
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

© Commonwealth of Australia 2017

ISBN 978-1-74366-700-2 (Printed version)

ISBN 978-1-74366-699-9 (HTML version)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Australia License.



The details of this licence are available on the Creative Commons website:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>.

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



Contents

Membership of the Committee	ix
Foreword	xi
Terms of reference	xiii
Executive summary	xv
Lack of data	xv
Barriers to achievement	xv
Cultural safety	xvi
Engagement programs	xvi
Teaching and pedagogies	xvii
Boarding	xix
Funding	xix
List of recommendations	xxi
1 Introduction	1
Conduct of inquiry	2
Acknowledgements	3
Structure of report	4
Data	4
Attendance	5
Literacy and numeracy	8
Year 12 attainment	9
Further education and employment	10
Access to quality data	12
Committee comment	14

2	Barriers to achievement.....	15
	Food insecurity, overcrowding and exposure to anti-social behaviour	15
	Early childhood education	20
	Family responsibilities and young mothers	22
	Adulthood	25
	Health and wellbeing	27
	Ear health and hearing issues.....	27
	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD).....	32
	Trauma and mental wellbeing	35
	Linking health services and schools.....	37
3	Cultural safety and community engagement	43
	Cultural safety	43
	Teaching through culture	48
	Teaching through language	49
	Indigenous teachers and leadership	52
4	Engagement programs	55
	Gender differences	55
	Gender equity.....	56
	Equity of funding	58
	Committee comment.....	60
	Attendance strategies.....	61
	Remote School Attendance Strategy	62
	School Enrolment and Attendance Measure	62
	Committee comment.....	63
	Engagement programs	64
	School-based 'academy-style' programs.....	64
	Skills-focussed programs.....	71
	Academic mentoring programs	73
	Outside the safety nets	75
	Committee comment.....	76

5	Teaching and pedagogies.....	79
	Teacher training	80
	Cultural awareness and teacher attitudes	81
	Teacher retention	83
	Committee comment	84
	Pedagogies	85
	Scaffolding Literacy/Accelerated Literacy	86
	Direct Instruction	87
	Committee comment	92
6	Boarding.....	95
	Living away from home for study	96
	Models of boarding.....	97
	Committee comment	99
	Boarding vs local schools.....	99
	Wilson Review.....	100
	Regional boarding	102
	Committee comment.....	104
	Quality of boarding	105
	Student/staff ratios	107
	Cultural safety	107
	Health and wellbeing.....	109
	Committee comment	111
	Walking in two worlds – impacts on students who board.....	112
	Homesickness.....	114
	Absences for family business.....	115
	Student retention and ‘churn’	116
	Committee comment	117
	Transition support	118
	Relationships with community	119
	Flexibility and matching schools to students	120
	Committee comment	122

7 Funding	125
Federal, state and territory expenditure	126
Federal Government funding.....	126
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading	127
Indigenous Advancement Strategy (Children and Schooling Programme)	130
Cost of boarding	131
Federal funding for boarding	134
Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme.....	135
Indigenous Boarding Initiative	135
ABSTUDY	136
Scholarship support	151
Appendix A – List of submissions	155
Appendix B – List of witnesses, hearings and site visits	161
Appendix C – List of exhibits	181
Appendix D – List of abbreviations	185

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1	Northern Territory Government remote and very remote schools teacher tenure	84
Table 7.1	SRS – estimated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading	129
Table 7.2	Uncommitted funds, Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)	130
Table 7.3	Average allocated cost incurred per Indigenous boarding student at independent schools.....	131
Table 7.4	Net cost of operating Indigenous boarding facilities.....	132
Table 7.5	ABSTUDY boarding-related payments, mean and median, 2016	140
Table 7.6	Impact of income test.....	142

LIST OF FIGURES

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)	6
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)	7
Figure 1.3	Indigenous student attendance rates (per cent) Year 1 to 10 combined, by state/territory, Semester 1, 2014 and 2016.....	8
Figure 1.4	Student attendance rates (per cent) Year 1 to 10 combined, by Indigenous status and remoteness, Semester 1, 2016.....	8
Figure 1.5	Proportion of students reaching National Minimum Standards for Year 5 numeracy by Indigenous status and remoteness, 2016	9
Figure 1.6	Proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year-olds with Year 12 or equivalent attainment, by remoteness, 2008 and 2014–15	10
Figure 1.7	Highest educational attainment achieved, Indigenous persons 18 years and over, 2008, Selected Indicators of Wellbeing.....	10
Figure 1.8	Characteristics which influence student achievement, observed and unobserved in Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) data	13
Figure 2.1	Average attendance, Year 1 to Year 10, by Indigenous status of student	25
Figure 7.1	Proportion of total school education government recurrent expenditure, 2014–15	126
Figure 7.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading percentage rate	128
Figure 7.3	Funding per school, 3 year average breakdown by boarding facility (per student)	135



Membership of the Committee

45th Parliament

Chair Ms Melissa Price MP

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
(until 14/9/17; from 4/12/17)

Mr Llew O'Brien MP

Mr Rick Wilson MP

44th Parliament

Chair The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Members Ms Sharon Claydon MP
(from 19/10/15)

Mr Mark Coulton MP

The Hon Warren Entsch MP

Mr Bert van Manen MP
(until 19/10/15)

The Hon Shayne Neumann MP

Mr Graham Perrett MP

Committee Secretariat

45th Parliament

Secretary Ms Melanie Brocklehurst

Inquiry Secretary Ms Casey Mazzarella

Research Officers Ms Louise Milligan
Ms Megan Jones

44th Parliament

Secretary Dr Anna Dacre

Senior Research Officer Ms Lauren Wilson



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.