

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2012-2013

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

DEEWR Question No. CA0036_13

Senator Scullion provided in writing.

Question

Closing the Gap - reading, writing and numeracy

In relation to reading, writing and numeracy targets, with five years to go, which of these targets can we meet? Which are not possible to meet? What is being done and what plans are in place to accelerate progress for these areas that are below requirements?

Answer

The Government is committed to meeting all of the Closing the Gap targets, which have been agreed by all Australian governments.

The Prime Minister's 2013 Closing the Gap report contains an assessment of progress against the targets.

The full report is available at: www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/closing-the-gap/closing-the-gap-prime-ministers-report-2013.

What is being done and what plans are in place to accelerate progress for these areas that are below requirements?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan was launched by Education Ministers in June 2011 after receiving endorsement by the Council of Australian Governments. The Action Plan provides an overarching framework of outcomes, targets and performance indicators as well as 55 actions across six domains which evidence suggests will have the most impact on closing the gaps. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan Annual Report contains information on what state, territory and non-government education providers are doing to meet the closing the gap targets, including activity under the Literacy and Numeracy domain. This report is available at: www.scseec.edu.au/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Education-Action-Plan/Action-Plan-Reports-2010-20141.aspx.

Funding of the Action Plan is the shared responsibility of participating education providers and the Australian Government. For its part, the Australian Government has committed \$128.6 million between 2010 and 2014 (calendar years) on a range of measures that contribute towards the achievement of the actions in the Action Plan. As part of this commitment, \$70 million has been invested in accelerating activity in

380 Focus schools, including prioritising literacy and numeracy strategies. This focus is evident in school improvement plans commenced under the programs in 2012.

The Australian Government has invested over \$65 billion in schooling over the 2009-12 quadrennium, doubling the investment over the previous quadrennium. Further information on Australian Government measures to close the gap are presented in the Prime Minister's 2013 Closing the Gap report.

This includes information on the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (\$540 million over the four years ending 2012) as well as the Low-Socio economic school communities National Partnership (\$1.5 billion over seven years) and the Quality Teaching National Partnership (\$550 million over five years ending in 2012-13). The Prime Minister's 2013 Closing the Gap report notes that, '[a] range of reform strategies were implemented across jurisdictions to support students in developing strong and effective literacy and numeracy skills. These include:

- Providing teachers with the skills and strategies to teach the key concepts in literacy and numeracy across all year levels.
- Providing access to professional development for teachers to deliver consistent, high quality literacy and numeracy teaching.
- Identifying additional specialised classroom support to assist school leaders and teachers to improve student outcomes.
- Building up the capacity of principals and school leaders to drive continuous improvement.
- Supporting schools to share practice and performance outcomes with other schools.'

Between 2009 and 2011, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Low Socio-Economic School Community National Partnership schools at or below the national minimum standard has reduced. In Western Australia and Queensland, the rate of improvement observed for Year 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Low Socio-Economic School Community National Partnership schools was higher than the rate of improvement observed for all students in these states.

The new \$243.9 million Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership targets schools that have a high proportion of students in the bottom two NAPLAN bands. The Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership will operate in schools in 2013. Education providers will be funded to implement evidence based approaches in participating schools, to drive accelerated improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for the lowest achieving students, including approaches tailored to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Seven evidence-based literacy and numeracy approaches will be implemented in participating schools, including Accelerated Literacy, phonological awareness and phonics programs, Literacy and Numeracy coaches, case management to target literacy needs, and the provision of professional development and mentoring to increase teacher capacity and ability to more effectively identify student learning goals.

The Prime Minister's 2013 Closing the Gap report notes that 'The Government is supporting positive outcomes in literacy and numeracy through a wide range of programs. This funding aims in particular to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the Focus School initiatives and Closing the Gap—Expansion of Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Programs projects.

The Australian Government's Closing the Gap – Expansion of Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Programs and Personalised Learning Plans initiative is receiving \$56.4 million over four years from 2008–09 to 2012–13. A total of 35 projects have been funded under the intensive literacy and numeracy initiative across Australia over 2009–12, engaging more than 20 000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in more than 670 schools and communities. Focus schools identified under the action plan are a particular target for this initiative.

In the Northern Territory, the Australian Government also committed \$44.3 million over three years to June 2012 under the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement, for education providers to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes and upskill local Indigenous Education Workers in targeted remote communities.'

Plans for the future are also outlined in the Prime Minister's 2013 Closing the Gap report where it is noted that, '[t]he Australian Government announced the National Plan for School Improvement on 3 September 2012 to help every student get a high quality education and the skills to secure a fulfilling job when they leave school. The aim of the National Plan for School Improvement is to have Australia in the top five countries in the world in reading, science and mathematics by 2025.

The plan introduces a new national school funding model and increased funding, tied to concrete improvements, in all schools across Australia. The key improvements will include:

- lifting teacher quality;
- more power for principals; and
- more information for parents to help them support their child's education.

Under the National Plan for School Improvement, schools will be expected to form strong partnerships with parents and their local community and report on how they achieve those partnerships. The key features of the new funding system include:

- a benchmark amount per student, based on the costs of schools that are already achieving great results; and
- extra publicly-funded money, called 'loadings', which will be available to support the schools and students who need it most, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with a disability, rural and remote students, students at small schools and students with limited English skills.'

On 21 March 2013, the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth announced that '[u]nder the Government's National Plan for School Improvement, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student will be entitled to extra funding, whichever school they attend. Every Indigenous student will also have a personalised learning plan to help them achieve their best.'