31].

⁷⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Mr Steve Foster, Associate Principal, Tagai State College, *Committee Hansard*, Thursday Island, 9 March 2016, p. 8.

they start to develop some behavioural problems as a consequence of their experience of going away and, essentially, failing. That is how they feel; I am not saying that they have failed. But they feel like failures, a lot of them.⁸⁰

- 6.78 The Australian Education Union (AEU) highlighted the broader ramifications of boarding scholarship programs that target high-performing students, such as the Australian Indigenous Education Fund. The AEU acknowledged that while the recipients of these scholarships ‘study in a privileged environment where peer effects are likely to be positive for academic achievement...somewhat ironically, one consequence of these students completing their secondary studies at boarding schools is to remove any positive peer effect of their attendance in their local community’.⁸¹

Committee comment

- 6.79 Much of the evidence discussed in this chapter focussed on the challenges that many students have experienced when living away from home for study and the impact that this has had on their ability to attend school and achieve various levels of educational attainment. However, the committee wishes to acknowledge and commend the many Indigenous students who have been able to achieve amazing outcomes, despite the challenges they have faced.
- 6.80 All Indigenous students should be empowered to achieve their education goals. The committee received considerable evidence that a significant proportion of students who live away from home for study drop out and return to community shortly after commencing. This can have devastating impacts on the student’s motivation to study and self-esteem. It can also discourage others within the community and places financial and administrative strain on both boarding facilities and schools within the local community.
- 6.81 It is clear that this ‘revolving door’ within Indigenous boarding must be addressed if educational attainment is to be improved. The committee hopes that improving the quality and cultural safety of boarding facilities, as discussed above, will go some way toward addressing this problem. However, more must be done to assist students, families, boarding facilities and schools.

⁸⁰ Dr Adele Schmidt, Research Officer, Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, *Committee Hansard*, Acacia Ridge, 5 February 2016, p. 10.

⁸¹ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, p. 19.

Transition support

- 6.82 A number of submissions emphasised the importance of supporting students as they transition from community to boarding.⁸² Both the Northern Territory and Queensland Government provide transition support services for Indigenous students and their families.
- 6.83 The Northern Territory Transition Support Unit (NTTSU) ‘supports students and their families to make choices about remaining in the community or accessing either academic or vocational education and training pathways away for their community’.⁸³
- 6.84 Ms Lois Peeler AM, Principal, Worawa Aboriginal College, advised the committee that the NTTSU has ‘proven to be very valuable’. Ms Peeler explained that Worawa works collaboratively with the NTTSU to ensure smooth transitions and higher retention.⁸⁴
- 6.85 In Queensland, Transition Support Services are available in Cape York, Palm Island and at various partner boarding schools.⁸⁵ The Queensland Department of Education and Training advised the committee that, in 2016, its Transition Support Services worked with 130 year 6 students and families in Cape York to develop and enact primary into secondary school transition plans.⁸⁶
- 6.86 Mr Ren Perkins, National Catholic Education Commission, advised the committee that a number of Catholic boarding schools now employ transition managers, who work closely with students, families and

⁸² For example: Professor Jeannie Herbert AM, *Submission 8*, 44th Parliament, p. 4; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament, pp. 3–4; Ninti One Limited, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament, p. 7; Richard Stewart and Rachel Elphick, *Submission 26*, 44th Parliament, p. 2; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Supplementary Submission 46.1*, 44th Parliament; Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, pp. 7–9; Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament, p. 11; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, pp. 4–5; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7*, 44th Parliament, pp. 1–2; Boarding Australia, *Submission 21*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2–3; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament, p. 4; Queensland Government, *Submission 26*, 45th Parliament, pp. 16–17; Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, *Submission 18*, 45th Parliament; and Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, pp. 10–11.

⁸³ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, pp. 7–8.

⁸⁴ Ms Lois Peeler AM, Principal, Worawa Aboriginal College, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 31 March 2017, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Queensland Department of Education and Training, *Transition Support Services*, <http://indigenous.education.qld.gov.au/community/Pages/tss.aspx>, accessed 21 July 2017.

⁸⁶ Queensland Government, *Submission 26*, 45th Parliament, p. 16.

communities to develop strong links and strong local knowledge of students' home communities.⁸⁷

- 6.87 The Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia noted that independent schools and, in particular, the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership's High Expectations Program, provide 'support for students to help in the transition from remote community life to a metropolitan boarding school, including professional and private tutors, mentors, role models, weekend home stay families and counsellors', as well as providing assistance and support for parents and guardians.⁸⁸

Relationships with community

- 6.88 Many submissions emphasised the importance of boarding facilities to build and maintain strong relationships with the families and communities of students.⁸⁹ Ms Fiona Jose, Cape York Partnership, emphasised the importance of providing support that is based in community to both students and families:

We only have three high schools throughout our 16 remote communities. So really we started to look at and focus on how we can actually support parents and students transition from remote schools to schools all over the state. One of those things we...lacked was how we were bringing the parents along and how we actually supported them.⁹⁰

- 6.89 Ms Jose explained that the Cape York Leaders Program allows parents to feel confident that their children's needs are being properly considered and addressed by boarding schools in regional and capital cities:

We do a site inspection every year...Our kids do not have a choice...To have that structure fighting for them is extremely

⁸⁷ Mr Ren Perkins, National Catholic Education Commission, Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 22 March 2016, p. 32.

⁸⁸ Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Submission 46*, 44th Parliament, pp. [6], [23]–[25].

⁸⁹ For example: Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament, p. 3; Remote Indigenous Parents Association, *Submission 47*, 44th Parliament; Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, *Supplementary Submission 46.1*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament, p. 10; Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, *Submission 17*, 44th Parliament, pp. 12–14; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament, pp. 5–6; Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 20*, 44th Parliament, p. 4; Dr Maryanne Macdonald, *Submission 11*, 45th Parliament, p. 3; Melbourne Indigenous Transition School, *Submission 18*, 45th Parliament, p. 5; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Ms Fiona Jose, Executive General Manager, Cape York Partnership, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 9.

important...There are limited Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations with programs transitioning black Australian kids into these schools.⁹¹

Flexibility and matching schools to students

- 6.90 Mr Richard Stewart noted that a key benefit of boarding facilities like AFL House, which allows students to attend a range of schools, is the capacity for students to be matched with a school and schooling model that best suits their needs without being sent home each time.⁹²
- 6.91 Mr Anthony Bennett, Wiltja Boarding, emphasised the importance of flexibility when addressing student 'churn':
- ...big boarding schools – the 'big end of town' school systems – have very rigid and structured processes of expulsion, exclusion and all the rest of it. We do not. We will do everything in our power to keep that door open. We know that it might take four, five or six times for kids to come and go but eventually get to that point of maturation or decide they want to come back. The young lady doing law this year was deliberately not here for 12 months. We said: 'Go away; get it together...' She did. She finished her year 12 last year and got the highest ATAR that has ever been achieved by a student at Wiltja.⁹³
- 6.92 Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle explained that:
- Well-informed families and students as well as schools would, in our opinion, lead to less non-completes for our Indigenous kids. Better application and enrolment processes would ensure a good fit between school and student. Many schools look to attract any Indigenous student and enrol all applicants, for reasons known to such schools. For students and their families, a lack of information and research into Indigenous boarding schools leaves them making decisions without having the full picture. Misinformation and miscommunication can lead to difficult issues to resolve down the track.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ms Fiona Jose, Executive General Manager, Cape York Partnership, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 25.

⁹² Mr Richard Stewart, Previous General Manager, AFL Cape York House, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 33.

⁹³ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, Department for Education and Child Development, *Committee Hansard*, Northgate, 26 February 2016, p. 10.

⁹⁴ Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers and Dr Nicholas Biddle, *Submission 14*, 44th Parliament, p. 5.

- 6.93 Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Department of Education and Training, told the committee that the Queensland Government is considering establishing a project management office to track, monitor and coordinate students' transition from community to school and back again:

One of the options that we did talk about yesterday – I am probably more akin to walking down this path, but the review is still underway so we will wait until the outcome – is that within our department it is a matter of whether we go down the path of establishing what we might call a project management office so that logistically we track and monitor every student who goes off to boarding school or is transitioning to a school from remote communities, and that includes the logistics in relation to organising travel and accommodation and all those sorts of pieces along the way. If it is done inside our department and we can then provide the partial care and support and the accompanying pieces around having someone walk with them along the way, logistically it's all in the one space and we can then manage and monitor that better, we know exactly what's going on, we can take full responsibility and duty of care for every individual student, and we are more comfortable in knowing that we can see a seamless transition from community to school and back home again.⁹⁵

- 6.94 Mr Button explained that there are issues with the transfer of information about students who have travelled interstate to live away from home for study, which hinders efforts to support these students:

Where we experience difficulties in transferring information is when we get kids predominantly from the territory who come across to our schools, and that is where we do have some issues around transfer of information. As I said, most of our kids will stay in Queensland but it is the kids who come from the NT and WA who come across to our boarding schools where there is a lack of information about those kids and how do we best support them as well.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 22.

⁹⁶ Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools – Indigenous Education, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Proof Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 29 August 2017, p. 22.

- 6.95 The Northern Territory Department of Education also emphasised the need for better coordination and integration of services supporting students as they transition to secondary education pathways, particularly health services, ABSTUDY, and scholarship providers.⁹⁷

Committee comment

- 6.96 The committee received considerable evidence emphasising the importance of supporting students as they transition from community to boarding. Throughout the inquiry, it became clear that it is essential to work with students, families, and schools to ensure that the boarding facility, school, and schooling model best meets the individual needs of each student. Furthermore, the committee heard that retention and education outcomes improve when schools and boarding facilities are flexible and can negotiate a balance between a student's obligations to their family and community with their attendance and schooling.
- 6.97 The committee acknowledges the work that is being done by the Northern Territory and Queensland governments to support students in their transition from community to boarding. However, as many students travel interstate for study, the Federal Government may be the best suited to provide coordination and support so that no students fall through the cracks. The committee is of the view that the PM&C's existing and well-established regional network would be well-poised to deliver such services, whether through the establishment of a new Indigenous Education Support Officer position (the support officer), or by utilising existing resources within each regional office.
- 6.98 Students and families must be empowered to make informed decisions about what model might best suit their needs and to negotiate a balance between the student's obligations to their family and community with their school attendance and educational obligations. However, as many students and families may not feel confident conducting negotiations with schools, the committee believes that this could be an important role for a support officer, located in community. The support officer could liaise with families, students, and schools to ensure the best fit for the student and clarify expectations for all parties. The support officer could also assist students and families to coordinate and negotiate absences and return for cultural and family business.

⁹⁷ Northern Territory Department of Education, *Submission 39*, 44th Parliament, pp. 8-9.

- 6.99 For students who return to community shortly after commencing living away from home for study, the support officer can also have a role in following up with a student and their family to ascertain the reasons for leaving and discuss alternate educational options based on an updated understanding of the student's needs.
- 6.100 As a Commonwealth officer, the support officer would be best suited to provide assistance with applications for federal payments such as ABSTUDY and provide advice regarding other forms of financial assistance. Clear processing pathways between PM&C and the Department of Human Services should be established to streamline the ABSTUDY process. This would create a clearer, faster, more seamless experience for both recipients and schools. ABSTUDY is considered in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this report.
- 6.101 Throughout the inquiry, the committee found that complete and consistent data regarding student attendance, performance and outcomes (employment, tertiary studies, etc.) is difficult to find, particularly when students are travelling interstate to study. This challenge is compounded by the many different schools that a student may attend throughout their schooling. The committee is of the view that the Federal Government should be responsible for collecting and recording this data. Educational attainment cannot be improved if the current state of education delivery and outcomes are not properly understood.

Recommendation 17

- 6.102 **The committee recommends that, by 2020, the Federal Government, through the Prime Minister and Cabinet Regional Network Offices, introduce education coordination services for Indigenous boarding students from remote and very remote communities that will be responsible for:**
- **providing assistance and coordinating applications for ABSTUDY and other forms of financial assistance;**
 - **liaising with families, students, and schools to ensure the best fit for the student and clarify expectations for all parties;**
 - **coordinating and negotiating absences and return for cultural and family business; and**
 - **collecting and tracking student data regarding attendance, retention, educational performance, and outcomes (employment, tertiary studies, etc.).**

Funding

- 7.1 State and territory governments are responsible for the delivery and regulation of schooling to all children of school age in their jurisdictions. States and territories determine curriculums, register schools, regulate school activities and are directly responsible for the administration of government schools. Non-government schools operate under conditions determined by state and territory government registration authorities.¹
- 7.2 Government schools receive the majority of their public funding from their state or territory government, with the Federal Government providing supplementary funding. Non-government schools receive the majority of their public funding from the Federal Government, with state and territory governments providing supplementary funding.²
- 7.3 This chapter outlines the funding arrangements for schools, engagement and mentoring programs, and students living away from home for study. It explores the costs of boarding and the Federal Government funding available to meet these costs. It also considers the challenges experienced by Indigenous families when applying for ABSTUDY, as well as the way in which elements of the administration of ABSTUDY can negatively impact both students and schools.

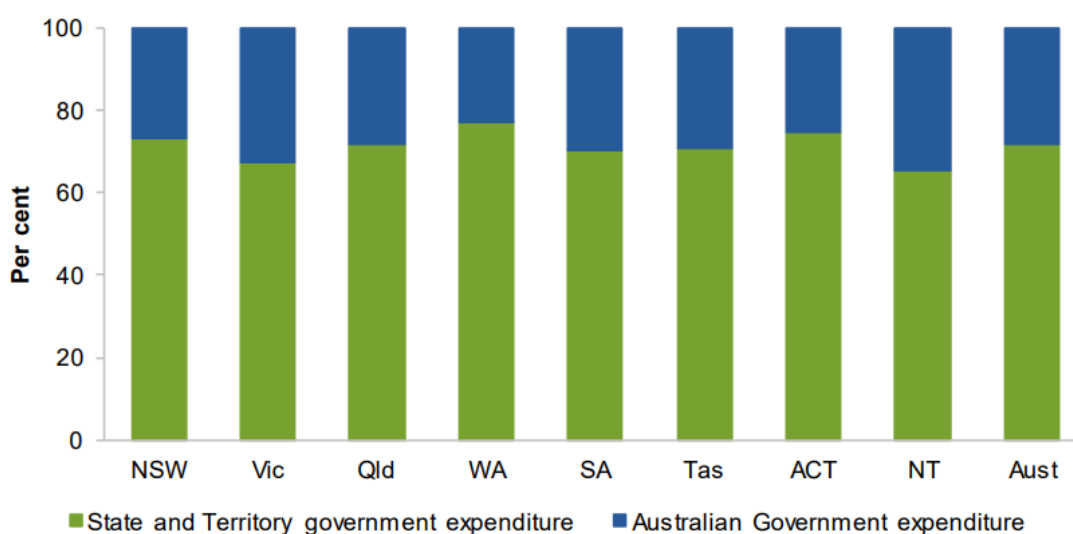
¹ Department of Education, 'Funding for schools', <https://www.education.gov.au/funding-schools>, accessed 3 August 2017.

² Department of Education, 'Funding for schools', <https://www.education.gov.au/funding-schools>, accessed 3 August 2017.

Federal, state and territory expenditure

7.4 In 2014–15, Federal, state and territory governments' total recurrent expenditure on school education was \$53 billion, of which state and territory governments provided 71.9% (Figure 7.1).³ However, this report will primarily consider Federal Government funding.

Figure 7.1 Proportion of total school education government recurrent expenditure, 2014–15



Source Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2017, Volume B: Child care, education, and training*, p. 4.3.

Federal Government funding

7.5 Recurrent funding for schools is calculated with reference to a school's Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This comprises a per-student amount (\$9,271 for a primary student and \$12,193 for a secondary student in 2014), which is indexed annually, in addition to loadings for certain types of student and school disadvantage, including:

- students with disability;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- students from low socioeconomic backgrounds;
- students with low English proficiency;
- the location of the school; and
- the size of the school.⁴

³ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2017, Volume B: Child care, education, and training*, p. 4.3.

⁴ *Australian Education Act 2013*, s. 35.

- 7.6 Government schools; special and special assistance schools; schools where the majority of students are Indigenous⁵; and sole provider schools receive the full SRS-funding amount. However, for all other schools, the amount is discounted by a capacity-to-contribute percentage, which is determined by the school's SES score.⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading

- 7.7 The amount of extra funding provided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading is calculated based on the proportion of Indigenous students in the school. At the lowest rate (one student) the loading is 20% of the school's per-student SRS amount. At the highest rate, the loading is 120% of the school's per-student SRS amount.⁷
- 7.8 For example, based on the 2014 per-student amounts, a primary school with 100 students, 20 of whom are Indigenous, would attract a loading of \$74,168 (40% x \$9,271 x 20). Whereas a secondary school with 300 students, of which 250 are Indigenous, would attract a loading of \$3,149,858 (103% x \$12,193 x 250).⁸ This is illustrated in Figure 7.2.

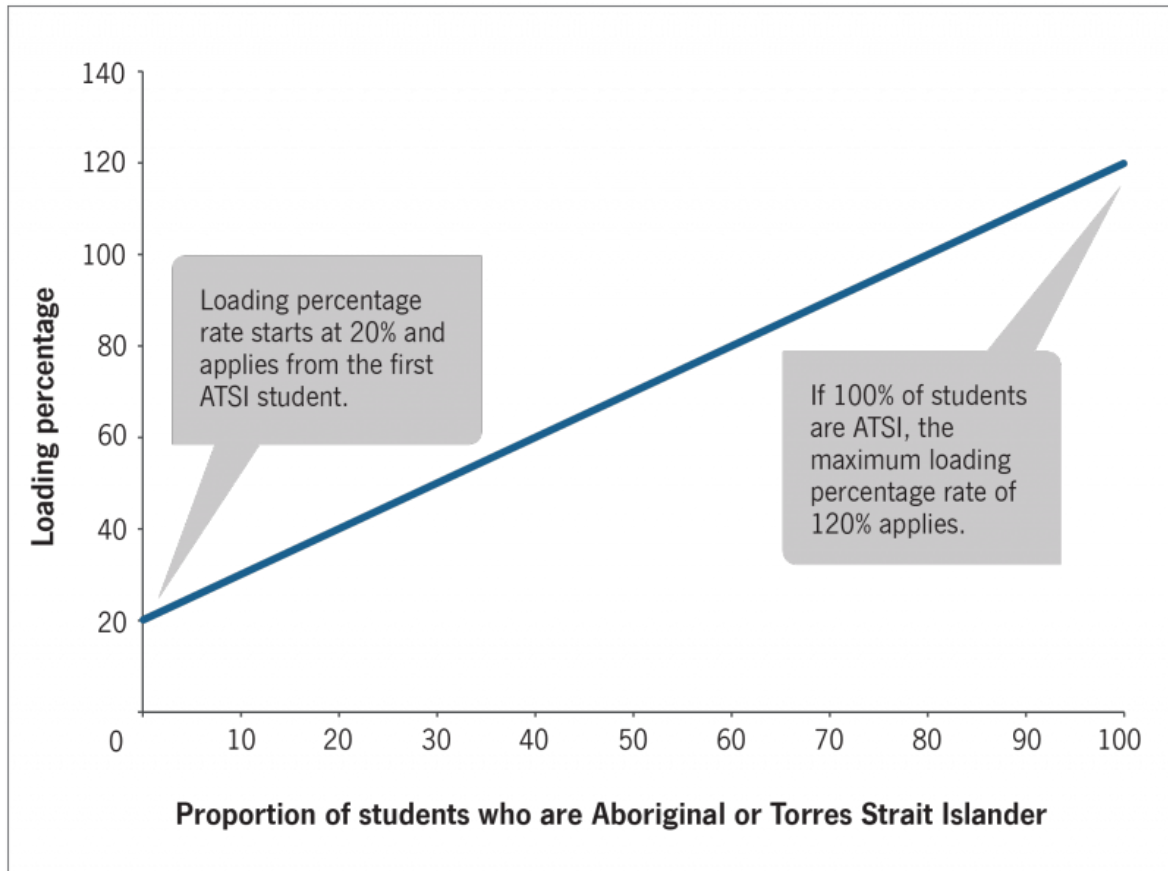
⁵ Defined under Section 8 of the *Australian Education Act 2013*, as schools where at least 80% of enrolled students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; or schools that are very remote and at least 50% of enrolled students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

⁶ *Australian Education Act 2013*, s. 54.

⁷ The formula for calculating a school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander percentage can be found in Section 37(2) of the *Australian Education Act 2013*.

⁸ Federal Government, *Guide to the Australian Education Act*, <https://aeaguide.education.gov.au/content/f52-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-island-students-sample-calculations-loading>, accessed 4 August 2017.

Figure 7.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading percentage rate



Source *Federal Government, Guide to the Australian Education Act 2013,* <https://aeaguide.education.gov.au/content/b2122-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-loading>, accessed 4 August 2017.

7.9 The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) advised the committee that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading 'means that education authorities have an additional \$929 million over four years to apply flexible approaches that best meet the needs of Indigenous students'.⁹ The estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loadings are listed in Table 7.1.⁹

⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 9.

Table 7.1 SRS – estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading

<i>Sector</i>	2014 \$m	2015 \$m	2016 \$m	2017 \$m	TOTAL¹⁰ \$m
Government	111	123	135	152	521
Catholic	54	59	64	69	246
Independent	35	39	42	45	161
All	200	222	241	266	929

Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament, p. 9.*

7.10 State, territory, and non-government education authorities control the vast majority of federal school funding, including funds to assist Indigenous students.¹¹

7.11 The Independent School’s Council of Australia (ISCA) and Association of Independent Schools raised concerns regarding the level of funding received by some of their schools.¹² ISCA explained that large metropolitan boarding schools with small numbers of Indigenous students ‘receive very little additional funding for these students’, beyond ABSTUDY for their boarding:

These schools are generally high SES schools and so receive minimal recurrent grants from governments and minimal funding to address disadvantage for Indigenous students as the population in the school is relatively small. Thus the majority of the cost of educating this group of boarders is borne by the school. If schools reach the point where they feel they are no longer able to support these students financially and these programs ceased or were reduced, it would be at great social cost to Australia.¹³

7.12 ISCA criticised the way in which funding is distributed under the SRS model, asserting that ‘the SRS funding entitlements and allocations only apply to the 900 non-systemic Independent schools’. The ISCA explained that:

The new SRS model theoretically provides base funding and loadings for disadvantage directly to schools. In practice however, school systems, such as government and Catholic systems, receive the SRS funding for all their schools and are able to redistribute

¹⁰ Note numbers may not add due to rounding.

¹¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament, p. 9.*

¹² Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16, 44th Parliament, pp. 6–9.*

¹³ Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16, 44th Parliament, p. 8.*

their schools' funding entitlements within the system according to their own needs-based methodologies.¹⁴

Indigenous Advancement Strategy (Children and Schooling Programme)

7.13 Many of the engagement programs discussed in Chapter 4, such as the school-based 'academy-style' programs, receive Federal Government funding through the Children and Schooling Programme, which is part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.¹⁵ PM&C advised the committee that, as at March 2016, a total of \$353.5 million of funding remains uncommitted (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Uncommitted funds, Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)

	2016–17 \$'000	2017–18 \$'000	2018–19 \$'000	TOTAL \$'000
Children and Schooling	10,459	126,035	216,966	353,460
IAS total	302,454	545,215	774,910	1,622,579

Source Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Supplementary Submission 43.1, 44th Parliament, p. 5.*

7.14 PM&C advised the committee that the Children and Schooling Programme 'assists the delivery of a range of activities to provide supportive, enriched and meaningful learning environments for young people', explaining that:

These activities include full-time intensive school-based Academies (such as those delivered by the Clontarf Foundation and Role Models and Leaders Australia), junior ranger projects and less intensive activities offered over days or weeks throughout the school year, such as mentoring projects.¹⁶

Committee comment

7.15 The Federal Government has a duty to ensure that funds are spent in the most effective and efficient manner possible. As such, the committee is of the view that all Federal Government programs and programs receiving Federal Government funding must be evidence-based and incorporate

¹⁴ Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16, 44th Parliament, p. 13.*

¹⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament, p. 10.*

¹⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament, p. 10.*

clear and effective performance measurement to ensure that they are effective.

- 7.16 Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4, the committee is very concerned by the significant disparity between the availability and funding for engagement programs, and, provision of scholarships for girls compared to that provided for boys. These girls will be the mothers and carers of the next generation of Indigenous students. As such, their education is critical to improving the health, education, and employment of not only themselves but their children and future generations.
- 7.17 Students living away from home for study should have access to high-quality, culturally safe boarding facilities. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, many boarding facilities identified areas that they could, and often desperately wanted to, improve but were prevented by resource constraints.

Cost of boarding

- 7.18 In 2015, the Northern Territory Department of Education commissioned KPMG to review funding arrangements for non-government Indigenous boarding schools. The KPMG report found that the average annual cost of providing an Indigenous boarding facility in a school based setting is \$25,857 per boarder,¹⁷ outlined in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Average allocated cost incurred per Indigenous boarding student at independent schools

	2013	2014	2015	3 year average
No. Indigenous boarders	798	679	742	740
Total cost incurred (\$'000s)	19,090	18,732	19,581	19,134
Average cost per boarder (\$'000s)	24	28	26	26

Source KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. 11.*

- 7.19 The calculation was based on the average actual costs¹⁸ of services being delivered by independent boarding schools. The report noted that this

¹⁷ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. vii.*

¹⁸ For the period from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2015 across seven schools, comprising St Philip's College in Alice Springs, Tiwi College on Melville Island, Kormilda College in Darwin, St John's Catholic College in Darwin, Yirara College in Alice Springs, Woolaning Homeland Christian College, and Marrara Christian College in Darwin.

‘falls short of the [National Boarding Standard] in some areas, and short of the standard that service providers and peak bodies believe should be delivered’.¹⁹

- 7.20 This cost was compared to the average cost of Callistemon House, a Northern Territory Government-owned and operated boarding facility that meets the National Boarding Standard, which was found to be \$30,305 per boarder.²⁰
- 7.21 By comparison, Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) advised the committee that, over a typical school year (266 days), its average cost per student is \$61,000.²¹
- 7.22 The report concluded that the funding provided by Federal and Northern Territory governments for the provision of boarding facilities in a school-based setting was insufficient to meet the costs associated with delivering the current level of service provided by the schools. It noted that ‘this assessed outcome is consistent with an array of sector estimates that a funding shortfall of \$12,000–15,000 exists per student’.²² The calculated net costs of operating Indigenous boarding facilities is outlined in Table 7.4 below.

Table 7.4 Net cost of operating Indigenous boarding facilities

	2013	2014	2015	Overall average
No. of Indigenous boarders	798	679	742	740
Total revenue across all sources (\$'000)	11,529	11,546	11,167	11,414
Total cost incurred (\$'000)	19,090	18,732	19,581	19,134
Net operating result (\$'000)	(7,561)	(7,186)	(8,414)	(7,720)
Average loss per Indigenous boarder (\$)	9,475	10,582	11,340	10,437

Source KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. 12.*

¹⁹ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. viii.*

²⁰ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, pp. 7–8.*

²¹ Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 41, 45th Parliament, p. 4.*

²² KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. 13.*

7.23 The KPMG report asserted that ‘the combined efforts of funding models across [Federal] and NT programs do not adequately cover the current costs of running boarding operations’, noting that:

As a result there are various levels of cross subsidisation by the academic schools to the boarding facilities. Levels of cross subsidisation are not always well measured as a result of the lack of transparency in ABSTUDY funding received by schools for academic purposes versus living away from home allowance.²³

7.24 The KPMG report acknowledged that ‘a significant amount of unrecompensed goodwill exists within the sector’, noting that ‘staff regularly attend to out of hours’ functions including transportation to medical attendance, sporting events and weekend excursions’.²⁴ The report explained that unmet costs extend to:

- expenses associated with boarding supervision staff;
- professional development for staff caring for disadvantaged and high need boarders;
- medical staff (nursing);
- uniforms and normal clothing;
- books; and
- travel home deemed necessary for student well-being.²⁵

7.25 Northern Territory Christian Schools explained that ‘there are expenses incurred for healthcare, sport, and recreational activities’, and that ‘it is critical that the real costs of boarding are understood and these additional expenses factored into income received by boarding schools’.²⁶

7.26 Ms Jennifer Florisson, Trainer, Boarding Training Australia, stated that ‘the existing funding falls well short of real costs for an effective and appropriate boarding experience for Indigenous students’. Ms Florisson explained that:

A large part of that is around the student-staff ratio that we believe is required...because of the real added needs for mental health and wellbeing support and transition support...They particularly need their own nurses and professional supports, health screening

²³ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government*, Department of Education, 2016, p. 13.

²⁴ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government*, Department of Education, 2016, p. 13.

²⁵ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government*, Department of Education, 2016, p. 13.

²⁶ NT Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament, p. 2.

facilities, a lot of support in nutrition, mental health, personal development and those things... Boarding operations that have the required support staff and appropriate ratios often have to rely on funding from other sources... The school is often propping up the boarding program, or other partners are providing that shortfall... boarding operations, who cannot access that kind of additional funding, are operating more of a minimal program. There are a lot of reduced outcomes and difficulties in the residences. Some operators argue that dedicated Indigenous boarding houses are basically in crisis because of this inadequate funding.²⁷

- 7.27 The KPMG report warned that peak bodies have expressed concerns that 'schools or boarding operations may need to close', and noted that 'others have already sought emergency funding from Government to remain in operation'.²⁸

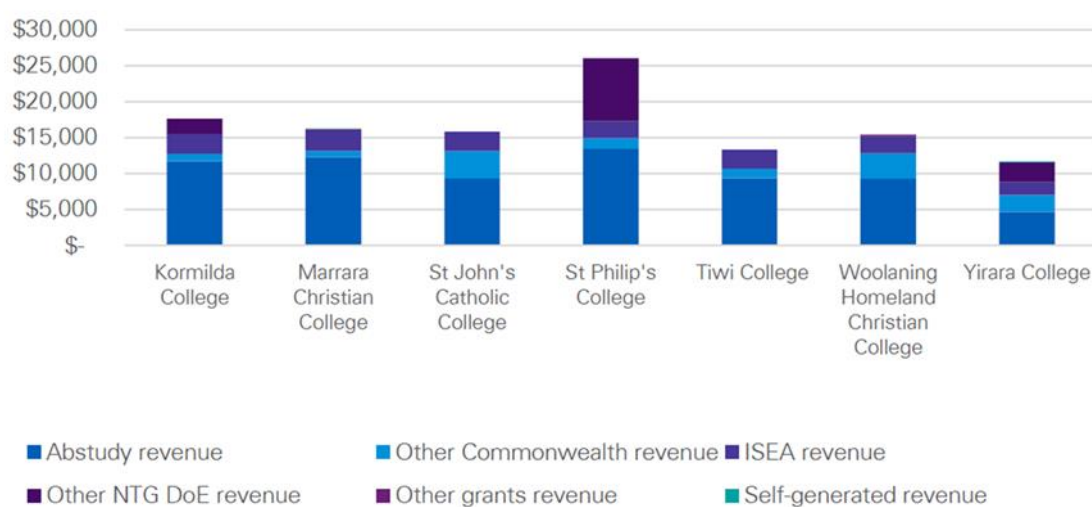
Federal funding for boarding

- 7.28 A range of support is available for Indigenous students who live away from home for study, offered by federal; state and territory governments; and philanthropic and corporate organisations. State and territory governments contribute to boarding schools, with some states and territories also operating residential colleges and hostels. However, as illustrated in Figure 7.3, a significant proportion of the funding for boarding is provided by the Federal Government.
- 7.29 In addition to recurrent schools funding and Family Tax Benefit support for families, the Federal Government offers five main streams of supplementary support for Indigenous students living away from home for study and their families:
- Assistance for Isolated Children;
 - Indigenous Boarding Initiative;
 - ABSTUDY;
 - Aboriginal Hostels; and
 - Scholarship Support.²⁹

²⁷ Ms Jennifer Florisson, Trainer, Boarding Training Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Perth, 4 May 2017, p. 12.

²⁸ KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government*, Department of Education, 2016, p. 13.

²⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, pp. 11-13.

Figure 7.3 Funding per school, 3 year average breakdown by boarding facility (per student)

Source KPMG, *Non-Government Indigenous Boarding Schools: Review of funding arrangements for the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education, 2016, p. 9*

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

7.30 The Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) is a mainstream program to assist families of students who cannot access an appropriate government school because of geographic isolation, disability, or special health needs. PM&C noted that 'a key difference between AIC and ABSTUDY is that AIC provides allowances for primary school students'.³⁰

7.31 PM&C advised that 'several hundred Indigenous students access AIC each year', explaining that:

Most Indigenous students accessing AIC receive the Distance Education Allowance, a maximum of \$3,948 a year at 20 September 2015. In 2014, around 60 Indigenous students receiving AIC were secondary students accessing the boarding allowance. The maximum AIC boarding allowance rate is \$9,407 a year (at 20 September 2015), made up of a base rate of \$7,897 and an income tested additional rate of up to \$1,507, subject to actual boarding costs.³¹

Indigenous Boarding Initiative

7.32 PM&C advised the committee that, in 2014, the Federal Government implemented the Indigenous Boarding Initiative to 'assist non-government boarding schools with significant numbers of Indigenous

³⁰ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament*, p. 12.

³¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament*, p. 12.

boarders from remote areas to transition to the new recurrent school funding arrangements'. PM&C explained that:

The measure targets non-government schools with more than 50 Indigenous boarding students from remote or very remote areas, or where 50% or more of their boarding students are Indigenous students from remote or very remote areas. The measure provides additional funding to these schools in each year of the initiative, equivalent on average to the difference between the Indigenous loading for each year and the estimated 2017 Indigenous loading.³²

- 7.33 PM&C noted that, as total recurrent funding for schools continues to grow year on year it will offset the Indigenous Boarding Initiative. However, it is estimated that by 2017, 'recurrent funding for schools eligible for the Indigenous Boarding Initiative, when combined with other sources of public funding, will allow the initiative to cease'.³³

ABSTUDY

- 7.34 The ABSTUDY Policy Manual states that 'ABSTUDY is an important symbol of the Australian Government's commitment to Indigenous education'. The main objectives of the ABSTUDY Scheme are to:
- encourage Indigenous peoples to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available;
 - promote equity of educational opportunity; and
 - improve educational outcomes.³⁴
- 7.35 The ABSTUDY scheme aims to address educational disadvantage by assisting with the costs associated with study – such as accommodation, living expenses, and travelling to or from a place of study – if a student is living away from home for study.³⁵
- 7.36 A student can be approved for ABSTUDY Living Away from Home Benefits if they need to live away from home to study for a range of reasons, including, but not limited to when:
- the student does not have reasonable access to a local state school;

³² Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 12.

³³ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, pp. 12–13.

³⁴ Department of Social Services, *ABSTUDY Policy Manual*, 2016, http://guides.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/2016_ABSTUDY_Policy_Manual.pdf, accessed 7 August 2017.

³⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 11.

- the local state school is considered a limited program or 'bypass' school, as determined by the relevant state or territory education authority;
- the student cannot reasonably be expected to study while living at home (for example, due to overcrowded or disruptive living conditions in the home or community, or where the student's family is itinerant); or
- the student has accepted a scholarship to an independent boarding school that meets certain requirements, or a scholarship program that has been specifically approved for ABSTUDY.³⁶

7.37 PM&C advised the committee that:

Customers can claim ABSTUDY over the phone by calling a dedicated ABSTUDY line, or they can upload the claim form online through the Department of Human Services document lodgement service. Customers are also able to print a claim form from the Department of Human Services website and lodge it at a service centre.³⁷

7.38 Throughout the inquiry, the provision of ABSTUDY has consistently been raised as a central concern to students, families, communities and schools. The committee heard concerns regarding:

- unethical practices;
- payment amounts not meeting the costs of boarding;
- administrative processes that are slow, complex and very difficult for families and schools; and
- census dates and student movement.

Unethical practices

7.39 The Independent Education Union (IEU) noted that 'unethical practices by some regional and metropolitan boarding schools can exacerbate disadvantage and disengagement in rural and remote communities'.³⁸ Mr Anthony Bennett, Wiltja Boarding, described the current system:

You may not be aware, but there is this term in the industry called 'cherry picking'. Kids will – and do – go from Spinifex to Worawa to St John's to Yirara. What that means is that you are not actually getting any educational engagement at all. The ABSTUDY system simply provides access to secondary education. It is not linked or

³⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 19.

³⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 19.

³⁸ Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, *Submission 10*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

...tied to engagement or retention. None of that is factored into the current system...There are a number of policy settings at the minute within ABSTUDY which in fact encourage the revolving door of Indigenous boarding and cherry picking. In fact, all of those policy settings actually promote the notion within a boarding environment that if you want to maximise your income you should make sure you put through the door as many kids as you possibly can. In fact, there is a perverse incentive because the shorter the period they stay, the better it is from an economic perspective because you get to retain that funding for a term et cetera.³⁹

7.40 The Central Land Council called for an 'urgent revision' of ABSTUDY payments made to boarding schools:

We know that retention for remote students is an issue, yet payments to boarding schools are not based on their ability to retain students. Some students may only last a term...Yet, if a student does not return to boarding school, the school still receives payment for that student. Payments to boarding schools need to be paid in quarterly instalments and not as lump sums. Financial incentives for retaining students can ensure schools provide adequate academic support and appropriate social and emotional care.⁴⁰

7.41 Mr Barry Wallett, ISCA, strongly refuted claims that schools and boarding facilities are benefitting financially under the current ABSTUDY system:

In my seven years of working for the Independent Schools Council of Australia, I have never come across an independent boarding school with large numbers, or even small numbers, of Indigenous students that in any way hinted that there was any financial gain in trying to educate those students. In fact, most of them invest very large proportions of their own revenue into trying to help some of those students.⁴¹

³⁹ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, Wiltja Secondary College, *Committee Hansard*, Northgate, 26 February 2016, p. 24.

⁴⁰ Central Land Council, *Submission 41*, 44th Parliament, p. 15.

⁴¹ Mr Barry Wallett, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 March 2016, p. 13.

Meeting the costs of boarding

7.42 A number of submissions raised concerns that the ABSTUDY scheme does not adequately meet the costs of boarding.⁴² ISCA asserted that ‘the quantum of ABSTUDY is not sufficient to cover the reasonable costs of meeting the accommodation and day-to-day needs of Indigenous boarding students’, explaining that:

...schools are meeting all the basic and more complex health and social/emotional needs of these students at significant cost. As students’ families can make no contribution to their ongoing care, these costs must be met by schools. When compared to the cost of boarding provision in government facilities, the current ABSTUDY payment is meeting only half of these expenses.⁴³

7.43 Mr Barry Wallett, ISCA, advised the committee that, in many instances, schools are not able to ascertain how much ABSTUDY funding a student will be entitled to until after that student has commenced.⁴⁴

7.44 Furthermore, Mr Wallett noted that, as ABSTUDY is a family payment and subject to means-testing, the payments can fluctuate significantly based on the circumstances of the student’s family. He explained that, counter-productively, positive outcomes in community employment can negatively affect students’ access to education support.⁴⁵

7.45 The Australian Association of Christian Schools explained that most Indigenous families ‘view the ABSTUDY payment as the payment of fees for non-government schooling’. It asserted that ‘any expectation that the family might contribute outside of that [ABSTUDY] payment is unrealistic and not attempted by the school.’ As such:

...means-testing ABSTUDY is counter-intuitive both as a discouragement towards parental employment and for the school,

⁴² For example: Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; Independent Schools Queensland, *Submission 19*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools (Western Australia), *Submission 32*, 44th Parliament; Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 41*, 45th Parliament; Cape York Partnership, *Submission 55*, 44th Parliament; Catholic Agricultural College Bindoon, *Submission 5*, 44th Parliament; NT Christian Schools, *Submission 27*, 44th Parliament; National Catholic Education Commission, *Submission 18*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 40*, 45th Parliament; Downlands College, *Submission 42*, 45th Parliament; and Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament.

⁴³ Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Mr Barry Wallett, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 March 2016, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Mr Barry Wallett, Deputy Executive Director, Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 3 March 2016, p. 11.

which then receives less income but still incurs the full cost. The school incurs the loss because it is hardly going to close off the enrolment position.⁴⁶

7.46 The Association of Independent Schools for the Northern Territory (AISNT) told the committee that the gap between the costs of boarding and the funding provided are widening, asserting that:

From 2010 to 2013 the cost of schooling, as measured by the Australian Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC), rose by 14.4%...In the same period the Northern Territory Government has only increased its funding to recurrent costs of boarding facilities for remote Indigenous students by 8% (Isolated Students Education Allowance - ISEA). ABSTUDY, which forms the major part of the funding for these schools, has only increased by 0.15% for the same period.⁴⁷

7.47 AISNT called for ABSTUDY to be reviewed 'to ensure that annual increases are at least in line with the real cost of service delivery'.⁴⁸

7.48 PM&C advised the committee that ABSTUDY comprises a range of payments that respond to the particular needs of each student and their family, as such, there is 'no single ABSTUDY rate'.⁴⁹ Table 7.5 sets out the average amounts, both mean and median, that students received in 2016.

Table 7.5 ABSTUDY boarding-related payments, mean and median, 2016

	Under 16 year olds (n=4182)	16 years and over (n=1,085)
Mean	\$13,370	\$17,450
Median	\$14,630	\$19,200

Source Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, p. 1.

7.49 The Department of Social Services (DSS) explained that the mean and median amounts for students aged under 16 years old are lower than those for students aged 16 years and over because these figures do not include the Under-16 Boarding Supplement.⁵⁰

7.50 The Under-16 Boarding Supplement is a payment for eligible schools and hostels to make up the shortfall in boarding fees for younger students and who attract a lower rate of Living Allowance than students aged 16 years

⁴⁶ Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24, 45th Parliament*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9, 44th Parliament*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁸ Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9, 44th Parliament*, pp. 5-9.

⁴⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43, 44th Parliament*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, p. 1

and over. In 2016, the Under-16 Boarding Supplement was \$5,126.60 annually.⁵¹

7.51 Examples of ABSTUDY calculations provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to illustrate these payments are outlined below.

Scenario 1 – Boarding at an independent school

7.52 John is 17 years old and living in a remote community where he cannot access secondary schooling locally. He is an only child and a dependant. Both of his parents are unemployed and receiving the Newstart Allowance and, as such, the parental income test does not apply. John is eligible for Remote Area Allowance. He is living away from home to study at a college in Alice Springs.

7.53 If the college charges \$27,450 per year for boarding, John would attract \$15,530.75 per year in ABSTUDY assistance towards his boarding fees at the college, comprising:

- \$11,588.75 – ABSTUDY Living Allowance per year;
- \$3,467.50 – Rent Assistance per year; and
- \$474.50 – Remote Area Allowance per year.⁵²

7.54 The college charges \$11,450 for school fees in 2017. John would be eligible for a maximum amount of \$10,417 per year in ABSTUDY Group 2 School Fees Allowance.⁵³

7.55 If John parents were both employed full-time and earned the full-time National Minimum Wage, as at 1 July 2015, for the entire 2015–16 financial year (\$656.90 per week, \$17.29 per hour, 38 hours a week), each parent would have earned \$34,158, with a combined parental income of \$68,316 for that year. The income tests apply once parental income exceeds the parental income free area (\$51,903 per year for 2017). The total reduction is calculated as \$3,282.60 ($\$68,316 - \$51,903$) x 20 per cent. Table 7.6 below shows the impact of both parental income tests.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67*, 45th Parliament, p. 1.

⁵² Department of Social Services, *Submission 67*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2–3.

⁵³ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2–3.

⁵⁴ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67*, 45th Parliament, pp. 2–3.

Table 7.6 Impact of income test

	Parent on income support	Parental income \$68,316 (2015–16)	Difference (Income Test impact)
Total ABSTUDY	\$25,926.89	\$22,700*	-\$3,330

* Figures rounded to nearest \$100

Source Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, pp. 2–3.

Scenario 2 – Boarding at a residential college and attending state high school

- 7.56 Jane is 16 years old and studying at year 10 level; she is living in a remote community where she cannot access secondary schooling locally. She is an only child and a dependant. One of her parents is employed and the other is unemployed and receiving the Newstart Allowance. As such, the parental income test does not apply. Jane is eligible for Remote Area Allowance. She is living away from home for study at Broome Residential College in Broome and attending Broome Senior High School.
- 7.57 Broome Residential College charges \$20,940 per year for boarding in 2017. Jane would attract \$15,530.75 per year in ABSTUDY assistance towards her accommodation at Broome Residential College, comprising:
- \$11,588.75 – ABSTUDY Living Allowance per year;
 - \$3,467.50 – Rent Assistance per year; and
 - \$474.50 – Remote Area Allowance per year.⁵⁵
- 7.58 Broome Senior High School charges \$300 for annual school fees for a year 10 student in 2017. The ABSTUDY Schools Fees Allowance would pay this amount in full.⁵⁶
- 7.59 The School Fees Allowance will cover up to \$10,417.00 per year (\$2,322 of which is income tested) of the actual cost of the school fees. However, if the actual amount of the school fees is less than the student’s entitlement, then any unused School Fees Allowance can be transferred to cover boarding costs if they exceed the assistance available for boarding costs.⁵⁷
- 7.60 In this case, Jane has \$10,117 per year of unused School Fees Allowance, which can be used towards her boarding costs not already covered by ABSTUDY payments. Therefore, to make up for the shortfall between the ABSTUDY assistance towards Jane’s accommodation and the actual boarding charge, Jane would be entitled to \$5,430.20 per year of her

⁵⁵ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, pp. [5-6].

⁵⁶ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, pp. [5-6].

⁵⁷ Department of Social Services, *Submission 67, 45th Parliament*, pp. [5-6].

unused School Fees Allowance, which would cover the full cost of Broome Residential College.⁵⁸

Administrative challenges

7.61 The committee received considerable evidence that parents, schools and boarding facilities found the processes regarding applying for ABSTUDY difficult, confusing and frustrating.⁵⁹ The Remote Indigenous Parents Association stated that ABSTUDY forms are 'too hard and complicated to complete'.⁶⁰

7.62 Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, told the committee that, contrary to its intention to provide access to education, ABSTUDY forms and processes may be an insurmountable barrier to access for some families:

...many kids whose parents have very low literacy levels never get access. They would have to be entirely dependent upon the availability of a local Centrelink worker, who may or may not be there...⁶¹

7.63 Worawa Aboriginal College highlighted the difficulties faced by boarding facilities trying to assist students and families to resolve issues with ABSTUDY applications:

Telephone communication with ABSTUDY on any issue, including the status of a student application, requires a lengthy wait period...Calls often get disconnected, requiring a re-dial and the process of waiting commences again...There are numerous examples of [documents]...being sent to ABSTUDY regarding advice of an application which have not been received/uploaded by ABSTUDY onto student files- even though a [successful]

⁵⁸ Department of Social Services, *Submission 72*, 45th Parliament, pp. [5-6].

⁵⁹ For example: Independent Schools Council of Australia, *Submission 16*, 44th Parliament; Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament; Wongutha CAPS, *Submission 37*, 44th Parliament; Catholic Agricultural College Bindoon, *Submission 5*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Australia, *Submission 7 and Supplementary Submission 7.4*, 44th Parliament; Remote Indigenous Parents Association, *Submission 47*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 11*, 44th Parliament; Boarding Training Australia, *Submission 40*, 45th Parliament; Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament; Yirara College, *Submission 33*, 45th Parliament; Australian Parents Council, *Submission 16*, 45th Parliament; Downlands College, *Submission 42*, 45th Parliament; and Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament.

⁶⁰ Remote Indigenous Parents Association (Roper-Gulf Branch), *Submission 47*, 44th Parliament, p. [7].

⁶¹ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 26 February 2016, p. 28.

transmission report has been received...Wrong advice [is given to] Callers to the ABSTUDY main enquiry line...[this] contributes to lengthy delays on applications and commonly the wrong ABSTUDY form is completed.⁶²

- 7.64 The Australian Association of Christian Schools described the expectations placed on families regarding ABSTUDY applications as 'unrealistic'. It told the committee:

Ensuring that all the ABSTUDY administrative requirements 'line up' is challenging to put it mildly. It is not unusual to see - wrong forms, no forms, inadequately filled out forms and incorrect parental/guardian signatures. It is highly unrealistic to use, and depend on, forms that are frequently not understood.⁶³

- 7.65 Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) noted that it has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department of Human Services (DHS) 'to ensure the application, approval and payment processes are streamlined and do not act as a disincentive for students and families in preparing to live away from their home communities to attend school'.⁶⁴

- 7.66 DHS advised the committee that its 'staff-assisted claim' process allowed for ABSTUDY applications to be made completely over the phone.⁶⁵ The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) outlined this process in its review of the administration of ABSTUDY:

The ABSTUDY Simplified Claiming Tool...allows the potential recipient's claim details to be obtained over the telephone...or in a personalised interview. The potential recipient is then sent (or given) a Customer Declaration Form (CDF), which is populated with details provided in the interview and other information already held by the department. The potential recipient then confirms and/or updates the CDF, and signs and returns it to be processed.⁶⁶

⁶² Worawa Aboriginal College, *Submission 32*, 45th Parliament, p. 13.

⁶³ Australian Association of Christian Schools, *Submission 24*, 45th Parliament, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Aboriginal Hostels Limited, *Submission 38*, 44th Parliament, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Ms Rosemary Deininger, Department of Human Services, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 September 2017, p. 3

⁶⁶ Australian National Audit Office, *Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY*, Report No. 51 (2016-17), p. 40.

7.67 DHS advised that, as at 15 April 2016, 76.2% of ABSTUDY claims had been processed via the staff-assisted channel in the 2015–16 financial year.⁶⁷ Ms Melissa Ryan, DHS, explained that:

... a parent can phone a 1800 number, and our trained staff can help them, with the aid of interpreters as well, work through and answer the relevant questions to fast-track the processing of that claim.⁶⁸

7.68 At the end of 2016, DHS began a trial of verbal customer declarations, which ‘removes the need for signed declaration forms to be submitted following a phone call’. This service was intended to ‘speed up processing of ABSTUDY claims, especially for families in remote areas’.⁶⁹

7.69 DHS reported that in December 2016 and January 2017, ABSTUDY claims finalised with a verbal declaration were processed nearly 50% faster than in December 2015 and January 2016, when verbal declarations were not used. DHS advised that, due to the success of the trial, the ABSTUDY verbal declaration process remains in operation.⁷⁰

7.70 The AISNT noted that representatives from DHS ‘were clearly motivated to assist our Indigenous families [but that] there were limitations placed on what they could do’. It explained that:

To be blunt, the ABSTUDY process in the Northern Territory is asking people who are partly nomadic, marginally literate in the English language and with negligible understanding of the use of money or its value to operate within the ABSTUDY application process and its ongoing processes. No matter how the process is modified within the requirements of DHS, the processes will still be designed for the dominant user group and remain mystifying for the vast majority of remote Indigenous families. Even with support offered by DHS officers and the Principals of local government primary schools, applications are still rejected because they are not correctly completed to DHS requirements.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 43.3*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Ms Melissa Ryan, Participation Division, Department of Human Services, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 19 April 2016, p. 8. See also Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report 2017*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 50.1*, 45th Parliament, p. [3].

⁷¹ Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament, p. 6.

Census dates and movement of students

7.71 The AISNT advised the committee that ‘the conditions imposed by ABSTUDY having a census day in the third week of every term means that invariably a significant percentage of students are not counted and each boarding school is only funded for the time that a student is present.’ The AISNT explained that:

Almost always these delays in students arriving are not within the control of the schools. Yet the schools must have their full teaching and boarding staff in place from the beginning of term. We are unable to be flexible enough with staffing to meet the staggered return of students. Schools are punished due to circumstances that are beyond their control.⁷²

7.72 Mr Duncan Murray, Chief Executive Officer, Cape York Partnership, advised that the inflexibility of the census date creates an incentive for schools to reject students who do not arrive before the census date:

The [Federal] and the state governments incentivise us to reject. It is now past the state census day. Last year's dux of the school turned up today, in the first week of March. The CFO called me and said: 'Ten kids have turned up this week. Half a dozen of them look really promising, but if we teach them we will get zero funding. It will cost us between \$15,000 and \$20,000 per kid'. We will get zero funding because the state rules are that by a certain date towards the end of February you need to have attended for 11 days.⁷³

7.73 Furthermore, Dr Adele Schmidt, IEU, noted that the census date for ABSTUDY also negatively impacts local community schools:

The unintended negative consequences that were specifically mentioned by members to us include impacts on the community school when boarding schools do recruitment drives immediately before school census periods in the home communities. Small, local schools have a number of students enrolled and they are given funding and resources on that basis...the kids go off to boarding school. They miss home or whatever – there are many reasons – and they come back home. They end up back at the local community school, which is now significantly under-resourced

⁷² Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, 44th Parliament, p. 7.

⁷³ Mr Duncan Murray, Chief Executive Officer, Cape York Partnership, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, p. 14.

because they have budgeted for fewer students than they end up actually having.⁷⁴

- 7.74 DHS explained that, where students commence after the census date (the third Friday of the school term) due to extenuating circumstances, the boarding school or hostel will be paid the full ABSTUDY entitlement for the term. However, where students commence after the census date and do not have extenuating circumstances, the boarding school or hostel will be paid a pro-rata ABSTUDY entitlement for the term.⁷⁵

Processing times

- 7.75 The committee heard that long processing times significantly delayed students from commencing the 2016 school year. Boarding Australia stated that, in its survey of 28 boarding providers, 71% indicated that students were delayed from attending boarding at the start of the year while awaiting ABSTUDY approval. Boarding Australia explained that:

The reasons for these delays were not explicitly sought in the survey, although subsequent comments in the survey indicated that delays were a combination of time required to process applications and follow up to collect all required data and consents (e.g. tax file numbers, parent signatures, income records) in the case of incomplete applications.⁷⁶

- 7.76 Boarding Australia described the amount of school missed by students because of these delays as 'alarming', noting that the survey identified more than 300 students who were delayed by more than 4 weeks, waiting for their application to be processed. Moreover, at the time of the survey (weeks 6-7 of the term), 64% of boarding facilities indicated that they were still awaiting students while ABSTUDY issues were being addressed.⁷⁷
- 7.77 The Bilateral Management Arrangement between DSS and DHS for the timeliness of processing for ABSTUDY claims is listed as '70% of claims completed within 21 days'.⁷⁸ DHS advised the committee that, as at 8 April 2016, the average number of days to process a claim for the 2015-16 financial year was 21 days.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Dr Adele Schmidt, Research Officer, Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch, *Committee Hansard*, 5 February 2016, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 50.1*, p. [10].

⁷⁶ Boarding Australia, *Supplementary Submission 7.2*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Boarding Australia, *Supplementary Submission 7.2*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Australian National Audit Office, *Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY*, Report No. 51 (2016-17), p. 44.

⁷⁹ Department of Human Services, *Submission 43.3*, 44th Parliament, p. 1.

- 7.78 DHS advised the committee there were ‘179 ABSTUDY boarder claims on hand at the commencement of the 2017 school year’, and that ‘this is commensurate with the same time last year, noting that the December–January period is a peak time for claim lodgement’. DHS explained that ‘of these only 96 claims were able to be processed by the department, [while] the remaining 83 were held pending further information being supplied by the claimant’.⁸⁰
- 7.79 DHS was not able to advise the committee regarding the average number of days of school students missed while they were awaiting ABSTUDY approval, nor the maximum number of days of school missed by these students.⁸¹
- 7.80 Mr Roger Ashcroft, Principal, Yirara College, advised the committee that the ‘ineffectiveness’ of ABSTUDY processes also ‘leads to late payments and non-payments’ to schools.⁸² Mr Michael Avery, Director, National Catholic Education Commission, agreed, explaining that:
- There are some absolutely fundamental flaws in the processing by the ABSTUDY people. All of the cross-sectorial meetings of the boarding school with ABSTUDY have not resolved anything in the last few years... Students can be approved for travel and not for full ABSTUDY, so it can be months before they find out if they are getting a partial payment or whatever. These are procedural things that should not happen. There is poor response and follow-up by ABSTUDY to complaints. One school still has eight-year-old debts from ABSTUDY waiting to be paid into their account. They are very quick to demand money the other way. Eight years! These are institutional faults in the thing. Getting compassionate travel is almost impossible. It could be a circuit breaker to expelling kids or suspending kids if you could get that sort of thing. There is just a poor response.⁸³
- 7.81 DHS advised the committee that ‘the department works closely with schools to make ABSTUDY payments [and that] payments are assessed as a priority following receipt of the necessary information’. However, when asked about the average and maximum amounts of time after which a student has commenced at a school before the school receives ABSTUDY payment, DHS advised that it ‘does not collect the data and to do so

⁸⁰ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 50.1*, 45th Parliament, p. [8].

⁸¹ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 50.1*, 45th Parliament, p. [8].

⁸² Mr Roger Ashcroft, Principal, Yirara College, *Committee Hansard*, Alice Springs, 4 April 2017, p. 9.

⁸³ Mr Michael Avery, Director, National Catholic Education Commission, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, Campbelltown, 22 March 2016, p. 38.

would require an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources'. Furthermore, DHS was not able to advise the committee whether any schools were currently waiting to receive ABSTUDY payments for students that commenced studying in 2017.⁸⁴

- 7.82 In May 2017, the ANAO performance audit into the *Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY* found that DHS systems for processing ABSTUDY claims 'do not support the consistent achievement of the department's Key Performance Measure against timeliness during peak work periods'. The ANAO also noted that:

Performance by Human Services' telephony services has also declined since 2013–14, particularly for ABSTUDY recipients who use this service as a primary mechanism for lodging claims.

The ANAO's analysis, based on available data, indicates that key barriers to achieving service and claim assessment improvements include: failure of applicants to supply the required supporting documentation and the policy complexity associated with assessing individual ABSTUDY awards and claims. There would be benefit in DSS and Human Services examining cost-effective options to improve this area of performance.⁸⁵

Committee comment

- 7.83 The committee is concerned by the disparity in the cost of boarding and the amount of ABSTUDY assistance provided for boarding fees. As outlined in the findings of the KPMG report and illustrated in the example scenarios, it appears that, the amount of ABSTUDY assistance provided for boarding fees is not reflective of the actual costs of boarding nor is it meeting the boarding fees charged by independent boarding colleges, state residential colleges, or Federal Government hostels.
- 7.84 Furthermore, this shortfall is apparent even before considering the additional expenses that boarding facilities may incur in order to comply with the requirements of the *Boarding Standard for Australian Schools and Residences*; or to meet health and wellbeing needs; or to create culturally safe environments necessary for Indigenous students to thrive while living away from home for study.

⁸⁴ Department of Human Services, *Supplementary Submission 50.1*, 45th Parliament, p. [9].

⁸⁵ Australian National Audit Office, *Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY*, Report No. 51 (2016–17), p. 34.

- 7.85 The committee acknowledges that unused School Fees Allowance can be used towards boarding costs that have not already been covered. Nonetheless, while the committee approves of such a mechanism, it is of the view that the ABSTUDY assistance provided for boarding fees should better reflect the cost of boarding.

Recommendation 18

- 7.86 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government conduct a thorough review of how ABSTUDY is calculated and administered to ensure that Indigenous students are given the support necessary to thrive and to ensure optimal equity and efficiency of operations.**
- 7.87 Attendance is directly linked to academic achievement, with the effects of absence accumulating over time. The committee was concerned by reports of ongoing difficulties in completing ABSTUDY application forms. As noted in Chapter 6 at Recommendation 17, the committee recommends that the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet Regional Network Offices provide assistance and coordinate applications for ABSTUDY for Indigenous boarding students from remote and very remote communities.
- 7.88 The committee was also concerned by reports that long processing times for ABSTUDY applications significantly delayed students from commencing the 2016 school year. Furthermore, the committee was disappointed that DHS was not able to advise the committee regarding the average number of days of school students while they were awaiting ABSTUDY approval, nor the maximum number of days of school missed by these students.
- 7.89 The committee is of the view that more needs to be done to ensure that no student is being delayed from attending school as a result of ABSTUDY application processing. As such, it recommends that schools be advised of a student's ongoing eligibility for ABSTUDY and the amount that is expected to be received for the next year before the end of each school year.

Recommendation 19

- 7.90 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government confirm a student's ongoing eligibility for ABSTUDY before the end of each school year to provide certainty to students and schools, and reduce the delays for students at the start of each new school year.**

Scholarship support

7.91 The Federal Government funds a range of scholarship and mobility projects through the Children and Schooling Programme. PM&C told the committee that, in 2015, the Federal Government ‘will provide \$15.2 million to support 778 secondary scholarship holders across 70 schools’. PM&C explained that:

These projects support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth from regional and remote communities to move away from home to gain educational and training qualifications. Support for participants can include accommodation, mentoring, life skills, extra-curricular activities and other practical support to assist students complete their studies.⁸⁶

7.92 In particular, PM&C noted that the Federal Government has ‘provided a total \$38 million since 2009 to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation [AIEF] to provide scholarships to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to assist with pastoral care, tuition and other boarding-related costs’.⁸⁷

7.93 Furthermore, in 2017 the Federal Government announced that the AIEF will be provided with \$30 million to ‘support up to 500 students each year for three years (up to December 2020) to attend leading Australian secondary colleges’ and provide mentoring.⁸⁸

7.94 However, some organisations questioned whether these scholarship programs are having a measureable effect on outcomes. Ninti One observed that ‘despite increasing levels of government funding, there is no publically available independent research or evaluation of programs such as [the] Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and [Yalari]’.⁸⁹ Mr Richard Stewart, AFL Cape York House, explained that:

I think we need to be quite clear about how we determine success. The AIEF talk about a 93% success rate...I think that fact needs to be publically challenged – 93% of what? If you take a kid away from Cairns who has finished year 10, from an aspirational, urban, middle class Indigenous family, and value-add...anyone can

⁸⁶ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 43*, 44th Parliament, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *1967 Referendum – 50th Anniversary Indigenous Education Package*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/ia/nrw-education-package.pdf>, accessed 9 August 2017.

⁸⁹ Ninti One, *Submission 6*, 44th Parliament, p. 7.

value-add...to say that you have a 93% success rate and then not be open to any real scrutiny is quite outrageous.⁹⁰

7.95 Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, noted that ‘a lot of money’ goes into programs such as the AIEF, but only a small percentage of Indigenous students benefit. He explained that:

99% of kids will never ever access any of those programs...The theory is that they act as role models for other people. However, somebody from an AIEF scholarship who graduates from Melbourne Grammar is not a model for a kid from the Anangu lands; there is no connection. So I really doubt the effect and traction that that actually gets...If we rely on programs like AIEF then 99-point-whatever per cent of kids are not going to get any opportunity. That is the big problem for me at a professional level and at a personal level. A lot of money goes into it.⁹¹

7.96 Dr Margaret (Marnie) O’Bryan also noted the gender inequity of the AIEF scholarships,⁹² with only 36% of scholarship recipients being female in 2016.⁹³

7.97 The AEU acknowledged that the AIEF ‘is able to point to impressive retention and post-school outcomes among the students it sponsors’. It noted that AIEF participants ‘receive extensive support from the program’s transition team’, are assigned a mentor, and are able to study in a ‘privileged environment where peer effects are likely to be positive for academic achievement’.⁹⁴ As a condition of receiving an AIEF scholarship the student must have already been accepted into one of a select list of schools. Therefore, the students chosen are likely to have succeeded even without the assistance of the AIEF. Consequently, the AEU was sceptical of the AIEF’s actual achievements, noting that ‘AIEF scholarship recipients are likely to be among the highest performing students in their local schools’ and that schools participating in the AIEF program ‘select Indigenous students on the basis of their likelihood to succeed, with being likely to complete Year 12 as one of the selection criteria’.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Mr Richard Stewart, Previous General Manager, AFL Cape York House, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 March 2016, pp. 37–38.

⁹¹ Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding, *Committee Hansard*, Adelaide, 26 February 2016, p. 25.

⁹² Dr Margaret (Marnie) O’Bryan, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 1 June 2017, p. 9.

⁹³ Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, *Annual Report 2016*, p. 20.

⁹⁴ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, p. 19.

7.98 The AEU noted that ‘the cost of supporting a student through the AIEF exceeds the average per student public funding paid to a government school to educate an Indigenous child’. It noted that:

There is no doubt the AIEF can point to positive indicators and individual success stories among the students it sponsors. However before endorsing the AIEF model or recommending any expansion in its operation, or similar schemes, this inquiry is duty bound to fully investigate whether the generous public and private subsidies directed to a relatively small group of students and the private boarding schools they attend, via the AIEF, is a most optimal allocation of resources.⁹⁶

7.99 The AEU stated that between 2009 and 2014, the AIEF’s scholarship program received \$32 million from the Federal Government and \$37 million from private sources, with an average net scholarship cost of approximately \$19,000 per student per annum.⁹⁷ By comparison, the average funding (State and Federal) received by government schools was considerably less, at only \$10,783 per student in 2013.⁹⁸

Committee comment

7.100 The Federal Government has a duty to ensure that funds are spent in the most effective and efficient manner and has a responsibility to ensure that the next generation of Indigenous youth are receiving the best educational opportunities possible. As such, the committee is troubled by the concerns raised in evidence regarding the efficiency and equity of Federal Government funding managed by private organisations to provide scholarship programs for Indigenous students to attend independent boarding schools.

7.101 The committee notes that substantial Federal Government funding is currently being provided to the AIEF. Therefore, it is the view of the committee that the AIEF, and other such programs, be reviewed to ensure that the programs are equitable, evidence-based and incorporate clear and effective performance measurement to ensure that the programs are having a demonstrable effect on the education outcomes of scholarship recipients.

⁹⁶ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, p. 20.

⁹⁷ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, pp. 19–20.

⁹⁸ Australian Education Union, *Submission 45*, 44th Parliament, pp. 19–20.

Recommendation 20

- 7.102 **The committee recommends that the Federal Government conduct a thorough review of private organisations that provide scholarship programs to Indigenous students to attend independent boarding schools, to determine whether they provide value for money, are equitable, and are supporting a range of students of varying backgrounds and abilities.**

Ms Melissa Price MP
Chair
7 December 2017



Appendix A – List of submissions

44th Parliament

1. Ms Tracey de Grussa
2. Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council
3. Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Indigenous Corporation
 - 3.1. Supplementary
4. Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre
5. Catholic Agricultural College
6. Ninti One
7. Boarding Australia
 - 7.1. Supplementary
 - 7.2. Supplementary
8. Professor Jeannie Herbert AM
9. Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory
10. Independent Education Union of Australia (Queensland and Northern Territory Branch)
 - 10.1. Supplementary
11. Boarding Training Australia
12. World Vision Australia
13. The Department of Education (Tasmania)
14. Dr Nicholas Biddle and Assistant Professor Dr Jessa Rogers
15. The Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle
16. Independent Schools Council of Australia
 - 16.1. Supplementary

17. The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales
18. National Catholic Education Commission
 - 18.1. Supplementary
 - 18.2. Supplementary
 - 18.3. Supplementary
19. Independent Schools Queensland
20. Queensland Catholic Education Commission
21. St Brigid's College
22. Independent Education Union of Australia
23. Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People (South Australia)
24. Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation
25. Geraldton Universities Centre
26. Mr Richard Stewart and Ms Rachel Elphick
27. NT Christian Schools
28. Kurungkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University
29. Independent Schools Victoria
30. Commissioner for Children and Young People (Western Australia)
31. National Rural Health Alliance
32. The Association of Independent Schools (Western Australia)
33. Stronger Smarter Institute Limited
34. Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre
35. Australian Indigenous Education Foundation
36. Reconciliation Australia
37. Wongutha CAPS
38. Aboriginal Hostels Limited
 - 38.1. Supplementary
39. Department of Education (Northern Territory)
40. Department for Education and Child Development (South Australia)
41. Central Land Council
42. Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory
43. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Communications and the Arts
 - 43.1. Supplementary (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet)

- 43.2. Supplementary (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet)
- 43.3. Supplementary (Department of Human Services)
- 43.4. Supplementary (Department of Education and Training)
44. The Smith Family
45. Australian Education Union
46. Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
 - 46.1. Supplementary
47. Remote Indigenous Parents Association (Roper-Gulf Branch)
48. Reconciliation Victoria
49. North Queensland Cowboys Rugby League Football Club
50. The Aboriginal & Islander Independent Community School Inc (Murri School)
51. Australian Primary Principals Association
52. Deakin University
53. Dr Bill Fogarty and Professor Mick Dodson
54. National Rural Health Student Network
55. Cape York Partnership
56. Martu Schools Alliance
57. Stars Foundation
58. Informed Solutions NT
59. Save the Children
60. Good to Great Schools Australia
61. Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council
 - 61.1. Supplementary

45th Parliament

1. Deakin University
2. Independent Education Union of Australia
3. Dr Kerry Hempenstall
4. Mr Don Anderson
5. National Rural Health Alliance Inc
6. Woodleigh School
7. Dr Dennis McIntosh
8. Ms Cheryl Cannon

9. Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre - Youth Plus
10. CIT Yurauna Centre & Northside Community Service
11. Dr Maryanne Macdonald
12. Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales
13. Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)
14. Dr Jennifer Buckingham, The Centre for Independent Studies
15. Mr Kon Kalos and Ms Shoba Kalos
16. Australian Parents Council
17. The Cultural Enhancement Group
18. Melbourne Indigenous Transition School
19. Mount Magnet District High School
20. Mr Tom von Oertzen, The Boston Consulting Group
21. Boarding Australia
22. Aboriginal Literacy Foundation
23. The Association of Independent Schools of NSW
24. Australian Association of Christian Schools
25. Madjulla Inc
26. Department of Education and Training (Queensland)
 - 26.1. Supplementary
27. Mr Harold Ludwick, Ms Joanne Bowen and family
28. Good to Great Schools Australia and Cape York Partnership
29. The University of Melbourne
30. Wik Women's Group
31. NT Council of Government School Organisations Inc (NTCOGSO)
32. Worawa Aboriginal College Ltd
 - 32.1. Supplementary
 - 32.2. Supplementary
33. Yirara College
 - 33.1. Supplementary
34. St Joseph's Catholic Flexible Learning Centre
 - 34.1. Supplementary
35. One Tree Community Services Inc.
36. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School

37. Thamarrurr Development Corporation, Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation, Murin Freight and Travel and the Kardu Alliance
38. Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation
39. Balga Senior High School
40. Boarding Training Australia
41. Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL)
 - 41.1. Supplementary
42. Downlands College
43. Professor Judy Atkinson
44. Kununurra District High School
45. Waardi
46. Broome Senior High School
 - 46.1. Supplementary
47. The Aboriginal & Islander Independent Community School (Murri School)
48. Shalom Christian College
49. Palm Island Community Company
50. Department of Human Services
 - 50.1. Supplementary
 - 50.2. Supplementary
 - 50.3. Supplementary
51. Department of Education (Northern Territory)
52. NT Christian Schools
53. Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School
54. Albany Residential College
55. Save the Children
56. Department of Education (Western Australia)
 - 56.1. Supplementary
57. Kormilda College
58. Wanslea Family Services
59. Great Southern Grammar
60. Central Land Council (CLC)
61. Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia - 16 June 2017
 - 61.1. Supplementary
62. Broome Primary School

63. Broome Residential College
64. Geraldton Senior College
65. Role Models and Leaders Australia
66. St Patrick's College
67. Department of Social Services
68. Department of Education and Training
69. Bwgcolman Community School



Appendix B – List of witnesses, hearings and site visits

44th Parliament

Thursday, 12 November 2015 – Canberra, ACT

Public hearing

Yurauna Centre, Canberra Institute of Technology

Mrs Roxanne Brown, Teacher
Ms Dearne Brown, Student
Mrs Lynnice (Letty) Church, Teacher
Ms Felicity Corbin, Student
Mrs Caroline Hughes, Director
Mr Kelvin Marr, Student
Miss Cara Smith, Student support coordinator
Mr Wayne Woods, Student

Thursday, 26 November 2015 – Canberra, ACT

Private hearing

ACT Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Ms Fiona Petersen, Chairperson

NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Ms Cindy Berwick, President
Mr Merv Donovan, Executive Officer

South Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Consultative Body

Ms Jo Anne Ashford, Deputy Chairperson

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc

Ms Geraldine Atkinson, President
Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager
Miss Karina Wei-Inn Lee, Policy and Research Officer

Thursday, 4 February 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****Individuals***

Dr William (Bill) Fogarty, Private capacity
Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan, Private capacity

Friday, 5 February 2016 – Brisbane, QLD**Public hearing*****Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mathematics Alliance***

Dr Christopher John Matthews, Chair

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

Ms Marian Heard, Director (outgoing)
Ms Therese Postma, Director (incoming)
Mr Joe Sambono, Manager

Independent Education Union, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch

Ms Thersa Nunn, Member and Indigenous support officer
Dr Adele Schmidt, Research officer

Institute for Urban Indigenous Health

Dr Alison Nelson, Director
Mrs Cassie Powell, Traineeship Coordinator and Workforce Support Officer

Stronger Smarter Institute

Mr Darren Godwell, Chief Executive Officer

YuMi Deadly Centre, Queensland University of Technology

Professor Thomas James Cooper, Director
Mr James (Jim) Lowe, Research Associate

Site visits

- Hymba Yumba School
- Aboriginal & Islander Independent Community School Inc (Murri School)

Thursday, 11 February 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****Australian Indigenous Education Foundation***

Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Executive Director

Ms Renee Steenstra, Projects Director

Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council

Mrs Leah Armstrong, Member

Mr Djambawa Marawili AM, Member

Mr Nyunggai Warren Mundine AO, Chairman

Mr Andrew Penfold AM, Member

Thursday, 25 February 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre, Australian National University***

Ms Anne Martin, Director

Mrs Fiona Petersen, Administration Manager

Mr Rory Larkin, Student

Mr Kieren Murray, Student

Mr Sam Provost, Student

Ms Chloe Simpson, Student

Friday, 26 February 2016 – Adelaide, SA**Public hearing*****Boarding Australia***

Mr Daniel Cox, Chief Executive Officer

Department for Education and Child Development (SA)

Ms Patricia Strachan, Executive Director, Statewide Services and
Child Development

Ms Vicki Wilson, Manager, Aboriginal Services

Remote Indigenous Parents Association

Ms Lorraine Bennett, Beswick Community representative

Mr Bjorn Christie-Johnson, Program Manager

Ms Anita Painter, Barunga Community representative

Wiltja

Mr Anthony Bennett, Manager, Wiltja Boarding

Mr Greg Cousins, Co-ordinator, Wiltja Secondary College

Ms Ashley Dorr, Principal, Wiltja Secondary College

Site visit

- Wiljta Boarding

Thursday, 3 March 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****Reconciliation Australia***

Mr Alex Shain, General Manager, Narragunnawali

Independent Schools Council of Australia

Ms Colette Colman, Executive Director

Mr Barry Walleth, Deputy Executive Director

Monday, 7 March 2016 – Cairns, QLD**Public hearing*****AFL Cape York House***

Ms Rachel Elphick, Education Manager

Mr Ricky Hanlon, Program Manager

Mr Richard Stewart, General Manager (previous)

Cape York Girl Academy

Assistant Professor Jessa Rogers, Principal

Cape York Partnership

Mr James Fa'aoso, Head of Leadership

Ms Fiona Jose, Executive General Manager

Mr Duncan Murray, Chief Executive Officer

Djarragun College

Mr Don Anderson, Principal

Good to Great Schools Australia

Ms Lyn McKenzie, Director

Site visits

- Cape York Girls Academy
- Djarragun College

Tuesday 8 March 2016 – Coen and Aurukun, QLD**Private hearing*****Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy***

Mr Glenn White, Principal, Coen Campus

Individuals (parents and community elders)

Mr Allan Creek
Mrs Emma Hicks
Mr Tim Jaffer
Ms Kirsten Kulka
Ms Maureen Liddy
Michelle
Ms Joanne Nelson
Ms Louise Pratt
Ms Charlene Sellars
Tamara

Site visits

- Cape York Academy, Coen Campus
- Cape York Academy, Aurukun Campus

Wednesday 9 March 2016 – Thursday Island, QLD**Public hearing*****Aboriginal Hostels Ltd***

Mr Brendan Moyle, General Manager, Operations
Ms Joy Savage, Chief Executive Officer
Mr Charles Turner, Regional Manager Queensland

Individuals

Mrs Bertha Natanielu
Ms Ramena Fuji

Tagai State College

Mr Steve Foster, Associate Principal
Ms Judith Ketchell, Executive Principal
Mr Jeff Waia, Teacher

Torres Strait Regional Authority

Ms Margaret Cowley
Mr Joseph Elu, Chairperson

Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council

Mr Ned David, Chair
Ms Ganala Gibuma, Representative

Site visits

- Canon Boggo Pilot Hostel
- Tagai State College

Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University***

Professor Michael Dodson, Director

Dr William (Bill) Fogarty, Senior Research Fellow

Thursday 17 March 2016 – Canberra, ACT**Public hearing*****University of South Australia***

Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean of Indigenous Scholarship, Engagement
and Research

Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes

Monday 21 March 2016 – Newcastle, NSW**Public hearing*****Australian Council of Deans of Education***

Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, President

Mr David Templeman, Executive Director

Board of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training

Professor John Evans, Deputy Chair

Dr Laurel Williams, Member

Darkinjung Aboriginal Land Council

Mr Sean Gordon, Chief Executive Officer

Kunnar Ngarrama, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Mrs Deidre Heitmeyer, President

MATSITI Evaluation Panel

Mr Peter Johnson, Chair

University of Newcastle

Ms Chloe Barwick, Student teacher

Dr Margot Ford, Senior Lecturer, School of Education

Mr James Ballangarry, Student teacher

Ms Lauren Johnson, Student teacher

Ms Samantha McNeill, Student teacher

Mr Nigel Millgate, Student teacher

Ms Kyara Nean, Student teacher

Dr Robert Parkes, Senior Lecturer, School of Education

Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle

Mrs Bronwyn Chambers, Elder in Residence
Ms Madelene Davy, Community Engagement Coordinator
Mr Michael Donovan, Lecturer
Associate Professor Maree Gruppetta
Ms Belinda Huntriss, Indigenous Academic Engagement Officer
Mr Derek Kinchela, Student Engagement and Experience Coordinator
Professor Bob Morgan, International Engagement Officer
Mrs Colleen Perry, Elders in Residence Program

Tuesday 22 March 2016 – Sydney, NSW**Public hearing*****Aurora Education Foundation***

Ms Lorraine Efeturk, Director of Education
Mr Richard Potok, Chief Executive Officer

Australian Education Union

Ms Correna Haythorpe, Federal President
Mr Maurie Mulheron, Deputy Federal President

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

Mr Adam Linforth, Director, Finance and Partnering
Ms Marlee Silva, Co-Chief Executive Officer
Mr Jake Thomson, Program Manager, University of Western Sydney

National Catholic Education Commission

Mr Michael Avery (Northern Territory)
Ms Sharon Cooke (New South Wales)
Ms Sharon Davis (Western Australia)
Mr Ross Fox, Executive Director
Ms Kellie McDonald (Northern Territory)
Mr Ren Perkins (Queensland)
Mr David Wood (Western Australia)

University of Sydney

Professor Edward Shane Houston, Deputy Vice Chancellor

Wednesday 23 March 2016 – Dubbo, NSW**Public hearing*****Charles Sturt University***

Professor Heather Herbert AM, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Indigenous Education and Foundation Chair of Indigenous Studies

Clontarf Foundation

Mr Michael Lee, Director, Delroy Clontarf Academy
Mr Chris McDonald, Regional Manager, New South Wales

Get Real Program

Ms Louise Lawler, Executive Officer

TAFE Western

Ms Connie Ah See, Head Teacher, Yarradamarra Centre
Ms Susan Carey, Director for VET Delivery

Site visit

- Dubbo College

Tuesday 19 April 2016 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing****Department Human Services**

Mr Paul Creech, National Manager
Mrs Melissa Ryan, General Manager, Participation Division

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Mr Glen Hansen, Senior Adviser, Schools and Territory Education Reform
Ms Elizabeth Hefren-Webb, First Assistant Secretary, Schools,
Information and Evaluation

Department Social Services

Ms Emma Kate McGuirk, General Manager, Participation Division
Mr Andrew Whitecross, Branch Manager, Rates and Means Testing Policy

Stars Foundation

Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director

45th Parliament**Thursday 30 March 2017 – Canberra ACT****Public hearing*****Reading to Learn (Scaffolding Literacy)***

Dr David Rose, Director

Mirima Dawang Woortlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre – Miriwoong Language Nest

Miss Rita Boombi, Language Engagement Officer
Miss Rosemary Boombi, Language Engagement Officer
Miss Dianne Dingle, Language Engagement Officer
Miss Barbara Gallagher, Language Engagement Officer
Mr Peter McKenzie, Language Nest Facilitator

Wongutha CAPS

Mr Cor Bezuidenhout, Boarding Manager
Mr Brendan Franzone, Deputy Principal, Literacy Co-ordinator
Mr Harold Graham, Board Director, Teacher
Mr Shane Meyer, Principal
Dr Steven Florisson, Board Member, CAPS Association

Friday, 31 March 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****Individual***

Dr Kerry Hempenstall, Private capacity

Worawa Aboriginal College

Ms Tracey Burchall, Teacher
Mr Spencer Davenport, Assistant Principal
Ms Lois Peeler AM, Principal

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAIC)

Dr Peter Lewis, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Ms Claire Stacey, Senior Policy Officer

Aboriginal Literacy Foundation

Dr Anthony (Tony) Cree, Chief Executive Officer

Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School

Dr Helen Drennen, Principal
Mr Ned McCord, Executive Director

Melbourne Indigenous Transition School

Mr Edward Tudor, Executive Director
Professor Elizabeth Tudor, Chairperson

Tuesday 4 April 2017 – Alice Springs NT**Public hearing*****St Joseph's Flexible Learning***

Mrs Sitinder Bahia, Campus Principal
Mr Gerard Keating, Network Principal

Yirara College

Mr Roger Ashcroft, Principal
Mrs Karen Jessen, Deputy Principal
Ms Leela Kruger, Chair of Board
Mr Greg Miller, Director of Teaching and Learning

Central Land Council

Dr Josie Douglas, Senior Policy Officer
Mr Hamilton Morris, Committee Member
Mr David Ross, Director
Ms Georgie Stewart, Senior Community Development Officer

Yipirinya School

Ms Jane Conaghan, Special Needs Teacher
Ms Yasmin Erlandson, Teacher Assistant
Mr Jungala Kriss, Chair of Board
Ms Lorraine Sligar, Principal

Sadadeen Primary School

Ms Jennifer Buckley, Senior Teacher, K.I.T.E.S
Ms Ali Hood, Senior Teacher, Student Well-being
Ms Jan Robertson, Teacher
Ms Georgie van Meegan, Teacher
Ms Elizabeth Verstappen, Principal
Miss Sophie Woods, Representative, Sadadeen Primary School Council

Site visits

- Sadadeen Primary School
- Yipirinya School

Wednesday 5 April 2017 – Wadeye NT**Public hearing*****Individual***

Ms Rebecca Morgan, Private Capacity

Thamarrurr Development Corporation

Mr David Hurst, Employment and Training Manager
Ms Tobias Nganbe, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

Palngun Wurnangat Aboriginal Corporation

Ms Denise Messiter, General Manager
Ms Margaret Perdjert, Chairperson
Ms Joanne Turner, Consultant

Thathangathay Foundation

Mr Russell Melphi, Support Staff
Mr Andrew Mullumbuk, Support Staff
Mr Romulo Tchernia, Director
Mr Mark Tunmuck Smith, Youth Service Coordinator

Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel

Mrs Prudence Dickens, Senior Residential Youth Worker
Mr Larry Softley, Head of Boarding
Mr Birrigan Young, Senior Residential Youth Worker

Save the Children Intensive Family Support Service

Mr Aminandaba Fuyana, Team Leader, Remote Family Support Service
Ms Cheryl Pilkington, Team Leader, Intensive Family Support Service and
Play2Learn Program

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School

Mr Marcelino Bunduck, Assistant Teacher
Ms Xaverine Bunduck, Teacher
Ms Ursula Kinthari, Teacher
Ms Martina Mullumbuck, Teacher
Dr John Young, Principal

Site visit

- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School

Thursday 6 April 2017 – Darwin NT**Public hearing*****Northern Territory Christian Schools***

Mrs Debra Twartz, Chief Executive Officer

Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory

Mr Barry Wallett, Representative

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Norther Territory

Ms Priscilla Collins, Chief Executive Officer
Ms Theresa Roe, Network Coordinator

Department of Education (Norther Territory)

Mr Anthony Considine, General Manager, Indigenous Education Review
Implementation

Tivendale School

Mr Bret McNair, Acting Principal

Kormilda College

Mrs Anne Cooper, Head of Boarding
Mr Peter Jones, Chair of the Board
Dr Helen Spiers, Principal
Ms Sydney Taylor-Turley, Student

Stars Foundation

Ms Andrea Goddard, Executive Director

Site visits

- Casuarina Secondary College
- Kormilda College
- Tivendale School (Don Dale Education Unit)

Tuesday 2 May 2017 – Geraldton WA**Public hearing****Rangeway Primary School**

Mrs Jacqueline Quartermaine, Former Principal

Geraldton Senior College

Mr Kimberley (Kim) Treffone, Acting Principal

Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre

Ms Amy Campbell, Head of Wellbeing
Mr Gerard Keating, Network Principal

John Wilcock College –SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc.

Mrs Waneen Bennett, Associate, John Wilcock College
Ms Julie Campbell, Principal, John Wilcock College
Mr Alan Bradley, Board Member, SHINE
Mrs Many Jolley, Director/Founder, SHINE
Mrs Jodie McAuliffe, Facilitator, SHINE

Geraldton Residential College

Ms Ruth Davis, Manager

Site visits

- John Wilcock College–SHINE Inspire Achieve Belong Inc.
- Geraldton Residential College

Wednesday 3 May 2017 – Albany WA**Public hearing*****Wanslea Aboriginal Parenting Program***

Ms Deeanna Mantach, Coordinator, Regional Programs

Mr Moray McSevich, Coordinator, Regional Programs

Alta-1 Albany

Mr Lindsay Campbell, Engagement and Transition Manager, Southwest Education Region

Mr Steven Sharp, Regional Manager

St Joseph's College

Mr Mark Browning, Principal

Great Southern Grammar

Mr Mark Sawle, Principal

Albany Residential College

Mr Matthew Baines, Manager

Mr Neil Milligan, Regional Executive Director, Southwest Education Region

Albany Senior High School

Mr Lindsay Campbell, Engagement and Transition Manager, Southwest Education Region

Mr Neil Milligan, Regional Executive Director Southwest Education Region

Ms Jennifer (Jenny) Firth, Principal

Site visit

- Albany Residential College and Albany Senior High School

Thursday 4 May 2017 – West Perth WA**Public hearing*****Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia***

Mrs Valerie Gould, Executive Director

Boarding Training Australia

Dr Steven Florisson, Chief Executive Officer
Mrs Jennifer Florisson, Trainer

Role Models and Leaders Australia (Girls Academy)

Mr Ricky Grace, Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People

Mr Colin Pettit, Commissioner

Department of Education (Western Australian)

Mr Stephen Baxter, Executive Director, Statewide Planning and Delivery
Mr Lindsay Hale, Executive Director, Statewide Services
Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General

Balga Senior High School – Swan Nyungar Sports Education Program

Mr Mark Carton, Deputy Principal
Mr Geoffrey Harris, Principal
Ms Donnelle Slater, Team Leader, Middle School
Mr Len Yarran, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer

Thursday 11 May 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****Sanctuary Point Primary School***

Mr Ben Ballard, Network Specialist Centre Facilitator,
Department of Education (New South Wales)
Miss Belinda Doyle, Deputy Principal
Ms Karen Hodge, Director, School Services
Mr Jeff Ward, Principal
Ms Ashlee Williams, Aboriginal Education Officer

Budawang Special School

Mr Ben Ballard, Network Specialist Centre Facilitator,
Department of Education (New South Wales)
Mrs Sheryl Bruffey, Principal

Thursday 25 May 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****Martu Schools Alliance***

The Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Chair

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Mr Tony Usher, Chief Executive Officer

Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia

Ms Jill Buckrell, Literacy Consultant

Friday 26 May 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****National Indigenous Youth Parliament – Roundtable***

Ms Taneshia Atkinson, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Mr Mitchell Dahlstrom, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Mr Marcellus Enalanga, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Mr Timu King, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Ms Rebekah Shurley, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Ms Angel Towney, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Ms Ineke Wallis, Former National Indigenous Youth Parliamentarian

Thursday 1 June 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****Individuals***

Professor Valerie (Judy) Atkinson. Patron, We Al-li Pty Ltd

Dr Margaret (Marnie) O’Bryan, Private capacity

Friday 2 June 2017 – Healesville and Melbourne VIC**Site visits**

- Worawa Aboriginal College
- Melbourne Indigenous Transition School

Tuesday 27 June 2017 – Fitzroy Crossing WA**Public hearing*****Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre***

Ms Emily Carter, Chief Executive Officer

Ms Angela Needham, Manager, Baya Gawiy Early Childhood Learning Unit

Ms Sue Thomas, Marulu Strategy Coordinator

Fitzroy Valley District High School

Mrs Elizabeth (Liz) Ritchie, Acting Principal
Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley,
Department of Education (Western Australian)

Kulkarriya School

Mr James (Ted) Tucker, Principal

Yiyili Aboriginal Community School

Ms Alexandra Mountford, Principal

Site visit

- Juniper Guwardi Ngadu

Wednesday 28 June 2017 – Kununurra WA**Public hearing*****Wunan Foundation***

Mrs Natasha Short, Manager, Special Projects

One Tree Kununurra

Miss Natasha Grosse, Director

Kununurra District High School

Mr Peter Thatcher, Principal
Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley,
Department of Education (Western Australian)

Site visits

- Kununurra District High School
- Kununurra Hostel

Thursday 29 June 2017 – Broome WA**Public hearing*****Broome Primary School***

Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley,
Department of Education (Western Australian)
Mr Jared Lawson, Principal

St Mary's College

Ms Carol Geurts, Regional Officer and Principal Schools Adviser,
Catholic Education Western Australia
Mr Michael Pepper, Principal
Ms Janenell Kennedy, Assistant Head of Primary

Wardi

Ms Christine Bergmann, Years 0-3 Program Manager
Mrs Maree Gaffney, Education and Training Coordinator
Ms Debra Hannagan, Early Years Literacy Specialist
Ms Paula Sibosado, Early Years Literacy Specialist

Broome Residential College

Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley,
Department of Education (Western Australian)
Ms Kristine Van, College Manager

Broome Senior High School

Mr Gregory Robson, Regional Executive Director, Kimberley,
Department of Education (Western Australian)
Ms Cath Winfield, Deputy Principal

Shooting Stars

Ms Helen Ockerby, Community Development Coordinator

Site visits

- Broome Senior High School
- Broome Residential College

Tuesday 29 August 2017 – Brisbane QLD

Public hearing

Kurbingui Youth Development Ltd

Mr Travis Coyne, Bridges Support Worker
Mr Kevin Maund, Program Manager

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

Mr Benjamin Abbatangelo, Mentor and Co-Chief Executive Officer
Miss Bianca Hunt, Mentor Leader – Griffith University
Mr Tom Wensley, Centre Manager

Department of Education and Training (Queensland)

Dr James Watterston, Director-General
Mr Selwyn Button, Assistant Director-General, State Schools –
Indigenous Education

Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School Inc. (The Murri School)

Ms Philomena Downey, Principal
Mr Victor Hart, Board Member

Site visit

- Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School Inc.
(The Murri School)

Wednesday 30 August 2017 – Townsville QLD

Public hearing

Townsville State High School

Mr Robert Slater, Principal

Heatley State School

Mrs Eleanor (Louise) Wilkinson, Principal
Mrs Joan McKay, North Queensland Regional Education Counsellor,
Department of Education and Training (Queensland)

Aitkenvale State School

Mr Judd Burgess, Principal
Mrs Josephine Lenz, Deputy Principal
Mr Jason Robert Pritchard, Mobility Officer, Department of Education and
Training (Queensland)

Shalom Christian College

Reverend Bruce Cornish, Board Chair
Mr Christopher England, Principal
Ms Sandy Hindmarsh, Deputy Principal

St Patrick's College

Ms Paulina Skerman, Principal
Ms Amber Hauff, Deputy Principal

Site visits

- Shalom Christian College
- St Patrick's College
- NRL Cowboys House

Thursday 31 August 2017 – Palm Island QLD**Public hearing*****Palm Island Community Company***

Mr Ray Armit, Project Officer

Ms Dyella Morgan, Children and Family Centre Playgroup Coordinator

Bwgcolman Community School

Mr Beresford Domic, Principal

St Michael's Catholic Primary School

Mrs Janet Wigan, Assistant Principal Religious Education

Site visit

- Bwgcolman Community School

Thursday 7 September 2017 – Canberra ACT**Public hearing*****Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet***

Ms Elizabeth Hefren-Webb, First Assistant Secretary

Ms Sarah Murray, Assistant Secretary, Tertiary Education Policy and
Coordination Branch

Department of Social Services

Mr Daniel Casey, Director, Student Payments, Work and Study Payments
Branch

Ms Cath Halbert, Group Manager, Payments Policy Group

Ms Vanessa Lapthorne, Director, Payrates, Policy Section

Ms Emma Kate McGuirk, Branch Manager, Work and Study Payments
Branch

Department of Human Services

Ms Bridget Brill, General Manager

Ms Rosemary Deininger, General Manager

Department of Education and Training

Ms Andrea Kelly, Acting Branch Manager

Dr Peter Nolan, Acting Branch Manager

Ms Nicole Panting, Director



Appendix C – List of exhibits

44th Parliament

1. Good to Great Schools
Gary Adams, *Project Follow Through: In-depth and Beyond*, Winter 1996.
2. Louise Lawler
Louise Lawler, *A Will and A Way: Program Evaluation (Activity No 58156)*, August 2008.
3. Louise Lawler
Louise Lawler, *A Will and A Way – saving millions and lives*, 2007.
4. Louise Lawler
Louise Lawler, *Closing the gap through secondary school education*, 2009.
5. Clontarf Foundation
Clontarf Foundation, *Overview of operations*, October 2015.
6. AFL Cape York House
AFL Cape York House, *House Brief*, March 2015.
7. National Catholic Education Commission
Annotated map of Australia
8. Cape York Academy
Cape York Academy, *Get ready. Work hard. Be good* (Pamphlet).
9. Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy
Dr Annie Holden, *Case studies: Impact of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy*, March 2013.

10. Good to Great Schools Australia

Noel Pearson, Bernadine Denigan, Jan Gotesson, *The most important reform – Position Paper: An agenda for completing ‘learning demand’ side reforms effected by the Cape York Welfare Reforms with ‘teaching supply’ side reforms, through the establishment of a specialist K-7 remote schools provider under the aegis of a statutory board led by Noel Pearson which has legislative delegation within Queensland public schools system to provide education where parent communities support alternative provisioning, June 2009.*

45th Parliament

1. Woodleigh School

Mrs Vivienne Wearne, *Wugubank Booklet*, 2010.

2. Woodleigh School

Mrs Vivienne Wearne, *Wugubank Red Earth Booklet*, 2015.

3. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

Dr Peter Lewis, *Supporting Transition to School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: What it means and what works?*, 2013.

4. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

Dr Peter Lewis, *Journey to big school - supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s transition to primary school*, 2014.

5. Geraldton Residential College

Geddes, M, *Sigh Not the Past: Reminiscences and History of Geraldton ‘Proddy Home’ and Dellahale Girls Hostel*, 1986.

6. WA Commissioner for Children and Young People

This Is Me: Aboriginal young people’s stories.

7. Girls Academy

Prospects: Girls Academy Program 2017.

8. Western Australian Department of Education

Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework.

9. Worawa Aboriginal College

Wayfinding 2017: New Student Handbook.

10. Worawa Aboriginal College

A sense of place (Information brochure).

11. Worawa Aboriginal College

Walking Together to make a Difference: An international First Nations Education Symposium, Event program 27-29 July 2017.

12. Worawa Aboriginal College
Newsletter: Term 1, 2017.
13. Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre
Understanding and addressing the needs of children and young people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD): A resource for teachers.
14. Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School
Annual Report 2016.
15. Dr Margaret (Marnie) O'Bryan
Shaping futures, shaping lives: an investigation into the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian boarding schools.
16. Shooting Stars
Ms Rose Whitau, Shooting Stars: Yarning with the Stars presentation – education through netball.
17. Queensland Department of Education and Training
Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.
18. Heatley State School
Mrs Louise Wilkinson, Explicit Improvement Agenda (EIA) and Priority Learning Areas (PLAs) for 2017, and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander education at Heatley SS Townsville.
19. Aitkenvale State School
Mr Judd Burgess, NAPLAN results, Closing the Gap – Year 3, and A transformational narrative of Aitkenvale State School.
20. Shalom Christian College
Rev Bruce Cornish, Breakdown of student numbers at 30 August 2017 and Campus map.
21. Bwgcolman Community School
Mr Beresford Domic, Bwgcolman Community School presentation.
22. Worawa Aboriginal School
Ms Lois Peeler, Annual Report 2015 – School Financial Activity
23. Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre
Indigenous Early Childhood Education (SEIP) Program: 6-Monthly Progress Report, 30/06/16 - 01/01/17
24. Role Models and Leaders Australia
Mr Ricky Grace, Annual Report 2016 – Board of Directors
25. Alta-1 College
Mr Dave Stevens, Alta-1 College welcome letter to Parent/Carer, 2017



Appendix D – List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Education Research
AEU	Australian Education Union
AGSRC	Australian Government School Recurrent Cost
AHISA	Association of the Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
AHL	Aboriginal Hostels Limited
AIC	Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme
AIEF	Australian Indigenous Education Foundation
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience Program
AISNT	Association of Independent Schools Northern Territory
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ARAB	Alcohol-Related Birth Defects
ARND	Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder
CARE	Curriculum and Reengagement in Education Schools
CDF	Customer Declaration Form
CFC	Child and Family Centres

CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CLC	Central Land Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CYAAA	Cap York Aboriginal Australian Academy
DHS	Department of Human Services
DSS	Department of Social Services
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ENT	Ear Nose and Throat
ESL/D	English as a Second Language or Dialect
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
IEU	Independent Education Union
ISCA	Independent School's Council of Australia
ISEA	Isolated Students Education Allowance
LoCP	Learning on Country Program
MATSITI	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NTCET	Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training
NTTSU	Northern Territory Transition Support Unit
PM&C	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RSAS	Remote Attendance Strategy
SEAM	School Enrolment and Attendance Measure
SES	Socio-economic Status

SNAICC Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

SRS Schooling Resource Standard

VET Vocational and Education and Training

