



CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL

**Submission in relation to the House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Employment, Education and Training**

**Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments
17 December 2019**

Terms of Reference

The House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training will inquire into and report on the education of students in remote communities and the role of culture, family, community and country in delivering better outcomes. The Inquiry will focus on but not be limited to consideration of:

- A child's journey through early childhood, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education in remote communities, like the tri-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory;
- Key barriers to the education journey, including the effects of environmental factors such as drought on families and communities;
- The role of culture and country in a child's learning;
- Community and family structures that support a child's education and their attendance at school;
- Effective government initiatives, past and present, that support remote communities to enable greater educational outcomes, including those that have improved attainment in literacy and numeracy;
- Innovative approaches to workforce, including recruitment, professional learning, retention and support, and lessons from communities that could be more generally applied;
- Access and support to deliver the Australian Curriculum (including STEM) in a flexible way to meet local learning needs and interests of remote students, including examples of innovative ways in which the curriculum is being delivered in remote schools; and
- Successful pathways to ensure students have the knowledge and skills they need to enter further education and the workforce.

Introduction and context

The Central Land Council (CLC) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments.

The CLC is a Commonwealth corporate entity established under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* ('ALRA'). Amongst other functions, it has statutory responsibilities for Aboriginal land acquisition and land management in the southern half of the Northern Territory. The CLC is also a Native Title Representative Body established under the *Native Title Act 1993* ('NTA'). Pursuant to the ALRA, more than 50% of the NT and more than 85% of the NT coastline is now held by Aboriginal Land Trusts on behalf of traditional owners. A further 253,886 square kilometres of land and water is also held under native title. The CLC region covers approximately 780,000 km² of land, and 417,318 km² is Aboriginal land under the ALRA.

In addition to these functions, the CLC administers a range of programs for the benefit of our constituents in relation to environmental management, community development, governance, cultural heritage and customary practices. Through our elected representative Council of 90 community delegates the CLC represents the aspirations and interests of approximately 24,000 traditional landowners and other Aboriginal people resident in its region, on a wide range of land-based and socio-political issues.

A key priority for the CLC and our constituents is ensuring that Aboriginal people are able to continue to live on and maintain connection to traditional lands, primarily in remote communities and outstations, to pass on cultural knowledge and language to future generations and to retain and develop the unique components of Aboriginal identity and knowledge that have evolved over tens of thousands of years.

This sits alongside an aspiration and need, particularly amongst younger people, to gain the skills and capacity to function in and engage confidently with mainstream society. Arguably a successful education in this context would combine these two objectives through access to high quality early childhood programs and primary and secondary education, the latter to at least Year 10, but through an adapted curriculum that reflects language and cultural priorities that are crucial to identity. Experience has shown that this is difficult to achieve without strong family and community engagement in schools.

In consultations undertaken for the CLC prior to the establishment of the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT), the consultants noted that, "there is a strong emphasis placed on direct and pragmatic support for passing on the Warlpiri Law and tradition by the old people before they are lost to us. There is a recognition of the need for Warlpiri young people to survive and thrive on the mainstream environment and the world of work."¹

¹ Harrison & Price, 2005, p.4

While the CLC is not an education service provider, our organisation has a long history of working with and representing the interests of our constituents and we are familiar with the day-to-day and lifelong challenges facing Aboriginal people from remote communities in accessing education and training at all levels. The CLC has also had direct involvement with education issues through the work of its Community Development Unit. This unit works with traditional owners to maximise development and community benefit outcomes from income arising from land use agreements. A range of communities have been investing their own monies into a range of education initiatives for some time. The most well-resourced and comprehensive work has been undertaken through the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust established in 2005 in the Tanami region.

Since 2011, \$26.7 million of money from royalties has been invested into education through the Community Development Unit's programs across the CLC region.² This figure demonstrates the willingness of Aboriginal communities to invest in the improvement of education for their young people. However, it also reveals that frequently, particularly across the CLC region, external funding is needed to supplement school budgets in communities that want to implement extensive Aboriginal language and culture programs in schools.

NT Government schools are resourced under a Global Funding model. A large component of this budget is calculated according to 'Effective Enrolment', which is an average of attendance at different times throughout a year, rather than on school enrolment. This means schools have little certainty in their budgeting, with there often being variations between preliminary and final budgets, and budgets vary greatly from year to year.³ The volatility of this can delay funding of staff positions and makes it difficult for schools to plan ahead. Special programs that are considered additional to the general literacy and numeracy focus of many schools, such as Indigenous Language and Culture and the provision of linguists and support staff, may be the first programs to be cut when funding is uncertain. It is the recommendation of this report that the priorities outlined by the CLC constituents such as bilingual education and a strong focus on culture, are funded in such a way that they are protected from the volatility of global budgeting. Consistent and additional funding of these cultural elements of education would also enable regional strategies to be developed, rather than schools working individually out of their separate global budgets.

² Central Land Council Community Development Unit (CDU) Data, February 2020

³ EY, 2017, p. 24

Executive Summary

Remote education service delivery is complex, compounded by multifaceted issues of policy failure, under-investment and remoteness. Poor school attendance is an ongoing issue for remote schools across Central Australia and has been for many decades. CLC has regularly provided submissions to education reviews at the Commonwealth and Northern Territory level and education remains a policy priority. Poor school attendance is only one of the many aspects of education and even this is affected by many factors. The reality of low school attendance is a serious concern and the urgent need to improve school attendance rates and educational outcomes is acknowledged. The focus on school attendance must be part of a more comprehensive approach to improving education outcomes in remote schools.

This requires prioritising community involvement and ownership of what is going on in their local schools, universal access to early childhood learning and preschool education, quality teaching in classrooms, a high-performing school and education system, as well as the incorporation of, and respect for, student identity, local language and culture. Working together, these critical factors inspire school attendance and the opportunities promised by access to education will be realised. To improve the unacceptably low education outcomes for Aboriginal students in Central Australia, long-term planning and consistent implementation of evidence-based approaches is essential.

The 2014 Wilson Review of Education in The Northern Territory summarised the issues:

“By Year 3, Indigenous students in very remote schools in the NT are already two years behind Indigenous students in remote schools in the rest of Australia in their writing results. By Year 9, the gap is about 5 years of schooling. These are not comparisons with the general population, but with comparable students in comparable locations.”⁴

Improving engagement in and attendance at remote schools cannot be achieved in isolation. Addressing broader social determinants including housing and overcrowding, access to healthy and regular food, family wellbeing and stability, chronic illness and mental health is critical. To address these successfully government departments must work collaboratively and not in silos and through genuine consultation with local communities who are best placed to design local solutions.

CLC strongly believes that it is vital to identify and mobilise the factors that give Aboriginal students an advantage. This requires a shift from a focus on ‘negative’ ways of thinking to a strengths-based approach. The strengths-based approach must be inclusive of Indigenous cultural frameworks and local knowledge and language. To improve the education and attendance outcomes for remote Aboriginal students, long-term planning and consistent implementation of evidence-based approaches is required.

⁴ Wilson, 2014, p. 11

Priority Recommendations

Whilst these recommendations may be applicable to the delivery of education in remote and complex environments in other parts of Australia, this submission directly addresses issues affecting the remote Aboriginal communities of the Central Australian region with which we are most familiar.

- Fully support and consistently resource schools where the local community is committed to the implementation of a bilingual program. Ensure that funding to remote schools is based on enrolments rather than attendance, with appropriate needs-based weighting.
- That governments commit to the provision of secondary schooling in remote communities to at least Year Ten.
- Provide additional funding to remote schools at a local or regional level to do the work of adapting the Australian curriculum to enable it to be delivered through the prism of local language and culture. The funding for implementation of adapted curricula should be quarantined within or provided in addition to global funding rather than being subject to annual budgeting priorities.
- Education departments must set annual targets for the training and mentoring of Aboriginal Assistant Teachers and develop pathways and incentives to enable progress to full teaching qualifications.
- Ensure fair and equitable entitlements for all Aboriginal teaching staff. Increased casualisation of the remote Aboriginal teaching workforce means that many workers don't get paid during school holidays or receive annual leave or other benefits. A reduction in benefits is a disincentive to Aboriginal teaching staff retention.
- Fully operationalise the COAG requirement for 15 hours per week of preschool to be delivered in all remote communities with appropriate support and resourcing for early childhood education and learning services.
- Adopt a more inclusive model for remote pre-school service provision allowing funding to be directed towards Aboriginal controlled service providers in addition to government operated pre-schools.
- Commission a national independent evaluation of education outcomes for remote Indigenous students attending government and non-government boarding schools. Identify elements of success for future planning and policy.
- Provide support for the establishment of an independently owned and controlled peak body for Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory. Currently, an Indigenous representative advisory body is appointed by the Minister for Education and Training to provide advice and make recommendations to the NT and Australian Government. This body is not Aboriginal owned or controlled.

The CLC has a strong interest in education provision in very remote communities. This submission now addresses the terms of reference.

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

A child's journey through the education system in a Northern Territory remote community is rarely without complication.

This journey begins long before they enter the education system, and young Aboriginal children often have a difficult start to life. For example, in the NT,

- 13.6% of Aboriginal babies are born with low birth weight⁵
- Aboriginal children have higher rates of many childhood diseases, including malnutrition and hearing loss than non-Aboriginal children⁶
- Aboriginal 1-4 year olds are 2.5 times more likely to be admitted to hospital than non-Aboriginal children⁷
- An Aboriginal child in the NT is nearly 7 times more likely to be assessed as developmentally vulnerable, according to the Australian Early Development Census⁸

Further to this, Aboriginal children in the NT face many difficulties that can impact on their capacity to access and engage with schooling, including:

- Aboriginal children are subject to substantiated child protection notifications at a rate of 38.6 per 1000 children, more than 4 times greater than the national rate for all Australian children⁹
- Aboriginal children in the NT are in out of home care at a rate of 36.6 per 1000 children, but only 36.9% of these are in kinship care. Nationally, 63.6% of Aboriginal children that are in out of home care are placed with family.
- In the Northern Territory, 54% of households living in state owned and managed Indigenous housing are overcrowded

The following table summarises a typical child's access to Northern Territory education services and gives an indication of the kind of journey they may have as they attempt to navigate the stages of the education system.

⁵ Productivity Commission, 2019

⁶ Guthridge et al., 2016

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Productivity Commission, 2020

Table 1.1 Summary of a typical child’s journey through education in the Northern Territory

Stage of education	Situation for Aboriginal children in NT remote areas
Early childhood (0-5 years)	<p>Early childhood education is recognised as being critically important to a child’s development, and yet is not offered in a consistent way across remote NT. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Families as First Teachers (FaFT) early childhood program is offered in 35 of the 73 remote communities in the NT¹⁰ ● Childcare and playgroup is delivered by some regional councils¹¹ but this is not consistent across the NT and is subject to fluctuations and restrictions in funding. ● Some regions are serviced by mobile playgroup, but these services are occasional¹²
Pre-school	<p>Young Aboriginal children in very remote communities in the NT do not have an equal opportunity to access suitable pre-school education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-school is offered in many of these very remote communities,¹³ although only 59% of early childhood services in very remote areas in the NT meet national quality standards¹⁴ ● Just 43% of students enrolled in early childhood education in NT very remote areas attended for the recommended 600 hours per year¹⁵
Primary	<p>Despite many strategies, school attendance continues to be a huge concern in very remote NT communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Average school attendance for Aboriginal students in very remote areas in the NT was 48.9% in 2019,¹⁶ which is well below the national average of 63% for Aboriginal students in very remote areas.¹⁷ ● Nationally, just 21% of Aboriginal students in very remote areas demonstrate consistent attendance (students attending school 90% of the time).¹⁸ Given the patterns in attendance, it is expected this figure would be even lower in the NT. ● In the CLC region, 18 out of the 27 schools in Central Australia had an attendance rate below 55%, with the lowest rate being 35.2% in Papunya¹⁹

¹⁰ NTG, 2019a, p. 20

¹¹ MacDonnell Regional Council, 2020

¹² KICS, 2018

¹³ The NT schools directory indicates that at least 5 communities in Central Australia do not have preschool offered at the community school (Finke, Imanpa, Mutitjulu, Watarrka & Willowra)

¹⁴ Closing the Gap, 2019, p. 54

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 50

¹⁶ NTG, 2019b

¹⁷ Closing the Gap, 2019, p. 69-71

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 71

¹⁹ NTG, 2019b

Stage of education	Situation for Aboriginal children in NT remote areas
Primary (continued)	<p>On nationally recognised measures of school achievement,²⁰ Aboriginal children in very remote areas of the NT fall well below targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NAPLAN Year 3 (2018): 83% below national writing standard; 76% below national reading standard²¹
Middle years and secondary	<p>Into middle and senior years, Aboriginal students in very remote areas of the NT simply do not have access to the mainstream secondary curriculum delivery. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited opportunities exist for remote students to pursue education beyond Year 8 in remote communities, and students who wish to engage with the secondary curriculum are encouraged to move away to either a regional high school or NT or interstate boarding school.²² • In 2015, it was estimated that 1097 Aboriginal students in the NT attended boarding school, with 349 of these attending school outside the NT²³ • Of the Aboriginal cohort that remain in very remote communities, there was a 38% Year 12 attainment rate in 2018-19²⁴ <p>Given the inequitable access to education, it is no surprise that the Year 9 students sitting NAPLAN in very remote areas of the NT are well below national standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NAPLAN Year 9 (2018): 96% below national writing standard; 90% below national reading standard²⁵

All of this demonstrates the complexity of the education context in very remote communities. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that, when it comes to education in very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools, “it is far more complex than ‘success’ or ‘failure’.”²⁶

²⁰ While we acknowledge there are significant issues with the suitability of standardised testing in remote communities, this data indicates just how far these children are from attaining mainstream educational outcomes

²¹ ACARA, 2018

²² NTG, 2019

²³ Boarding Australia, 2016

²⁴ Closing the Gap, 2020, p. 60

²⁵ ACARA, 2018

²⁶ Osborne & Guenther, 2013

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

The Federal House of Representatives Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students conducted in 2016 identified food insecurity, overcrowding, exposure to substance abuse, physical and mental ill-health (including FASD and trauma) as well as a lack of general wellbeing as barriers to Aboriginal children's education journey.²⁷ The above barriers have been extensively discussed in relation to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote areas. In addition to these barriers, the CLC has identified some further critical factors that impact on education in the remote setting, namely the impacts of climate change, power security, mobility and distance and language.

Climate change impacts

"...Spare a thought for Aboriginal people out bush ... who are already suffering most during our hotter, longer and drier summers."²⁸

- Mr. Sammy Wilson, Chair of the Central Land Council

A hotter climate directly impacts children and their school attendance. School attendance and concentration at school rely upon adequate sleep, good nutrition and physical health. All of these requirements are negatively impacted in extreme and protracted hot weather. Climate scientists predict up to 168 days of the year in extreme heat by 2030. This grim forecast was surpassed in the summer of 2018/2019, with 184 days of record heat. With the strong likelihood that temperatures will continue to increase and persist, bringing hotter, longer and drier summers, it is essential to start thinking now about how these conditions are and will continue to affect children and their capacity to engage in formal education in future years.

In town camps and remote communities, not everyone can afford air conditioning. The few who can afford it have reported that in extreme heat, air conditioning fails completely. Children, the elderly and the sick suffer the most in these conditions. The pressures of overcrowding on children has been well documented.²⁹ It has been linked with children not receiving support for their schooling or facing many associated physical and mental health barriers which can stop them from attending school. Add increased and persistent heat to this context then issues of inadequate sleep, physical discomfort, family stress and food spoiling more quickly (particularly as many houses do not have effective refrigeration), will further reduce children's ability and willingness to attend and engage with school. These factors are compounded by the issue of power security in the NT, where families rely upon a prepaid "power card" card system with a unique household ID assigned to specific household members. Involuntary 'self-disconnections' occur at a very high rate, with the average duration being 7.7 hours.³⁰

²⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, 2017

²⁸ Central Land Council, 2019

²⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, 2017

³⁰ NTCOSS, 2019, p.21

Many children in remote Aboriginal communities walk to school. This prospect is made extremely challenging on very hot days. A lack of formed paths and shade means children are exposed to hot sun and are walking on surfaces with temperatures of between 61°C and 68°C.³¹ At this temperature, a child could sustain instant and severe burns to their feet. This is yet another example of how the worsening climate will deteriorate already poor living conditions and could place more pressure on school attendance.

Mobility and Distance

Aboriginal people in remote Central Australia can live as far as 800 km from the nearest regional centre. If a family needs to leave their community to attend a sick relative, access town-based services or funerals they are likely to be away for many days or weeks. This can also be the case when families visit other communities for family or cultural reasons. It is estimated that at any one time more than 25% of school aged children in a typical remote community are away from that community.³² There is encouragement for children to attend schools in regional centres or communities whilst they are away however this doesn't always happen and can be disruptive to the child's learning. This poses a unique challenge to education programs in remote settings.

Access to education

Access to a complete education service remains very limited for children living in the remote context of the NT. As Table 1.1 above highlights, there remains a number of remote communities in the NT without a functioning early childhood, pre-school and/or secondary school service, leaving significant gaps in access to education. Where education services are being provided, they are often subject to erratic delivery and inconsistency in funding due to frequent government policy changes. For example, in 2016, following the Wilson Review into Education in the NT, funding for remote secondary school teaching staff was cut, meaning classes that had been successfully running for secondary aged students were abruptly discontinued. This is just one example highlighting the inconsistent delivery of education in remote contexts.

It is well known that early childhood education is vital for establishing a child's pathway through formal education. Further to this, it has been shown that engagement of parents in the early childhood years facilitates greater support for children as they transition to school, as well as promoting involvement in children's ongoing education.³³ If this support is not there for a child, it makes it much more difficult to achieve educational outcomes. Yet delivery of these services in remote communities remain very limited and erratic.

³¹ Santamouris et al., 2007

³² Rob Picton, Advisor to the NT Minister for Education, Selena Uibo, pers. comm. (5 January 2020)

³³ Hirst, et al., 2011

At the other end of the education journey, access to secondary and tertiary education services are also very limited in the remote context. Under the current Northern Territory Education Strategy, the current options for remote students in the secondary years are limited to:³⁴

- 1) stay in their community and continue their schooling - focus on post-primary literacy and numeracy; employment pathways program may be offered
- 2) move to a regional high school with access to regional residential facilities
- 3) move to a boarding facility in Darwin or Alice Springs
- 4) move to an interstate boarding school

As previously stated in the 2015 submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, CLC strongly rejects removal of secondary schooling options from very remote communities. A lack of meaningful education alternatives in very remote communities for children aged over the age of 11 is likely to contribute to the entrenchment of intergenerational disadvantage. Assuming an Aboriginal child from a remote context of this age would thrive at a boarding school is an unrealistic expectation and has the potential to be damaging for a large cohort of children. Boarding school is discussed further in section 8 of this submission.

English as an additional language

“In the context of societies with dominant and minority cultures, such as Australia, the widespread and persistent suppression of minority cultural practices causes severe disruption, making our communities susceptible to trauma, collective helplessness and endemic maladaptive coping practices.”³⁵

- David Cooper

In the remote NT context, a minority of students speak English as a first language. It is more commonly the second, third or fourth language spoken for children. However, there is inadequate support for teaching English as a Second Language or adapting bilingual teaching to suit the context, which contributes to schools becoming inaccessible places for Aboriginal students and Aboriginal teachers alike. Given the high number of students who speak another language than English at home in remote schools, there is an insufficient number of TESOL specialists and first-language speakers working and collaborating effectively in the NT schools.³⁶

3. The role of culture and country in a child’s learning

Aboriginal people in Central Australia have long viewed educational success in terms of students that are confident in, for example, their Arrernte, Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara language and cultural identities and the incorporation of local language and knowledge frameworks, alongside strong mainstream education outcomes. Overwhelmingly, there is a strong desire for education to accord equal value and status to Aboriginal knowledge alongside Western knowledge and

³⁴ NTG, 2019

³⁵ Cooper, 2011

³⁶ ibid

include home language in schools. Aboriginal people view education as more than just 'schooling.' Aboriginal educators and community members are calling for a model of education that encompasses Aboriginal cultural frameworks and language. This is backed by evidence which shows that the conditions necessary for student success in remote education include a strong personal identity, strong family connections and then respect for local language and knowledge and the incorporation of these into the school curricula.³⁷ Where language, culture and country visits are incorporated into school programs and supported by employment of local community members working in the school, community engagement with the school increases.

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

Family and community involvement in education is central to success for Aboriginal students in the remote context. Indeed, community involvement in schools is one of the key factors that is shown to ensure Aboriginal communities value the role of schools in their community.³⁸ There are many strategies that can be employed to ensure communities and families play a central role in education, including through integrating Aboriginal language and culture in the school curriculum, employing local Aboriginal staff, engaging families in their children's education and in school governance. We will now look at successful examples of each of these approaches in the NT context.

Engaging families in education

Family support of schooling is critical to the ongoing engagement of young people in the education system.³⁹ It is important to put programs and structures in place that support young children even before they enter school, and to equip families with the skills needed to provide support to their children. One such program is Families as First Teachers (FaFT). This program is a supported playgroup that aims to assist families to develop the skills to undertake high-quality interactions with their children. It includes supporting families to read to and play with their children in a developmentally appropriate way.⁴⁰ Families are coached by FaFT staff and are supported to help their children develop important pre-reading behaviours. Where there is community support, there is also capacity for FaFT programs to be delivered using the families' first language and using cultural knowledge relevant to the context.⁴¹ Connected Beginnings is another early childhood approach that is being implemented in trial sites across Australia, including in the NT.⁴² Under this approach, education and health services work collaboratively to provide support to families with Aboriginal children from birth to school commencement age. The aim of the program is to improve ease of access to services and fully support families to ensure children are healthy and have the developmental support they need to be ready for

³⁷ Osborne, 2015

³⁸ Guenther & Disbray, 2015

³⁹ Guenther, 2015

⁴⁰ Mannion & Walker, 2016; Ferguson, 2018

⁴¹ Goveas & Gapany, 2017

⁴² Dept. of Education, Skills & Employment, 2020

school.⁴³ Exactly which model is followed is less important than that an integrated approach to early childhood is undertaken; one that supports families to engage in teaching their children, is culturally empowering and employs local people.

In his review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory, Bruce Wilson found that the positive family engagement fostered by early learning programs such as FaFT is often not sustained as children move into the pre-school system.⁴⁴ It is a recommendation of his report that transition programs are established between early learning and preschool, and from preschool into school, that continues to support families to understand the development of their children and connects families with schools.⁴⁵

Others agree that family and community engagement in schooling is highly valued.⁴⁶ Indicators to measure success in family and school engagement are suggested, including:

- A strong school council with community representation and a significant role in governance and decision-making for the school
- Events and opportunities for families to meet with school staff and be involved in school
- An active commitment to employing local staff as teachers and support staff

Aboriginal employment in schools

Employing non-teaching local staff in remote communities has been found correlate with higher school attendance and even improved NAPLAN data.⁴⁷ The presence of local staff and family support in schools can provide powerful role-modelling to students.

“For schooling to be successful it needs adults of all generations to be participating in the school, in strong roles that provide intergenerational modelling for those young children. If those young children aren’t seeing their elders, their grandparents, mothers, fathers in strong leadership roles in that environment, all they’re seeing is white fellas in those roles.”⁴⁸

A cooperative approach between the education system and the local community is paramount to the success of education in remote communities. This is further discussed in section six.

Learning on country

Just as important as community and family involvement in schools is the need to extend the classroom beyond its four walls and into the bush. Country visits and bush camps enable students, elders, family members and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers to apply learning in a physical space and in a way that supports the easy transmission of language and culture. For example, the WETT Country Visit and Elder Program provides funding to Warlpiri schools to undertake a week-long country visit and regular bush trips throughout the year as well as regular payments for elders to teach in the classroom. This program creates an abundance of opportunities for community members of all ages to participate in school run activities, and is

⁴³ Dept. of Education, Skills & Employment, 2016

⁴⁴ Wilson, 2014, p. 100

⁴⁵ Wilson, 2014, p. 104

⁴⁶ Guenther & Disbray, 2015

⁴⁷ Guenther & Disbray, 2015

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 10

highly valued by community members. Research commissioned by WETT in the four Warlpiri communities, Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Nyirripi and Willowra identified that learning about Warlpiri culture was the most common theme raised by survey respondents when asked about education programs in their communities, cutting across several program areas including early childhood, school and youth program.⁴⁹ The research demonstrated how Warlpiri culture and family are core mediators and drivers of learning, training, employment and life pathways for Warlpiri people, which is further demonstrated by the following survey responses:

“When we take kids out bush they are learning as soon as we get there. They all find something and we teachers have to explain it to them: when, where, what. But we learn a lot from kids too when we are out; they teach us and [we] understand them. But we need to make sure we go with old people, learn a lot more from them, deeper.”

-Young educator from Yuendumu School

“Learning from the old people, teaching, showing children rock art, water holes, bush food all important. Dance (ceremony). So young boys pass on knowledge as they grow older into men. Dancing, little ones learn about things from elders, helps kids grow up telling stories. Children learn Jukurrpa. Children learn about grandfather’s and father’s country. To learn Jukurrpa, little boys and girls dance.”

-Survey interview responses from four Nyirripi residents).⁵⁰

Governance

A final and important role for families and communities in schools relates to active engagement in school governance. Through greater control and involvement in school governance comes a sense of ownership. International research shows that projects characterised by a high degree of Indigenous involvement and control produced significant benefits for participants.⁵¹

The right to self-determination and the rights enshrined in Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are better served by allowing Aboriginal communities to have a high level of involvement and control in the delivery of education. Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides that *“Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.”*⁵² In the same Declaration, Articles 3, 4 and 5 declare that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and the right to participate in decision making in matters that affect them, through representatives chosen by themselves.

Consistent with these rights the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples considers *“that education for our Peoples must be meaningful, empowering and culturally-sustaining. This will only occur when we are centrally involved in developing pedagogy, choosing curriculum and teaching our children.”*⁵³ To realise this, an independently owned and controlled peak body for

⁴⁹ CLC WETT Review p. 33

⁵⁰ Disbray & Guenther, 2017

⁵¹ AIHW, 2013

⁵² UN, 2007

⁵³ National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, 2013.

Aboriginal education must be established, alongside effective school councils operating at the local level. Experience of the CLC facilitating governance in remote communities points to the need to have dedicated resources to developing effective governance practices and processes which hold school leadership accountable for ensuring effective school governance is in place.

Currently, an Indigenous representative advisory body is appointed by the Minister for Education and Training to provide advice and make recommendations to the NT and Australian Government. This body is not Aboriginal owned or controlled.

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

In light of the strong desire by residents in remote Aboriginal communities to include Aboriginal knowledge and language alongside Western knowledge in the school setting,⁵⁴ and the acknowledgement of the multilingual school setting, one of the most significant government policy settings in education over recent decades has been the implementation of bilingual education and Indigenous Language and Culture curriculums.

Since the 1970s a minority of remote schools have used bilingual programs. While it is not the intention of this submission to review the evidence in relation to bilingual education, it is worth noting that international studies support the benefits of bilingual education not just in the development of literacy, but in academic achievement in other areas.⁵⁵ In the NT, the available evidence shows that bilingual programs generally attained better literacy and numeracy scores than their peers in non-bilingual schools.⁵⁶ It is significant to note here, that in the remote Indigenous context of the Northern Territory, a key aim of bilingual education programs is to improve English language outcomes, and that there is no credible evidence to support the assertion that giving attention to Indigenous languages comes at the expense of English language development.

Furthermore, where language, culture and country visits are incorporated into school programs, community engagement with the school increases. A 2015 independent evaluation of Learning on Country program provides evidence for this.⁵⁷ In 2013, Learning on Country, was rolled out across five Arnhem Land sites - Maningrida, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands (Yirrkala), Groote Island and Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island). The evaluation found that the program had improved school attendance and engagement from both students and communities.⁵⁸ Language, culture and country visits are core domains of bilingual approaches in the NT. Further effective models

⁵⁴ Guenther et al., 2017

⁵⁵ Thomas & Collier, 2002

⁵⁶ Devlin, 2017

⁵⁷ Fogarty et al., 2015

⁵⁸ Ibid

of two-way or both-ways education using multi-literacy and a culturally inclusive approach include the Yolngu Both Ways Education, the Papunya education model and the Warlpiri Theme Cycle (further elaborated below). The school in Gunbalanya should also be noted for its flexibility in meeting the needs of the community, including by changing school year dates and holiday periods to fit in with cultural obligations and events, and through its establishment of a co-principal arrangement.

Furthermore, in contemplating effective initiatives to support improved literacy outcomes in the remote Indigenous context, it is essential to acknowledge the out-of-school factors which impact literacy acquisition. Understanding reading as a cultural practice, and literacy development as a gradual process which is developed over generations in direct relation to the purpose for which the skills are being acquired, points to the need for interventions that directly acknowledge the newly-literate context of many remote Indigenous communities.⁵⁹ In light of this, resources are required to support everyday adult literacy practices, in a way that children see reading and writing as elemental to everyday life, and not just something done by non-Aboriginal teachers. Government initiatives that improve access to reading materials and other literacy or learning centres are hence very important to supporting literacy acquisition. Research suggests that very few options and resources are available in the NT to improve levels of English LLN for those adults with very low literacy.⁶⁰

In light of this gap, a program seeking to address literacy at a broader community level has been initiated by the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) with their Learning Community Centre program in the four remote communities of Willowra, Nyirrpi, Lajamanu and Nyirrpi. This community-led initiative, is a unique example of a program that targets literacy and learning across the community, with a multi-pronged focus on literacy support, formal and informal learning workshops, accredited training and support for Warlpiri language and culture learning. The centres focus on meeting local individual and community-wide adult learning aspirations, strengthening local capacity and supporting pathways to education and employment. The model has been developed around responsive and sustainable learning and training centred on the community need, and real time delivery – rather than a fly in, fly out model – although accredited training is at times purchased from external providers.⁶¹

A community survey of the program in 2016 found that the program was rated as going well in all four communities, with the highest number of residents identifying computer access and support with civic literacies as the most important aspects of the program followed by more formal learning aspirations, as demonstrated in this quote:

“People come to the learning centre for everything, licence, birth certificate e-tax. It’s our community centre. Rangers come and train. Young ones can do all or part of their education there. I graduated at the learning centre.” - Survey respondent.⁶²

⁵⁹ Kral, 2009

⁶⁰ Shalley & Stewart, 2017 p. 69

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 6

⁶² Disbray & Guenther, 2017

The success of the WETT Community Learning Centre program points to the need for broader government support of community wide literacy initiatives across the Northern Territory, to support the goals of improved literacy and numeracy outcomes across the community.

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

“I think it is really important to have Anangu teachers in our classrooms because they know the culture from the inside. Every day in their lives they see it, what happens at home and how the learning happens and the practices they see in everyday life.”⁶³

–Linda Anderson

As previously stated, the Aboriginal education workforce is vital for improving success in remote schools in the NT, and investment in employment and training of Aboriginal staff must be a cornerstone for future development of the education system. There is a wealth of research with Indigenous communities which demonstrates the positive impacts of Indigenous students being taught by members of their own community, who intrinsically understand the language, culture and learning styles of the students.⁶⁴ Kathryn Gale, a long-serving teacher in the NT observes that, *“Education policies can come and go with changing governments, but it is the commitment and resilience of the Aboriginal staff that determines the success of community education programs.”*⁶⁵ A strong Aboriginal workforce is critical to improving family engagement in the schools and ensuring that Indigenous language, country and culture can be effectively integrated into the school learning environment such that schools can benefit from the improved community engagement and student outcomes that correlate. This is supported by quantitative analysis of data from very remote schools with more than 80 per cent Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students which suggests that higher non-teacher to teacher ratios are associated with higher levels of attendance and higher NAPLAN reading and numeracy scores.⁶⁶

Teacher training

Currently, there is an ageing Aboriginal teacher and Assistant Teacher workforce within very remote schools in the NT. This is a result of the withdrawal of well-resourced teacher training programs in the 1980s and 1990s which contributed to the establishment of a highly professionalised remote Indigenous language workforce. Programs like the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program, delivered in the NT by Batchelor College, presented a successful approach to ensuring fully qualified teachers. Participants went through courses with a cohort of their peers, much of the delivery was provided in their own communities and blocks of study provided on campus reduced the amount of time students were expected to relocate.⁶⁷

⁶³ Anderson et al., 2018, p. 37

⁶⁴ Anderson et al., 2018

⁶⁵ Gales, 2017, p. 49

⁶⁶ Disbray & Guenther, 2015

⁶⁷ Anderson et al., 2018, p. 9

The small, context specific flexible delivery model established by Batchelor later gave way to a more highly regulated, nationalized and standardised teaching system, under which course completion rates amongst remote staff fell.

Recently, a program was launched in Western Australia to enable Aboriginal people already working as support staff in remote schools to undertake a Bachelor of Education through Curtin University. It is expected that these prospective teachers can have a hugely positive impact in their communities.⁶⁸ The CLC strongly advocates that programs like this or the RATE program are implemented and sustained in the Northern Territory.

Professional development

In addition to ensuring that appropriately qualified Aboriginal teachers are available to teach in remote schools, ongoing and contextually relevant professional development is a further cornerstone of effective teaching and education outcomes. One example of a locally-led professional development is found in the Warlpiri Triangle of schools which comprise Nyirripi, Willowra, Lajamanu and Yuendumu. The schools meet annually for a professional development forum for Yapa (Aboriginal) teachers with a focus on identifying how to develop and teach the Warlpiri curriculum. Community elders and other members are at times invited to participate in activities, contributing to culturally-specific learning opportunities for staff. The annual forum is accompanied by once-per-term curriculum development workshops, Jinta Jarrimi, which also ensure consistent peer-to-peer learning between teachers and assistant teachers teaching across the region.

Resourcing of teacher and assistant teacher positions

The number of Aboriginal Assistant Teachers in remote schools reflects historical allocations and current resourcing. With the change to the global funding model in the NT, we are concerned about the amount of funding provided to remote schools: has it increased or decreased? In addition to this it is unclear how global funding, whereby schools have greater control over their own budget, will impact on support staff. In remote NT schools, additional resourcing is needed to allow new teachers and positions to work alongside near-retirement and highly experienced older Aboriginal teachers. Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers per school and providing them with training and professional development, we believe, is a critical factor necessary for improving education outcomes.

The CLC calls for an expansion of Aboriginal Assistant Teacher allocations and a strategic and resourced program to address the barriers to increasing the numbers of trained Aboriginal teachers from very remote locations. While remote schools receive additional funds for staffing and support staff; it is not always clear or evident that this funding is being used for Aboriginal assistant teacher positions. School engagement can be strengthened and supported by employing more local Aboriginal assistant teachers in conjunction with investing in the professional development of the current Aboriginal workforce.

⁶⁸ Forrest, 2020

Furthermore, CLC recognises that despite the complexity of issues affecting the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff in remote schools, some of these issues could be addressed by also offering local Aboriginal staff the entitlements offered to education staff from outside the community. CLC is concerned that staff employed from outside communities are often offered generous conditions of employment, with benefits including a remote area allowance, free or heavily subsidised housing, airfare allowances, and additional annual leave. By contrast, staff engaged locally within those communities are generally offered employment on standard terms. This creates inequalities within communities, and tends to exacerbate (or at least, fails to address) the challenges many Aboriginal people face to engaging in the workforce, such as unaffordable, overcrowded or unstable housing. Accordingly, CLC strongly recommends that to enhance the engagement of local Aboriginal staff members, equal benefits should be offered to both locally- and externally-engaged staff.

Improving the cultural competence of non-Aboriginal education staff

The CLC believes that there should be training in cross-cultural communication and engagement skills, cultural competency and Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories for non-Aboriginal teachers. CLC has significant concerns about the quality of initial cultural training provided to remote service teachers by the Department, and supports the recommendation that local communities should be involved in the development and delivery of inductions for staff, and that cross cultural training should be provided to staff by local community members. Outstanding examples of cross-cultural induction can be witnessed at Yirrkala School where resources have been invested in developing a series of online learning modules with videos from senior community members, to be delivered alongside a series of face to face workshops.

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

In light of the centrality of culture, country and identity to Indigenous identity and perceptions of successful learning, flexibility is required in remote schools to adapt and deliver the curriculum in ways that maintain relevance to the local context.

One example of where this has been achieved is in the Warlpiri schools in the Tanami desert where a structured curriculum, named the Warlpiri Theme Cycle (WTC), is delivered alongside the Australian curriculum in a bilingual education model. The WTC is the culmination of over four decades of work by educators, elders and community members in the four Warlpiri communities of Willowra, Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Nyirrpi. The WTC encompasses twelve knowledge domains central to Warlpiri people and their land, language, law and culture which are structured in a three year cycle, where one theme is taught across all school grades in each term. The curriculum has been continuously developed over time, which has included mapping the curriculum to English as an additional language, science, SOSE and maths curriculums and

including scaffolding for staged and deeper learning over a student's life⁶⁹. This structured and planned teaching program has demonstrated several benefits, including providing a clear direction for teachers, Warlpiri and non-Warlpiri alike, to deliver an ILC curriculum, a foundation for teachers to plan and learn together, a role for community elders in the school and creation of opportunities for peer learning as students from across the school study the same themes at the same time.⁷⁰

In 2018, an initiative was launched and funded by the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) working in partnership with the Bilingual Resource Development Unit (BRDU) at Yuendumu School, to map the WTC to the achievement standards of the Northern Territory Indigenous Language and Culture framework. The mapping project is aimed to further support teaching teams in the schools to develop integrated, thematic termly programs that cover a variety of curriculum areas based on themes from the WTC. As part of this project, linguists, elders and Warlpiri teachers will produce a series of resources to facilitate planning, teaching and assessing within the framework of the WTC. This represents a further step in enriching the curriculum, strengthening relationships between Warlpiri schools and communities and supporting teacher development through tools that strengthen teacher planning and assessment, which will ultimately drive improvement in student outcomes. This also represents a significant step forward in the implementation of the national Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages. The CLC recommends that programs such as this are expanded and must be funded in such a way that they are protected from the fluctuations inherent in the global funding system.

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

In the remote setting there is a small minority of students who move seamlessly from secondary to tertiary education and on to employment.⁷¹ In a context of limited economic opportunities, Indigenous communities see education as being strongly linked to maintaining connection to language, land, culture and identity, rather than just as acting as a stepping stone to further training or employment. Given this, higher rates of participation and success are far more likely in courses and employment opportunities that capitalise on local, linguistic, cultural and natural resource management.⁷²

Some examples of such an adaptive approach towards education to employment pathways have been seen in the CLC Ranger program and the Ntaria Design project, which have created desirable learning and work opportunities for young people. We explore why these have been so successful in the following case studies, before addressing the role of boarding schools in supporting education pathways.

⁶⁹ Disbray & Martin, 2017

⁷⁰ Disbray & Martin, 2017

⁷¹ Guenther et al., 2017, p. 262

⁷² Guenther et al., 2017

Case Study 1: Ranger program

“So the kids can know whose country is this, how they got to look after it and how they have to run it. Kids want to learn about Rangers, but some like going out on Ranger trips.”⁷³
–North Tanami Ranger

Introduction

The CLC's community ranger program is one of Central Australia's most popular and successful initiatives in Aboriginal employment with more than 80 Aboriginal people employed as rangers on their country across eleven different programs.

Rangers in the school

CLCs ranger groups have played an active role engaging with students in the school context undertaking diverse activities that aim to transfer Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) to students, support learning on country and teach young people about ranger work. In an evaluation undertaken on the Ranger program, Rangers consistently reflected on the importance of teaching students within their roles, and identified the next generation as the primary beneficiaries of Ranger work.⁷⁴ Further observations made in the evaluation included that children were remarkably more confident as a result of the Ranger tours⁷⁵ and that Young Ranger programs are more likely to be influential on behaviour than other targeted youth employment pathways.⁷⁶

Benefits of the program

“Out of all this the most important is to take kids out bush. To learn culture ways. To learn new ways. To help kids feel good about themselves.”⁷⁷
–Barbara Petrick

This pathway for education is considered desirable for young students, as well as by leaders and educators. It creates a high level of autonomy and amplifies connection to culture, community and country. It is also considered an important variation from alternative pathways of “shame” (asking for money when without income), being “bored”, or being ‘in trouble’ (meaning jail or conflict with authorities).⁷⁸ The researchers highlight the feelings of strong mental and physical health in connection to the role, such as ‘pride’, ‘self-respect’, ‘identity/belonging’ and ‘happiness’. Anecdotally, physical health as well as mental health improves as a result of these connections and emotions.

Conclusion

Rangers are important role models for children, connecting them through culture, language and country. Their work in schools creates a strong foundation for leadership and intergenerational connection, and demonstrates further how having strong and varied Indigenous employment in the schools supports improved outcomes.

⁷³ Miles & Walsh, 2018, p. 51

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 80

⁷⁵ Ibid, 2018, p. 83

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 79

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 8

Case Study 2: ‘Ntaria Design’

“We are learning. Getting new skills. We are designing and making our own things. It’s important for people to know our culture. To respect our culture. To respect us.”⁷⁹

Background

The Ntaria Design project was instigated by PhD candidate Nicola St John in 2017 and was continued in 2018 with funding support from community leaders under the Stronger Communities for Children project. This program aimed to teach digital design skills to secondary students attending school in the remote community of Ntaria (Hermannsburg). Working with digital design tools to create physical outcomes such as printed cards and t-shirts enabled the Ntaria young adults to connect with and express their Western Arrernte culture through design and create an enterprise model to sell their products.⁸⁰

The Ntaria community has a rich history of creative expression, including the uptake of introduced art tools, techniques and styles. This includes the Hermannsburg Watercolour movement, typically associated with Albert Namatjira, and the highly successful Hermannsburg Potters, established in the 1990s.⁸¹ The Ntaria Design project sought to introduce a new generation of young people to contemporary creative practices as a way to tell stories.

About the project

Students were taught new techniques as a way to produce digital drawings. Laptops and iPads were both used, however most students preferred the ease of mobility and portability that the iPads afforded them. Students primarily used traditional Aboriginal symbols and Western Arrernte stories in their artworks, but designed and presented them using 21st Century tools. Students produced t-shirt designs which they then sold, first to school staff and then to the wider community through enterprise support from the Hermannsburg Potters, at events such as the Darwin Art Fair and Desert Mob art festival in Alice Springs.

Positive outcomes – student perspectives

An interesting outcome was the freedom the students perceived as a result of using new media to produce art. Freed from the constraints of traditional art-making, students were able to express themselves in new ways, and moved towards thinking like designers. Many positive affirmations were captured from participants in this project.

- *“With design, I can make anything. I can tell stories, like sitting around the fire.”*⁸²
- *“I like to do designs on the iPad. I like to make shirts or anything. It makes me feel proud. I can put my culture on my t-shirt.”*⁸³

It is clear from these testimonies how proud the young participants were to learn new ways to tell stories of their country, and to develop design-based and marketable skills. Furthermore, the involvement of the Hermannsburg Potters in the second year of the program enabled young people to be mentored by older artists and build strong connections, and to assist in enterprise and business support through the structure of the art centre.

Future opportunities – formal recognition

There exist clear opportunities to provide a certification for skills developed through a program such as the Ntaria Design project. In 2018, the project aimed to support students to attain nationally recognised VET certifications in enterprise and community studies. However due to various challenges such as staff turnover, this was not achieved. Should projects like this be provided with consistent and ongoing funding, it would enable staffing to become more secure. In turn, this would result in school-based staff becoming better-equipped to integrate the learning requirements of a formal certification into the project. As a result, more students would be able to attain certifications that are formally recognised in the Western education system.

The role of boarding schools in supporting successful education to employment pathways

As identified at the beginning of this submission, there is limited provision of secondary schooling in the remote NT, which significantly impacts student's education pathways. This has resulted in part due to an increasing government policy focus on boarding schools as the vehicle for middle and senior years schooling. This was articulated in the Wilson review as a pragmatic decision and "the only way to meet the needs of a small and thinly distributed student population for a substantial secondary education including a breadth of options in the senior years is to aggregate students into larger groups."⁸⁴

Despite this governmental push, there has been little research undertaken into how effective this approach is, and many studies identify that sending remote indigenous students to boarding can have negative consequences with many students facing the challenges of homesickness, racism, culture shock and issues with academic adjustment.⁸⁵ The educational outcomes of these initiatives are also very unclear.

Emerging evidence from the field is starting to identify what type of boarding support is required to ensure effective education and pathways can be supported through a boarding pathway.⁸⁶ Some of the keys to success identified in the research include;

- Good communication founded on mutual trust and respect and including multiple practices including whole of community meetings and ensuring a single phone number for the community to contact the school
- A focus on cultural safety including having elders on call to support students as needed

⁷⁹ St John, 2018 p. 155

⁸⁰ St. John, 2018

⁸¹ Hermannsburg Potters, 2020

⁸² St John, 2018, p. 154

⁸³ Ibid, p. 150

⁸⁴ Wilson, 2014, p. 143

⁸⁵ Mander, 2012; Bobongie, 2017

⁸⁶ Guenther et al., 2015; Lloyd, 2019

- Reciprocal learning where students from both sites learnt in both communities and elders worked with college staff to co-design curriculum on their country.

A case study undertaken between a remote community that developed a strong reciprocal partnership with an urban boarding school identified the above factors helped contribute to its Indigenous students completing Year 12, achieving positive educational outcomes and entering into employment in their local community on return⁸⁷. Such factors for success are as important for governments to factor in to any program where boarding is a focus of improved education for remote students.

⁸⁷ Lloyd, 2019

Appendix A: Warlpiri Education and Training Trust

The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) was established in 2004 by Traditional Owners for the Granites Gold mine site to invest royalties to support education and training initiatives across the four remote communities of Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirrpri. The WETT supports partnerships for training and education so all Warlpiri people will have better knowledge through Warlpiri culture and two-way learning. The WETT is a Warlpiri-run initiative, with two Warlpiri governance structures; the WETT Advisory Committee (made up of 16 community educators) who advise on program design and problem solving, and the Kurra WETT committee (made up of traditional owners for the mine site) who finalise funding allocations to partners to deliver the programs. As WETT was being established, the four communities were interviewed about program ideas to meet Yapa aspirations for education and training. This has led to the five programs the WETT funds today.

WETT has invested over \$30 million across the five programs since its inception in 2005, demonstrating a long-term commitment to supporting learning for life, work and wellbeing. The programs WETT has invested in also underpin a commitment to life-long learning with a suite of services ensuring all community members have access to education services from birth, through early childhood, school age and adult learning. The flagship learning centre model plays a central role in this vision, facilitating pathways for young people between school and further learning opportunities such as through workshops, accredited training, employment and boarding school, to name a few.

WETT has also invested in extensive community research to identify community aspirations for education and ensure that their programs are well targeted to address these areas. Community surveys undertaken in 2016 identified the following local priorities for education; maintaining culture and supporting learning through country, building youth leadership and development, increasing adult learning opportunities, strengthening families, creating employment pathways for Yapa and supporting intergenerational learning and involvement. WETT's programs are designed to support these aspirations, and the suite of programs has made some remarkable achievements towards these aims, including; contributing to employment for approximately 40 Warlpiri people each year, up to 23 children and their parents accessing playgroup facilities in Willowra, up to 37 people actively engaged in governance of education services, more than 200 individuals accessing certificate training courses, over 60 students attending interstate excursions and additional support for boarding for over 55 Warlpiri students.⁸⁸ Central to WETT's success is the foundation of Warlpiri language, land and culture and self-determination over Warlpiri education across its programs, which ensure it is culturally appropriate and locally-relevant, maximising positive outcomes from its investments.

⁸⁸ Disbray & Guenther, 2017, p. 6

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