



**House of Representatives Indigenous Affairs Standing  
Committee - Inquiry into educational opportunities for  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students**

Submission from the South Australian Government

November 2015

## Introduction

The Government of South Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. In particular, South Australia will respond to two aspects of the inquiry:

- access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling; and
- engagement and achievement of students in remote areas.

As of 30 June 2011 the population of South Australia was 1,596,572 people, of which 30,430 people were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (1.9% of the total SA population).

The South Australian government has an ongoing commitment to ensuring South Australian children get the best start in life and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to six ambitious targets to address the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians in life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment.

They are to:

- close the gap in life expectancy within a generation (by 2031);
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018;
- ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities by 2013;
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018;
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians by 2018.

A new target to close the gap in school attendance within five years was agreed in 2014, with 2014 as the baseline.

The South Australian government is committed to improving participation of and opportunities for Aboriginal people in this State. The need to accelerate improved outcomes for Aboriginal people in areas encompassing health, education, employment, economic prosperity, heritage and culture, and wellbeing is a State priority and is clearly articulated in South Australia's Strategic Plan. Many Aboriginal South Australians still experience discrimination and disadvantage and do not share in the full benefits of society. To address this Aboriginal wellbeing is deeply embedded in the Plan with over ten per cent of targets being Aboriginal specific, and many other targets in the Plan delivering positive outcomes to Aboriginal people.

At the July 2015 National Press Club Luncheon, the Honorable Jay Weatherill MP, Premier of South Australia spoke of the need to deliver a quality education service to ensure that Australia is a fairer and more productive country in which all citizens can participate in the economy. The

Premier proposed reforms to the education system to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people through better investment in the early years.

South Australia is undertaking significant and extensive education reform to strengthen policy, regulation and the delivery of services to support children to fulfill their potential and be in a position to take advantage of opportunity. The Premier's Vision for SA Education (2015) prioritizes investment in the early years in order to deliver better outcomes for children particularly for those who are most in need

In South Australia, the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is responsible for providing early childhood development, health and child protection services, as well as public education and care, to South Australians. The Department provides a range of integrated services for the benefit of families, children and young people and aims to support every family so that – right from the start of a child's life – all young South Australians have the opportunity to become happy, healthy and safe members of our community. More than 180,000 children attend education programs in more than 1,000 public schools and early childhood services. In 2014, 9738 Aboriginal children were enrolled in public schools and over 1400 Aboriginal children were attending preschool programs. Education services are delivered across 60 Local Partnership clusters that deliver flexible and contextualised education services to suit the needs and diversity of local communities.

The DECD Strategic Plan 2014-2017 was released in July 2014 and outlines six priority areas for improvement over the next four years. The DECD Strategic Plan is available at <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/aboutdept/pages/stratplanning/strategicplan/?reFlag=1>

Through this plan DECD aims to strengthen South Australia's public education system; improve health, wellbeing and child safety; increase the engagement of children, families and communities; provide timely access to services; and provide an effective, efficient transparent education and child development system. Supporting this is a comprehensive strategic policy framework to support improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

The DECD Aboriginal Strategy 2013-2016 identifies a suite of systemic and local-level actions designed to support Aboriginal children and students across the full spectrum of their education experience from early childhood to employment. The Strategy also contains specific targets concerning Aboriginal employment and career pathways. The DECD Reconciliation Action Plan 2014-2015 builds on the DECD Aboriginal Strategy and outlines specific actions to be undertaken to support the building of relationships; to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Aboriginal people to Australian society; and to maximise current and future employment opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in the economy. The DECD Aboriginal Strategy is available at <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/mediacentre/pages/decdupdate/49098/?reFlag=1>

South Australia plays an active role in shaping national education policy and works in partnership with the Australian government, and other States and Territories to develop and implement policy to support improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and students. In 2014 South Australia commenced hosting the Secretariat for the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group (ATSIEAG), the key advisory group to the national



Education Council and associated working groups on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The Advisory Group is chaired by the Chief Executive of the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development.

In September 2015 the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy was released. The Strategy, developed by the ATSIEAG, outlines a vision whereby all Aboriginal children and young people are supported to achieve their full learning potential, are empowered to shape their own futures, and are supported to embrace their culture and identify as Australia's First Nations people. The Strategy outlines 8 key principles and 7 priorities that identify and support areas of national collaboration, and local and systemic-level actions. The Strategy establishes an agreed national vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education whilst enabling states and territories to enact localised approaches in partnership with educators, families, and communities.

The 8 key principles that underpin the strategy are:

- Achieving potential by holding high expectations of Aboriginal children and young people
- Equity of access and achievement
- Accountable, transparent and responsive systems
- Recognition and valuing of Aboriginal cultures, histories, languages, and values
- Relationships that demonstrate trust and respect and that value community cultural knowledge, wisdom and expertise
- Engaging Aboriginal people as partners in decision-making, planning, delivery and evaluation of education services across all levels of the system
- Local approaches used to accelerate outcomes
- Policies, programs and partnerships that reflect the needs of Aboriginal people and are informed by knowledge, evidence and research.

These principles underpin the 7 key priority areas of leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; culture, identity and partnerships; school and child readiness; literacy and numeracy; attendance; and transition points including pathways to post school options.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy is available at <http://www.scseec.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/ATSI%20documents/DECD NATSI EducationStrategy.pdf>

## Education policy in practice in South Australia

- *access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling*

DECD provides a range of services to support the early nurture, wellbeing, development, education and care of South Australia's children. These services and programs are dynamic,

reflecting the needs of the children and families in their local communities. They recognise that parents and carers have the primary role in their child's development, and the department aims to work in partnership with parents and carers to achieve the best outcomes possible for children.

The Department for Education and Child Development's discussion paper 'Every Chance for Every Child' firmly places all children from ages of birth to 18 at the centre of service development and delivery emphasising a team around the child concept to help deliver integrated and connected child and family services encompassing health and education. Implementation of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for children aged birth – 5 years has also meant that Aboriginal children are developing and learning as early as possible in life, and programs supporting Aboriginal children and families are in place.

In 2014, preschool programs were delivered at 410 South Australian government funded services across the state either in school based settings or 'stand-alone' community based facilities comprising preschools, Children and Family Centres, playgroups, Family day care, rural care, occasional care, and home-based education services. Of the 410 DECD government funded or DECD provided preschool services, 230 (56%) operate in metropolitan Adelaide, 134 (33%) operate in regional areas, and 46 (11%) operate in remote or very remote regions. On average over the past five years, this system has provided preschool to approximately 18,400 children each year.

The numbers of Aboriginal children enrolled in early education programs continues to rise. In 2003, 994 Aboriginal children accounted for 5.5% of all early education enrolments. This figure has increased to 8.7% in 2014 with 1496 Aboriginal enrolments in early education programs. Between 2003 to 2014, Aboriginal early education program enrolment numbers have increased 3.2%.

The South Australian government implements a number of policy initiatives designed to support Aboriginal children and families to access education programs as early as possible. The Universal Access to Early Childhood Education initiative in South Australia is designed to maintain the provision of early childhood education programs to ensure that every child has access to an affordable, quality preschool education program in the year before full time schooling, delivered by a four year university qualified teacher, for 15 hours per week and 40 weeks per year. Under this initiative, Aboriginal children and children under the guardianship of the Minister (children in care) are able to commence preschool at the age of 3 years old and attend for up to 12 hours per week initially, and increasing up to 15 hours per week prior to commencing school. Aboriginal children are also able to undertake extended periods in preschool up to six years of age, upon which time they are able to commence school.

South Australia has used three key approaches to implementing the Universal Access initiative:

- 1) Expanding service provision in existing preschool services: Children enrolled in government funded preschools had increased provision from 11 hours to 15 hours of preschool per week

- 2) Expanded service provision by providing preschool programs in child care centres and non-government schools
- 3) New service delivery options for vulnerable and disadvantaged children

South Australia is committed to an integrated approach to service delivery for families. Since 2005, South Australia has been developing a network of children's centres for early childhood development and parenting for children from prenatal to age five, and their families. Children's centres support children and families to achieve the best possible learning, health and wellbeing outcomes in a universal setting with targeted responses for children and families who may require additional support.

The South Australian Government has established 42 children's centres across metropolitan and regional South Australia. This includes four Aboriginal focus Children and Family Centres developed through a partnership with the Australian Government as part of the Indigenous Early Childhood Development national partnership. The four Children and Family Centres include:

- Taikurrendi Children and Family Centre at Christies Beach
- Ngura Yadurim Children and Family Centre at Ceduna
- Gabmididi Manoo Children and Family Centre at Whyalla
- Ernabella Children and Family Centre at Ernabella/Pukatja on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

The Children and Family Centres have a community development focus to support Aboriginal families to provide the best possible start in life for their children. Services include preschool, occasional care, Learning Together programs, playgroups, and child and maternal allied health programs.

All work connected with children's centres is guided by the National Quality Framework and the South Australian Outcomes Framework which identifies the priority outcomes of

1. Children have optimal health, learning and development
2. Parents provide strong foundations for their children's healthy development and wellbeing
3. Communities are child and family friendly
4. Aboriginal children are safe, culturally strong and confident.

The Learning Together program and the Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy are initiatives of the South Australian Government that support the literacy and language development in children from birth. The Learning Together program is for families with children aged birth to three across seven areas throughout South Australia. The program aims to involve families in their children's learning from birth. The initiative helps support parents and caregivers in their role as first teachers, and prepares children to engage with early learning prior to commencing preschool.

The Learning Together program and the Learning Together @ Home program supports the involvement of parents in children's early learning and focus on:

- children's oral language development

- children being read to at an early age
- the development of children's dispositions to learning
- the parent's role in supporting their children

The Learning Together program also supports parents to pursue accredited learning opportunities including the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), and vocational and higher education programs, and supports the development of employment pathways for parents into the early childhood education profession. The Learning Together program currently has over 1100 families participating, of which 68 or 6% are Aboriginal families. Through this program 7 Aboriginal women are undertaking their SACE.

The Learning Together @ Home program provides home visits when families require additional support to engage with their children through play or when they are unable to leave their home to access other services. Of the 1,000 families participating in this initiative, 81 (11%) are Aboriginal families.

The Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy operates in eleven children's centres across South Australia and supports increased participation in early childhood education. Targeted funding is used to employ Family Literacy Teachers to work with three-year old Aboriginal children and their families attending the centres. The teacher supports the development of literacy skills; engages families in building strength-based practices; and develops, implements and monitors individual learning plans for each child in collaboration with families, children and teachers. In Term 2, 2015 there were 311 Aboriginal children aged three years old accessing these supports in the eleven children's centres implementing this initiative.

Within the program, it is recognised that cultural competency has powerful implications for the learning environment and influences interactions and relationships with children and families. The project supports the building of strong culturally-appropriate professional practices by the Family Literacy Teachers as well as within the centre more broadly.

As part of the project each children's centre develops an inquiry project based on practice which links to their localised context. This inquiry project builds on previous learning and reflects observed areas for growth and development at the site. The program also focusses on building professional capacity across the system to support Aboriginal children's education.

## **Education policy in practice in South Australia**

- engagement and achievement of students in remote areas

In South Australia the most remote schools are located in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the far northwest of South Australia. The APY Lands are inhabited primarily by the traditional owners of the land, the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra people. There are nine schools (Anangu schools) situated in the APY Lands with 608 Anangu students enrolled as at third term 2014. The majority of students are Anangu and

their first language is Pitjantjatjara as this is usually the language spoken at home. Students are only introduced to English when they commence at preschool and school.

The South Australian Government is committed to developing policy and program solutions that contribute towards improved outcomes for Anangu in all areas of social and economic measures including education, health, wellbeing, community safety, and employment. DECD works in close partnership with the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC) and APY Lands Communities regarding education and child development services and delivery on the APY Lands.

Nationally, since 2009, there have been some gains towards the COAG Closing the Gap education targets, however overall there has been little improvement to halve the gap in reading, writing, numeracy outcomes. Children living on the Anangu Lands have unacceptably poor educational, health and social prospects and a significant factor impacting on the education of Anangu children is the mobility of the population between communities. This mobility contributes to unacceptably low attendance rates and impacts on continuity of education. Available data for 2014 shows that:

- there were 109 Aboriginal children enrolled in APY Lands preschools as at term 2, 2014, comprising 7% of all Aboriginal preschool enrolments in South Australian government preschools
- there were 608 Aboriginal students enrolled in APY Lands schools in 2014, comprising 6.2% of all Aboriginal student enrolments in South Australian government schools
- 5% of year 7 Aboriginal children were at or above National Minimum Standard in reading achievement compared to 79.4% of overall year 7 DECD Aboriginal children
- 4.3% of year 7 Aboriginal children were at or above National Minimum Standard in numeracy compared to 81.8% of overall year 7 DECD Aboriginal children
- On average Anangu children attended school for 63% of the days that schools were open on the Lands
- The Year 8 to 12 school retention rate on APY Lands in 2009 was 25.4% and 46.9% in 2014, compared to an overall Aboriginal student Year 8 to 12 retention rate of 86% in 2014.

School attendance is a priority of the South Australian and Australian Governments. In addition to the existing strategies implemented to support attendance, the South Australian Government is working closely with the Australian Government through the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) to improve the attendance of Aboriginal students in remote and very remote communities. This Strategy employs Local School Attendance Officers (LSAO) and supervisors to assist students living in APY communities. Attendance rates in Anangu schools for 2014 have remained below the overall DECD Aboriginal attendance rate of 80.2%.



Family and community engagement and support are critical factors in improving attendance. The key governance body for education on Anangu Lands, the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC) has prioritised attendance and community engagement, and works with schools and APY communities to work in partnership to develop and implement strategies to improve attendance.

Consultation with PYEC about the proposed education reform on APY Lands communities has commenced. The proposed reform will contribute to the identification and pursuit of opportunities to address intergenerational disadvantage in the APY Lands and will focus on the key areas of education, child development and community capacity.

The proposed reform will improve the coordination and integration of services provided by government and non-government service providers on the APY Lands by leveraging on existing approaches and resources to support greater engagement with education, whilst being cognizant of social and environmental contexts. There are opportunities to better align resources and eliminate any service duplication from levels of government and across agencies.

Effort will be focused on coordinating and co-locating where possible child health, child protection, education, childcare and parenting support services within the ten communities across the Anangu Lands. Four early childhood education centres located at Amata, Mimili, Ernabella/Pukatja, and Fregon/Kaltjiti already deliver early childhood education, health, and parenting support programs in this way. As part of this model, centres will provide education programs from birth with a seamless transition for children through to school or preschool.

A common curriculum approach has also been introduced across the APY Lands as of March 2015 ensuring children living on the Anangu Lands experience continuity of education through the establishment of a common curriculum program which spans all APY schools. Under this model, schools implement the same units of work across all schools in the APY Lands with common assessment tasks undertaken by all students. The curriculum has been adapted to suit the cultural and environmental surrounds and includes Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum content and delivery. Strategies have been implemented and are monitored across the nine school sites to ensure improvement in attendance and learning. This approach is critical in providing a seamless education experience for students that may move between communities.

For secondary students, education programs such as the Wiltja Residential Program and Umuwa Trade Training Centre support retention in and completion of education programs, improved attendance, literacy and numeracy development, and provide pathways from school to further education and employment opportunities.

The Wiltja Residential Program in Adelaide enables Anangu students to experience secondary education in a supported academic and social environment. Established in the 1980's, up to 120 students can be accommodated to successfully complete their SACE or other vocational courses. Students attend bridging programs and eventually mainstream secondary schooling at

either Woodville High School or Windsor Gardens Secondary College. The program supports students to engage with senior education programs and maintain cultural and family connections whilst attending school away from their home communities. The Wiltja program has been very successful in supporting Anangu senior students to complete education and/or vocational programs and return to their communities as young leaders.

The Umuwa Trade Training Centre (TTC) delivers short course and accredited training programs in a residential setting to Anangu including school students and community members. Short course training courses commenced in 2013, and residential courses commenced in March 2014. The Trade Training Centre provides short term accommodation of up to 4 nights for up to 24 people including 4 staff members across the 2 houses. Groups of up to 20 Anangu students travel to Umuwa three or four times a year to complete week-long blocks of vocational training in a specific industry area. Each group of students are accompanied by a teacher and an Anangu Education Worker (AEW) from their home community. The Trade Training Centre provides vocational training at a Certificate III level to students and Anangu living on the APY Lands in the following industry areas:

- Automotive
- Metal fabrication
- Construction
- Rural production
- Horticulture
- Commercial cookery
- Allied health (including Aged Care)
- Office administration
- Conservation and land management
- Hospitality (front of house and accommodation services)
- Information technology

The TTC has had a significant impact on improving the engagement of senior secondary students in education and has directly provided increased opportunities for employment and further training. DECD is developing further strategies to enable increased achievement of the South Australian Certificate of Education through the Trade Training Centre.

## Concluding comments

The State Government is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal South Australians across the full spectrum of government program and policy initiatives.

The participation of Aboriginal children in quality education programs and initiatives that help to build capacity in Aboriginal communities are identified in South Australia's Strategic Plan.

The embedding of Aboriginal perspectives in the design and delivery of government policy and programs is of enormous value and benefit, not only to Aboriginal people but to the entire South Australian community in shaping an environment where all citizens can prosper. Critical to this

is the involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of high quality education policy and programs that incorporate the unique diversity of communities.

The implementation of a seamless, contextualised, education experience from birth through to employment is critical in developing lifelong learning habits; building individual and community capacity; and in empowering children, young people and their families to influence and maximise their education outcomes and experiences.