

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

DEEWR Question No. EW1199_12

Senator Siewert asked on 16 February 2012, Hansard page 51

Question

SSNP case studies on student attendance

Ms Hanlon: I could possibly add to that, too. In some case studies that we have around the national partnerships in schools, particularly, that have large numbers of Indigenous students we now have school level information of increased attendance. When you actually look at why they are attending, it is the way in which the school has engaged and is doing their job on a day-to-day basis. Senator SIEWERT: Has that already been provided to the committee and I have missed it? Ms Hanlon: No. Senator SIEWERT: Could you provide that information because that would be extremely useful? Ms Hanlon: At a case study level? Senator SIEWERT: At case study level of, basically, what you have been outlining: the increased attendance with the funding for the national partnerships. Ms Hanlon: Certainly. Senator SIEWERT: That would be really helpful. Mr Cook: Certainly, some of that practice is actually about practical, vocational type programs in schools in the secondary classes. I know the Northern Territory is particularly focusing on that, actually engaging students in the real-life, practical components of education and delivering their education through that. Senator SIEWERT: It would be appreciated if you could provide that information on notice. Ms Hanlon: Absolutely. Senator SCULLION: Perhaps you could take that on notice because you can obviously understand—and I can recall as a recidivist truant myself—that you need to make sure you were already ticked off on the roll before you ran off. Some schools do it in the morning and the afternoon and it would be useful, again, in looking at the data. A second thing is, talking about what, I suppose, are more generally remedial issues—and I know they are fundamentally the responsibility of the states and territories: one of the great issues about actually getting kids to school is that as soon as you get further up the tree, in terms of the ones that have been recidivist, non-attendees for a very long time, is that they are the ones who are going to be the most disengaged and if you just put them back into a classroom it is going to be a zoo. So, this remedial process of parallel and accelerated process is not only about just having quality teachers, it is about having more of them and a whole range of resources. I think if people accept that if there are lots of people who are not going to school, it is only going to go one way. Perhaps you can, just on notice, outline what sort of thinking you have had in terms of costs that are going to be required in terms of the remedial stuff and whether the states and territories have discussed that. They have certainly discussed other matters around that; perhaps you could include that in the report. Ms Paul: I think it goes to what Mr Cook and Ms Hanlon were saying in response to Senator Siewert's question, so in our question on notice we will have a look at that whole area.

Answer

Case Studies for the following schools have been attached, providing further information on the contribution the Smarter Schools National Partnerships have made to increasing attendance.

- Alekarenge School, NT
- Bundaberg State High School, Qld
- St Therese's Community School, NSW
- Bourke Public School, NSW

'Remedial activities' re attendance

The funding of remedial programs remains the primary responsibility of state and territory governments.

The Commonwealth recognises that students who are disengaged from learning or not attending school need additional support to re-engage. Such support could take a number of forms such as additional teachers, classroom facilities, curriculum and learning material, as well as parental and community engagement. The Commonwealth provides additional funding to states and territories to support remedial programs, such as these, including through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships.

Many schools participating in the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership are undertaking programs such as:

- employment of additional teaching and non-teaching staff, including in remote and hard-to-staff schools;
- extra-curricular and lunchtime activities, including sport, creative and performing arts;
- Homework Club;
- engaging with the community and the family through wrap around services involving external health and welfare organisations; and
- anti-bullying/positive behaviour and resilience programs.

Through the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership, the Commonwealth is supporting Northern Territory remote schools with an additional 200 teachers, to be recruited by the end of 2012, at a total cost of \$107.8 million, comprising:

- \$91.6 million for the recruitment, placement and retention of up to 170 classroom teachers in agreed remote and very remote Northern Territory Government schools in order to improve attendance and education outcomes for Aboriginal students; and
- \$16.2 million in 2009-10 for the engagement of 30 additional teachers in non-government schools in remote communities in the Northern Territory.

As at 30 January 2012, a total of 196 full time equivalent teachers were in place, comprising 170 in NT government schools, 23 in Catholic schools and 3 in independent schools.

The additional staffing is enabling remote schools to better engage with their local communities, and to target education reform effort to cohorts of students identified as being most at risk.

Alekarenge School, NT

Alekarenge School is located 170km south of Tennant Creek with all students being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The school is participating in the Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities National Partnership.

In 2011 the school developed a whole school approach to literacy and numeracy with attendance and family and community engagement strategies strategically linked to these outcomes.

The school has employed a School Programs Coordinator to provide targeted professional development for staff to enhance instructional teaching of literacy and numeracy. In prioritising attendance and family and community engagement, the following strategies were identified:

- identifying chronic irregular/non-attendees to enable all staff to focus on these students;
- implementing whole school positive behaviour programs;
- providing school uniforms as a reward for students improving their attendance; and
- improving the connection between the school and community through school council initiatives by providing governance training to the School Council.

Attendance rates have significantly improved. Average attendance for Semester 2, 2011 was 16% higher than for the same time period in 2010.

Student achievement results are also showing strong progress, with NAPLAN results for students across all domains and year levels higher in 2011 than 2010.

Bundaberg State High School, Qld

Bundaberg State High School is located in Bundaberg approximately 360 kilometres north of Brisbane and has an attendance rate of 89%. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students represent approximately 10% of the student population.

As a result of Low Socio-Economic Status School Community National Partnership funding, the school has implemented a range of programs and strategies designed to improve the learning outcomes, attendance and engagement of students, including:

- continuing maintenance of close working relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, elders and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples community;
- developing individual Indigenous Education Plan for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- providing cultural and sporting extra-curricula activities;
- establishing support programs for families as well as the provision of text hire and resources, meals, bus pick-ups and uniforms;
- coordinating the approach to student services provision, including a structured, case-management approach to working with students as they set their academic, career and other goals; and
- hosting community Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events such as Parental and Community Engagement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance has increased from 86.8% in 2008 to 89.3% in 2010.

The percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continuing their schooling at Bundaberg State High School has also increased from 75.6% in 2009 to 80.4% in 2010.

St Therese's Community School, Wilcannia, NSW

St Therese's Community School is in Wilcannia, a remote town in Western New South Wales. Almost all of school's students in Years K to 2 are Aboriginal.

National Partnership funding from 2010 has enabled the school to develop a wellbeing framework which delivers tangible support for students, parents and teachers to address attendance, engagement and improved learning outcomes.

The school has employed the following strategies:

- the wellbeing framework including counselling to foster healthy relationships;
- teacher professional learning that deals with the effects of trauma on a child's learning and development;
- professional learning delivered by a teacher and Aboriginal education worker;
- external professional support services including planning with the local Wilcannia child and mental health team and ongoing visits by an educational psychologist to work with students and staff, and access to a paediatrician once a month for students and families;
- further development of the Paakantji Language and Cultural Program; and
- implementation of a support program to help parents to develop their parenting skills.

Progress and outcomes that have been observed include the following:

- behavioural referrals to the principal are down by 60%;
- students are more engaged in class and are more willing to learn new concepts;
- increased parental involvement and engagement to support students;
- increased teacher skills and capacity to teach and support Aboriginal students; and
- a DVD, 'Come to school with us', highlights the school's success in improving attendance and engagement, student results and an enhanced learning environment, through National Partnership support.

School attendance has improved from 53% in 2008 to 69% in 2009 to 75% in 2010 and to 81% in 2011.

Bourke Public School, NSW

Bourke Public School is located 380 km north-west of Dubbo in Western NSW. The school has a population of 210 students, 73% of whom are Aboriginal.

The Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities National Partnership has supported a Targeted Attendance Mentor position to improve student attendance and increase parent understanding of the importance of their children attending school. Bourke Public School student attendance figures have been below the region and state averages for a number of years.

The Targeted Attendance Mentor:

- monitors and records attendance daily;
- does home visits to all students who are absent that day without explanation. The Mentor either collects the students to bring them to school or obtains a written explanation of absence from the parents;
- follows up on the emergence of any pattern of concern within any student's attendance data with parents or carers.

New teachers participate in an Aboriginal cultural immersion program, which was followed up with whole school professional learning in embedding Aboriginal content in teaching and learning.

This has given staff a deeper understanding of Aboriginal content and pedagogies and enabled Bourke Public School to strengthen its commitment to Aboriginal education. Teachers report they are more confident in working with Aboriginal knowledge and developing quality teaching and learning programs that meet Aboriginal students' needs.

Under the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership, the school has employed an Assistant Principal Literacy to lead teachers and support staff in the implementation of whole school Reading to Learn literacy strategy and individual reading interventions.

School attendance has improved from 82% in 2008 to 83% in 2009 to 86% in 2010 and to 90% in 2011.