



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Indigenous Affairs reports:

First steps for improving educational opportunities for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
and

The power of education: From surviving to thriving
Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students

August 2020

Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Interim Report *First steps for improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (Interim Report) and the Final Report *The power of education: From surviving to thriving Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (Final Report), and thanks all who contributed to the Inquiry.

The Australian Government is committed to taking all possible steps to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can embrace the opportunities provided by our Nation's first class education system. There is no doubt that a good education is the key to longer-term prosperity and wellbeing.

The Australian Government is working with the states and territories to ensure schools funding contributes to improvements in educational outcomes for all students.

Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools is calculated with reference to a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). The SRS is made up of a base amount for every primary and secondary student, along with six loadings to provide extra funding for priority equity cohorts and some schools. These loadings focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, students with low English language proficiency, students with socio-educational disadvantage, school size and school location.

The Australian Government is providing an estimated \$314.2 billion in recurrent funding to all schools from 2018 to 2029. This includes an estimated \$5.4 billion through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student loading. Schools and education authorities have the flexibility to direct this funding to support those who need it most. While a portion of Australian Government funding is attributable to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student loading, this is not the only funding available for that particular group of students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attract funding through base funding and may also attract funding from other loadings.

From 2018, the Australian Government's growing investment in schools has been distributed according to need and tied to the implementation of evidence-based quality reforms proven to lift student achievement.

The Australian Government commissioned Mr David Gonski AC to undertake the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*. The Review Panel provided advice on how the Commonwealth's investment in school education from 2018 could best improve Australian schools' performance and grow student achievement. The Review Panel's final report, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, was delivered to the Government on 28 March 2018. The Government subsequently accepted the report in principle and referred it to the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Education Council for consideration.

The findings of the Review informed a National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) between the Commonwealth and states and territories to lift student outcomes across Australian schools. The agreement includes a focus on evidence based reforms to improve access and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The agreement also requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are consulted on reforms that will significantly impact them.

Under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* (the Strategy), the Government has been working with states and territories to accelerate improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes in a number of priority areas. These include school attendance, education, workforce development and transitions from school. The Strategy has recently been evaluated and the report will be considered by the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee.

These reforms build on the COAG commitment that improving the lives of Indigenous Australians is a strategic priority for the Nation. The 2020 *Closing the Gap Report* revealed improvements in the target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020, with the target on track. The proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year-olds who had achieved Year 12 attainment or equivalent has increased significantly from around 45 per cent in 2008 to 66 per cent in 2018–19. The gap in Year 12 attainment has narrowed by 15 percentage points, from around 40 percentage points in 2008 to 25 percentage points in 2018–19. Young Indigenous Australians living in major cities experienced the largest increase in Year 12 attainment, with rates rising from 63 per cent in 2012 to 85 per cent in 2018–19. Indigenous students living in remote areas also experienced an increase in Year 12 attainment, with rates rising from around 40 per cent in 2014–15 to around 50 per cent in 2018–19.

COAG recognised that in order to effect real change, governments must work collaboratively and in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda. In March 2019, this was formalised for the next decade through a Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks).

On 27 July 2020 the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap came into effect upon signature by all First Ministers, the Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The National Agreement has 16 targets across the following outcome areas: education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and languages. The National Agreement requires all parties to work in partnership with Indigenous Australians in all aspects of policy development, and program and service delivery.

The Commonwealth will continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, including the Coalition of Peaks, states and territories and ALGA to achieve the outcomes of the National Agreement.

In addition to the Australian Government's record recurrent schools funding, Indigenous specific supplementary funding is provided through the Australian Government's \$5 billion Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), which is designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the delivery of a range of broad based programs. As part of the IAS, the Children and Schooling Program includes a focus on increasing school attendance and improving educational outcomes that lead to sustainable employment. This includes activities that nurture and educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and adults to improve pathways to prosperity and wellbeing. Activities are also aimed at improving family and parenting support, early childhood development, care and education, school education, youth engagement and transitions and higher education.

Interim Report – Recommendations

Recommendation 1

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

Response: Noted

There have been a number of recent reviews that have considered the ABSTUDY scheme, in addition to the Interim Report and the Final Report.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) conducted an audit in 2017 that assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Social Services' and Services Australia's policy and administration of the ABSTUDY scheme (ANAO Report No.51 2016–17: *Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY*). The audit's findings were tabled in Parliament on 22 May 2017.

In addition, the *Study Away Review: Review of Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Students Studying Away From Home* examined the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students who study away from home, including in relation to ABSTUDY. The review was published in December 2017.

Informed by the findings of these recent reviews, in the 2018–19 and 2019–20 Budgets, the Australian Government committed an additional investment of \$74.5 million in new ABSTUDY measures to assist Indigenous secondary boarding students to stay engaged in school.

Further detail on the recent changes to ABSTUDY is provided in response to Recommendation 18 of the Final Report.

The Department of Social Services has policy responsibility for the ABSTUDY scheme and Services Australia is responsible for delivering payments. The Department of Social Services, in consultation with Services Australia, regularly reviews the efficiency of the ABSTUDY scheme as part of the ongoing program management. Should any further independent review be required in future, this would be led by the Department of Social Services as policy owners of the ABSTUDY scheme.

Recommendation 2

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

Response: **Noted**

The Australian Government recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls experience multiple and complex layers of disadvantage that adversely affect their ability to effectively engage with and participate in education, training and employment opportunities. The Australian Government is committed to gender equality and to advancing the interests of women and girls so they are able to achieve equality in all areas of their lives.

Under the Children and Schooling Program of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), the Australian Government is providing extra assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – girls and boys – to participate in early learning, to improve school attendance, engage with school and to go on to university. Generally, the funding available under the Children and Schooling Program is for activities which are designed to benefit students of any gender.

Since the start of the IAS in July 2014, the Australian Government has provided over \$1.3 billion to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's attendance and engagement in education from early childhood to higher education.

The Australian Government has made significant gains towards achieving gender parity in specific girls and boys program funding. For example, the \$200 million Indigenous Youth Education Package announced in February 2019, will provide scholarships, boarding and residential, academic and mentoring support to both girls and boys. The Package will assist students to access a range of high school pathways and receive the additional dedicated support they need to stay engaged in school. As part of the Package, over \$57 million will be provided for targeted girls' activities and over \$54 million will be provided for targeted boys' activities.

The Australian Government will continue to support the development and success of programs that provide vital services to as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as possible, recognising that future funding decisions will be made with the aim of ensuring equality of outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Recommendation 3

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

Response: **Noted**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women play pivotal leadership roles in their families, through their communities, and as contributors to the Australian economy. Like many other countries, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls often have different life pathways to those followed by many non-Indigenous women, prioritising caring responsibilities at a younger age, which often delays their education and impacts on participation in employment throughout their lives. A good education and financial security can provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with greater agency and support positive outcomes for their families and communities.

The Australian Government is exploring holistic and practical ways to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and an empowerment and strengths-based approach will complement its work to reduce family and domestic violence, improve outcomes for men and communities, and contribute to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. To this end, funding provided under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) programs will help to deliver equality of outcomes and opportunities for many individuals and communities.

The Australian Government is funding the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to undertake a joint project with Ms June Oscar AO, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, to improve the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls through a strengths-based approach.

The information and evidence gathered from activities such as the AHRC project, will help to shape key Australian Government policies and programs around future investment under the IAS, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Fourth Action Plan under the National Plan for Reducing Violence against Women and their Children. It will also ensure all Government action to support Australian women reflects the specific interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Insights from these activities will help to inform discussions with state and territory governments on ways in which they can better use their policies, programs and other levers to support gender equity and the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Recommendation 4

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

Response: **Agreed**

On 19 October 2016, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs asked the Committee to inquire into and report on educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Final Report - Recommendations

Lack of Data

Recommendation 1

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

*Response: **Agree***

There is significant work underway to improve the collection and analysis of student achievement data and to build a connected evidence base and understanding of how to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance and achievement.

As part of the Australian Government's Data Integration Partnership for Australia (DIPA) announced in the 2017–18 Budget, over three years the Department of Education, Skills and Employment will link and integrate data across all phases of education: early childhood education and care, schools, vocational education and training and higher education to deliver a stronger evidence base, including for Indigenous policy and research.

By bringing together information from different sources analysts will be able to:

- collate key information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, and their outcomes in early childhood, schooling, tertiary education and employment
- potentially pinpoint the earliest signs that a student may be heading towards poor life outcomes (for example criminal activity, social disengagement, unemployment)
- identify points where students are at greatest risk of disengaging from learning
- know where and how best to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with early childhood, schooling, tertiary education and employment
- best target any additional investment in early childhood, schooling, tertiary education and employment.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has established a dedicated Strategic Policy and Data Group to lead this work and enhance its policy and analytical capability.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is also working with other agencies to manage the integration of sensitive information, for example Indigenous status, in keeping with its *Privacy Act 1988* obligations and ensuring data is maintained securely.

The Commonwealth will also be undertaking work under the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) to enhance the national evidence base by 2023. This is one of three reform directions established under the NSRA and includes National Policy Initiatives such as:

- the establishment of a national evidence institute
- the improvement of national data quality, consistency and collection.

While this work is not specifically focused on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education outcomes, it will include the collection and analysis of data regarding student achievement more broadly.

Barriers to Achievement

Recommendation 2

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

Response: **Noted**

State and territory governments have primary responsibility for delivering school education, including providing specialist services to support pregnant students and school-age mothers. The Australian Government works closely with education authorities and providers to support and supplement the delivery of high quality and supportive learning environments to these young students.

Ensuring young mothers have a continued connection to learning can effectively minimise the risk of negative health and welfare outcomes for them and their children.

Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), the Australian Government is providing a total of \$2 million to the Cape York Girl Academy, – Australia’s first boarding school designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young mothers and their babies – to complete Year 12. The Academy provides individualised learning programs for mothers to support their education, while at the same time providing a dedicated early learning centre for their children.

Additionally, the Australian Government provided over \$402,000 from 2015 to 2018 towards the delivery of the Hope for Life teenage pregnancy support project to assist young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are pregnant in Moree, Narrabri, Wee Waa, Inverell, Boggabilla and Mungindi to develop a healthy family environment through education.

Recommendation 3

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

Response: **Not Agree**

Investment in schools is distributed according to need, with a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) measuring the relative need of each school. The SRS provides a base amount per student plus loadings for disadvantage, including \$29.6 billion for students with disability and \$5.4 billion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 2018 to 2029. Under the *Australian Education Act 2013*, Commonwealth recurrent funding can be used for the purchase of capital equipment by all schools. Recurrent funding can also be used by government schools and non-government special schools, non-government special assistance schools, non-government majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools and non-government sole provider schools for construction or capital improvements to a school.

Under the *Australian Education Act 2013*, the Australian Government also provides capital grant funding to non-government schools through the Capital Grants Program (CGP).

The CGP provides funding for non-government school communities to assist primary and secondary schools to improve capital infrastructure where they otherwise may not have access to sufficient capital resources. CGP funding can be used for a wide range of infrastructure projects, from new construction to minor refurbishments and associated equipment. The CGP grants are supplementary to funds provided by non-government school authorities.

Recommendation 4

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

Response: **Noted**

The Australian Government has been working with government and non-government education authorities across all states and territories on the design of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). National data is now collected annually on the number of school students with disability receiving adjustments to access education on the same basis as other students, as well as the broad category of disability under which each student best fits. The intent is to continue to work with the states and territories to use the NCCD as a mechanism to better target support for students with disability across Australian schools.

The NCCD model for federal funding for students with disability does not require a diagnosis of a specific disability. Rather, it is based on the level of adjustment provided to students with disability to enable them to access education on the same basis as other students. Under the NCCD model, teachers use their professional judgement based on evidence to determine the level of adjustment that is provided to each student with disability.

Under the *Quality Schools* package, the Australian Government is investing an estimated \$28.8 billion for students with disability over 2018 to 2029. On average, funding for students with disability will grow by 5.1 per cent each year over this period.

Recommendation 5

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

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

Response: Noted

The *National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Strategic Action Plan (2018–2028)*, developed by the Department of Health, builds upon a range of FASD activities undertaken through the 2016–17 Budget Measure *Taking More Action on FASD* and the *FASD Action Plan (2014)*. The *National FASD Strategic Action Plan (Strategic Action Plan)* focuses action on the following priority areas:

- prevention
- screening and diagnosis
- support and management
- priority groups (including Indigenous Australians).

The Australian Government committed an additional \$7.3 million for activities that align with the priority areas of the Strategic Action Plan. This funding includes \$1.2 million for priority group activities targeting Indigenous Australians as well as those living in regional and remote areas and areas where there are high levels of alcohol consumption. Education authorities and schools can decide how funding provided by the Australian Government can be used to support school-based programs and teacher professional development that best suit their local needs. The Australian Government does not have a direct role in these matters.

Under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) model, teachers use their professional judgement, based on evidence, to determine the level of adjustment that is provided to each student with disability.

FASD students identified in the NCCD as requiring a supplementary, substantial or extensive level of educational adjustment will attract a loading appropriate to the relative costs of providing that adjustment.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is one of a number of Australian Government departments involved in discussions on the development of the national FASD Strategy 2018–2028. These discussions involved peak bodies and other stakeholders.

Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government funds around \$70 million per year for about 80 Indigenous alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services in Australia. Some of this funding in the case of particular AOD services may be used to raise awareness of FASD.

Recommendation 6

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

Response: **Agree**

The Connected Beginnings Program, jointly delivered by the Australian Government Department of Health and Department of Education, Skills and Employment, integrates early childhood care and education with child and family health and support services. This assists 0–5 year old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to achieve the learning and developmental outcomes necessary for a positive transition to school.

The Australian Government is providing around \$12 million per year under the Department of Education, Skills and Employments’ Community Child Care Fund to support an organisation in each site (usually a school, child and family centre or non-government organisation) to co-design a locally relevant model for service integration through a collective impact approach to coordinate efforts across participating health providers, childcare services, schools and other relevant stakeholders.

The Australian Government has allocated \$23.5 million over six years (from July 2016) under the Department of Health's Indigenous Australians' Health Program (IAHP) to support the provision of culturally safe child health services in an outreach capacity on school grounds, where suitable infrastructure exists, usually through an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.

The program is being progressively implemented in new sites and is currently being delivered in 15 communities across Australia, of which seven are classified as remote or very remote – Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Galiwin'ku and Angurugu (NT), Derby (WA), Doomadgee (Qld) and Ceduna (SA).

Future funding for certain projects delivered under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Children and Schooling Program may include a requirement that organisations work with local Aboriginal Medical Services and other relevant health service providers to make sure participants receive regular health checks and screening.

Recommendation 7

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

Response: **Agree**

National collaboration will be achieved through existing Council of Australian Government processes. This recommendation will be considered by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council and Education Council.

Cultural Safety and Community Engagement

Recommendation 8 (Priority)

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

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

*Response: **Noted***

The Australian Government recognises the need for teachers to have access to high-quality professional learning focused on improving student outcomes that is aligned to the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. Effective teachers maintain and renew their knowledge and skills to meet the changing and expanding demands of the profession.

Research shows that engaging teachers in high-quality professional learning is the most successful way to improve teacher practice, including building cultural awareness and ESL/D capability for culturally safe classrooms. Undertaking professional learning is a requirement for teacher registration in all states and territories across Australia.

The content of initial teacher education programs is set by higher education providers. The inclusion of ESL/D training in initial teacher education programs is a matter for the provider to determine based on local needs and priorities, undertaken in consultation with relevant employers and regulatory authorities in each jurisdiction.

Engagement programs

Recommendation 9

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

Response: Noted

Since the commencement of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), the Australian Government has provided more than \$1.3 billion to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's attendance and engagement in education — from early childhood through to higher education. While some providers offer targeted programs for boys or girls, the vast majority of projects support all students.

The Australian Government has made significant gains towards achieving gender parity in specific girls and boys program funding. For example, the \$200 million Indigenous Youth Education Package announced in February 2019 will provide scholarships, boarding and residential, academic and mentoring support. The package will assist students to access a range of high school pathways and receive the additional dedicated support to stay engaged in school. As part of the Package, over \$57 million will be provided for targeted girls' activities and over \$54 million will be provided for targeted boys' activities.

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) project is specifically looking at supporting the needs and aspirations of women and girls. The project is being delivered in partnership with Ms June Oscar AO, the first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Findings from the project will inform future Australian Government investment in activities that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Recommendation 10

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

Response: Noted

The Australian Government acknowledges that, while sports-related activities may encourage school engagement for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, they may not be suited to all students. The flexible design of the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) ensures it is tailored to respond to the individual needs of communities. The IAS encourages proposals from communities and organisations for both sport-based and non-sport based school programs that engage and mentor students.

The IAS Children and Schooling Program funds a number of organisations to deliver projects to improve student attendance and education engagement. For example, the IAS provides funding for mentoring projects such as the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) that includes leadership and other activities such as healing circles, health and wellbeing, cultural programs, music programs, advocacy and parent and family events.

The IAS Children and Schooling Program also funds a number of sports-related organisations to deliver attendance and engagement projects. These projects use role models and sport as a vehicle to increase engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schooling, aiming to increase Year 12 attainment and improve post-school pathways. For example, high profile NRL and AFL players may visit schools, provide leadership programs focused on developing self-esteem and mentoring support for the young people they work with. The IAS funds these types of sports-related projects for both boys and girls.

Expenditure for the IAS Children and Schooling Program is around \$220 million annually. Since the commencement of the IAS, the Australian Government has invested more than \$490 million in secondary school activities designed to help over 40,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students stay engaged, complete their secondary school education and make successful post-school transitions.

These activities include:

- youth engagement and mentoring activities designed to enhance students' educational opportunities
- full-time intensive school-based academies
- boarding and residential facilities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students to attend secondary school away from home
- scholarship programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from regional and remote communities to access education and training opportunities only available in larger centres.

In addition, the Indigenous Youth Education Package announced in February 2019 will provide an extra \$200 million in scholarships, boarding and residential, academic and mentoring support. These activities will also be funded under the IAS Children and Schooling Program.

Teaching and Pedagogies

Recommendation 11

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

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

Response: **Noted**

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards) require that all teachers demonstrate knowledge of effective strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as well as understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Teacher Standards 1.4 and 2.4).

To achieve accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia, higher education providers must demonstrate their programs produce students that meet the Teacher Standards 1.4 and 2.4.

The Australian Government supports the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories in initial teacher education programs. However, the content of these programs is set by higher education providers and varies by institution.

Additionally, the Australian Government recognises that developing teachers' knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories is critical, and must be supported through high quality professional learning, aligned to the Teacher Standards.

Under the National School Reform Agreement, all governments are working together to strengthen the initial teacher education accreditation system, in recognition of the need for ongoing effort to ensure quality, consistency and transparency. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership is leading national reforms to ensure all graduate teachers have undertaken the highest quality training and are 'classroom ready'.

The *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (the Principal Standard) sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to achieve excellence in their work as well as the common capabilities they must possess to be effective. The Principal Standard includes specific reference to principals' understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and the expectation that principals take account of the social, political and local circumstances within which they work.

The Australian Government, through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, is currently looking at the cultural knowledge of the existing teaching workforce, identifying what measures or supports are in place to support teachers and school leaders in developing their cultural knowledge.

Findings from the research will be used to develop resources and tools to support the teaching profession. Consultation with the teaching profession, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching workforce and stakeholders will form an important component of this work.

Furthermore, *Leading for impact: Australian guidelines for school leadership development* (the Guidelines) were developed to support effective professional learning for principals. These Guidelines will contribute to the national dialogue on what constitutes excellence in school leadership development and principal preparation. They will also enable practices and learning to be shared nationally, and set out best practice in identifying, recruiting and developing high performing school leaders.

Recommendation 12 (Priority)

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

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>the full Australian curriculum is being provided;</i>• <i>the cultural safety and responsiveness of the school is not being adversely impacted; and</i>• <i>attendance rates are not declining.</i> |
|--|

Response: Noted

The Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program, delivered by Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA) aims to increase teacher pedagogical skills in teaching literacy through the use of Direct Instruction (DI) or Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) and improve literacy results for students in participating schools.

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$1.8 million over two years from 2019–20 to extend the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program pilot into the 2020 school year. The Australian Government has invested a total of \$30.7 million over seven years (2013–14 to 2019–20). This includes \$29.8 million to GGSA to administer the program and \$600,000 to the University of Melbourne Centre for Program Evaluation (CPE) to conduct an evaluation of the program (2015 to 2018).

The Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program helps to address the disparity in literacy outcomes between children in metropolitan schools and children in remote schools, which often have high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This pilot was extended for 12 months, to December 2019, to support the participating schools to continue in the program.

The CPE has evaluated the program three times since its inception in schools in 2015. An evaluation on the pilot was published on the Department of Education , Skills and Employment’s website on 6 November 2018. This evaluation found that the program was having pockets of success in some participating schools. The final summative report reviewing the program from inception in 2015 to 2018 was received in early 2020.

Recommendation 13

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

Response: **Noted**

A review of all federally-funded pedagogies has not been planned at this stage. The Australian Government is working with states and territories through the Education Council to establish a national evidence institute to support evidence-based learning and teaching in school and early childhood settings, an initiative under the National Schools Reform Agreement. The institute will work to ensure all teachers and school leaders have free and easy access to the best available evidence and resources and are equipped to confidently incorporate it into their classroom practice.

Boarding

Recommendation 14 (Priority)

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

Response: **Noted**

Following the 2017 *Study Away Review*, the Australian Government is investigating options to better support secondary students who need to study away from home, including investigating the relative merits of different models of boarding and the suitability of these options in different regions.

The Australian Government commissioned analysis to better understand the real costs of different models of boarding for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The results of this work will be used to determine the best longer-term approach.

The Australian Government will continue to engage with relevant state and territory governments to determine the level of need for additional boarding accommodation in regional centres. Any Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding proposals to establish boarding accommodation in regional areas will be considered on the basis of need.

Funding was provided jointly by both the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government to establish boarding facilities at Nhulunbuy High School in the Northern Territory, which opened in 2017. Any available evidence from regional boarding providers, such as that at Nhulunbuy High School, on the benefits and learnings of regional models of boarding will be considered in determining long-term approaches.

As part of the Barkly Regional Deal, signed in April 2019, the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government will jointly fund a student boarding accommodation facility in Tennant Creek. A ‘housing first’ approach has been adopted for the Barkly Regional Deal which recognises that without attempting to reduce chronic housing overcrowding, other long-standing social and economic challenges impacting youth in the region are unlikely to improve.

The Commonwealth has committed \$45.4 million through the Barkly Regional Deal to support the productivity and liveability of the region by stimulating economic growth and improving social outcomes, including reducing housing overcrowding and improving child safety.

Recommendation 15

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

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

Response: Agree in Principle

The Australian Government supports an industry-led approach to the establishment of Indigenous-specific boarding standards encompassing all aspects of student wellbeing. This approach is currently being led by peak bodies in the boarding sector – the Australian Boarding Schools Association and Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia. The National Indigenous Australians Agency is involved in this work.

Recommendation 16

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

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

Response: **Noted**

The Australian Government supports an industry-led approach and voluntary provider compliance with industry standards. In parallel, it commissioned financial analysis and benchmarking of the cost of boarding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This analysis enables the Australian Government to better understand the costs of providing boarding and how these costs may vary based on school and student characteristics and the different models of boarding delivery. The Grant Thornton Australia report, *Boarding: investing in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, was published on the National Indigenous Australians Agency website on 25 September 2019.

The Australian Government has also increased its investment and support for boarding families. The 50 Years of ABSTUDY measure delivered in the 2018–19 Budget increased support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. This measure invested \$38.1 million over five years to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students who need to study away from home. This included, from 1 January 2019:

- safer, fairer and more flexible travel arrangements, including the introduction of Safe Travel Plans, to improve school attendance
- consistent ABSTUDY Living Allowance rates for students studying away from home, by combining the ABSTUDY Under-16 Boarding Supplement with Living Allowance – this means boarding facilities previously ineligible for the Under-16 Boarding Supplement and receiving a lower rate of Living Allowance for students under 16 may now see an increase in boarding payments for these students of up to \$5,370 per year (2019 value, subject to indexation)
- simplified criteria and guidelines for approval of scholarships under ABSTUDY

- the payment of ABSTUDY in instalments to boarding providers, rather than a term in advance, so students will have continuous ABSTUDY support if they change schools during the school term.

In addition, from 1 January 2017, the Australian Government increased the means-tested component of ABSTUDY Group 2 School Fees Allowance by 50 per cent, from \$1,533 to \$2,322 annually.

Further changes to ABSTUDY were announced in the 2019–20 Budget, which provides additional support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. The Government is investing \$36.4 million over five years to extend Family Tax Benefit (FTB) to families of ABSTUDY secondary students aged 16 years and over who need to live away from home to study.

From 1 January 2020, families with a child aged 16 and over who gets ABSTUDY assistance to study away from home will continue to get FTB for the child while the child is studying. This measure builds on the 2018–19 Budget Measure ‘50 Years of ABSTUDY’ and will give more assistance to these families and help students to stay longer at school.

Recommendation 17

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

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

Response: Noted

The Australian Government considers that the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and its network of Regional Offices may not be best placed to provide the full range of assistance and support recommended, particularly as certain support is already being provided by state and territory governments.

For example, in addition to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's recurrent schools funding to the Northern Territory, under the *National Partnership Agreement on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment* (NTRAI), the Australian Government through the NIAA is providing funding of \$277 million from 2015 to 2022 to support remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Northern Territory.

Of this, \$40.2 million is provided to support pathways for secondary students, including the establishment and operation of the Transition Support Unit (TSU). The TSU assists remote students and their families to either undertake secondary schooling in regional and urban schools, supported with residential arrangements or undertake a secondary education program (Employment Pathways) in their community, understanding that this program provides pathways suited to employment within their local community.

The '50 Years of ABSTUDY' measure announced in the 2018–19 Budget included ABSTUDY travel allowances for two additional return trips each year for students' family or community members to visit their school and be involved in school events and activities, from 1 January 2019. This is partially alleviating some of the issues this recommendation seeks to address.

Funding

Recommendation 18

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

Response: Noted

The Australian Government's 2017 *Study Away Review* identified a number of areas where more focused effort is needed to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In response to these findings, the Australian Government committed an additional \$38.1 million over five years in the 2018–19 Budget to strengthen ABSTUDY support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. The Australian Government also committed an additional \$36.4 million over five years in the 2019–20 Budget to extend Family Tax Benefit (FTB) to families of ABSTUDY secondary students aged 16 years and over who need to live away from home to study.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency, the Department of Social Services and Services Australia continue to work together to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are given the support necessary to complete their education. This includes ongoing internal review processes for ABSTUDY policy and administration and collaboration with boarding providers and peak bodies to ensure students' ABSTUDY entitlements are being maximised and providers have clarity about ABSTUDY rules.

In 2017, the Australian National Audit Office assessment concluded that the ABSTUDY program payment administration arrangements are effective.

Recommendation 19

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

Response: Agree

In 2016, the Australian Government introduced changes that allow those claiming over the phone to make a verbal declaration. This has made claiming ABSTUDY easier and means ABSTUDY assistance can be finalised before the start of the new school year and without the need for a signed declaration form. In addition, a targeted communications campaign is run each year from October to the following January to promote the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families claiming ABSTUDY as early as possible, especially for students moving away from home to study.

Secondary school students in receipt of ABSTUDY do not have to put in a claim each year to receive support. Services Australia ensures their study details are automatically updated to allow payments to continue into the next calendar year. Students will receive a letter from Services Australia toward the end of each year asking them to advise of any changes to their study or living circumstances. If supporting documentation is required, the student will be advised accordingly.

For students attending secondary school away from home, payments for the next calendar year are dependent on the student remaining eligible for ABSTUDY and commencing secondary studies by the third Friday of each school term.

The Australian Government is investigating further opportunities to provide greater certainty to schools and students in relation to ongoing eligibility, including working with representatives from peak bodies through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Boarding Reference Group. The Reference Group was established in 2018, to coordinate efforts across governments and with key non-government stakeholders. The National Indigenous Australians Agency chairs the Reference Group.

Recommendation 20
<i>The committee recommends that the Federal Government conduct a thorough review of private organisations that provide scholarship programs to Indigenous students to attend independent boarding schools, to determine whether they provide value for money, are equitable, and are supporting a range of students of varying backgrounds and abilities.</i>

Response: **Noted**

The Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Evaluation Framework provides a comprehensive approach to the monitoring and evaluation of program activities funded under the IAS. Each year an IAS Evaluation Work Plan is released, which forecasts evaluation activities expected to commence that financial year. The 2018–19 Work Plan includes the development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for IAS funded secondary school scholarships delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy was completed in early 2020 and provides advice on data availability and quality to support a future evaluation.

This work is an extension of PricewaterhouseCoopers' 2017 *Review of the IAS funded secondary school scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, which reported that the IAS funded scholarships achieved positive outcomes in terms of Year 12 completions, the number of scholarships awarded and the diversity of scholarship providers and service models. However, it also indicated a need to address a number of gaps in data before an impact evaluation could be conducted. Following the completion of the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy, an impact evaluation is expected to commence in late 2020.