

## CHAPTER 9

### DIVERSITY

9.1 Most of the reviews and inquiries into Indigenous education over the last ten years have drawn attention to the diverse nature of Indigenous communities, and the need to take this into account in policy making. This diversity exists in cultural, social and geographic terms. The NATSIEP joint policy statement referred to diversity in the following way. 'In the pursuit of educational equity, the National Policy recognises the diversity that exists in terms of Aboriginal socio-economic circumstances, cultural values and educational aspirations. These environmental factors have to be taken into account in the design and delivery of educational services and in assessments of individual and student group performance.'<sup>1</sup> The agreed common goals of the national policy aimed to provide a framework that would 'encourage flexibility and innovation'.<sup>2</sup>

9.2 The national review of Indigenous education also documented support for 'a more diverse and pluralistic view of how best to provide and administer education'.<sup>3</sup> Recommendation two of the review called for policy making to be based on five principles. One of these was diversity, which was about 'empowering Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to exercise the maximum degree of choice in education'.<sup>4</sup> The more outcomes focussed MCEETYA National Strategy did not specifically address diversity but acknowledged it in priority one, which pointed to a need for reform in the delivery of education and training programs to recognise diversity.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Remote, rural and urban Indigenous needs**

9.3 Indigenous cultural diversity is directly linked to a richness and variety in location. 'Despite an inclusive commonality of Aboriginal identity, key differences continue to be asserted by groups wanting to emphasise distinctive local identities.'<sup>6</sup> The culture of educational administration in Australia shows a propensity to favour standardisation, even though this flies in the face of educational theory. The challenge

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1 Department of Employment, Education and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy: Joint Policy Statement*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1989, pp. 9-10

2 *ibid.*, p. 13

3 Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Final Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1995, p. 21

4 *ibid.*, p. 27

5 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996 – 2002*, DEETYA, Canberra, 1995

6 D. Smith, *Shooting the Banker: Essays on ATSIC and Self-Determination*, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin, 1996, p. 18

in improving Indigenous education lies in the need to serve widely diverse groups at very different levels of readiness to benefit from educational opportunities. It lies also in the way governments choose to administer schools in catering for these varying levels.

9.4 Indigenous diversity encompasses remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settlements, rural towns, and urban and metropolitan areas. Historical factors contribute to cultural diversity, especially in relation to the degree of dispossession from land, and the impact of successive government policies since white settlement. Within these three main categories of remote, rural and urban there are other styles of communities, including inland and coastal settlements, town camps, small outstations or homelands, pastoral excisions, and fringe camps. Some groups are highly mobile, often in predictable ways.

9.5 The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the following census categories to define geographic location:

- Rural balance (settlements under 200 people)
- Bounded localities (settlements of between 200 – 999 people)
- Other urban (towns of between 1,000 – 99,999 people)
- Major urban (cities of 100,000 and above people)

9.6 Most ‘remote’ settlements come within the scope of the first two categories, while ‘rural’ roughly equates with ‘other urban’, and ‘urban’ (metropolitan) would be ‘major urban’. Remote Indigenous people comprise the smallest percentage group overall, but usually present the most challenges, geographically and in terms of cultural appropriateness, for developing and implementing policies, particularly national policies such as education.

9.7 In the 1996 census, the Indigenous population was estimated at 386,049 persons or 2.1 per cent of the total population of Australia. Around 30 per cent of the Indigenous population lived in major urban areas, while 42 per cent lived in other urban areas, 11 per cent lived in bounded localities, and 17 per cent lived in the rural balance section of state. This geographic distribution differed across states and territories.<sup>7</sup> Over half of all Indigenous people resided in New South Wales and Queensland (28 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). Another quarter lived in Western Australia and the Northern Territory (15 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). Overall, Indigenous people represented 3.2 per cent or less of the total

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7 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, ABS, Canberra, 1996, p. 5

population in each State or Territory, except in the Northern Territory where representation was 28.5 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

9.8 Census figures are important for purposes of perspective, but need to be treated with caution. These demographics are also affected by differences in age. Compared to the rest of Australia, a higher proportion of Indigenous people were aged under 15 in 1996 (40 per cent compared to 21 per cent) while a lower proportion were aged over 65 (3 per cent compared to 12 per cent), indicating high fertility and mortality. The median age for Indigenous people was 20 years compared to 34 years for other Australians. Almost 90 per cent of Indigenous people identified as Aboriginal, while 8 per cent identified as Torres Strait Islander and 3 per cent identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. As a consequence of cultural diversity, differences exist in relationships, links with the land, language, occupations, class and gender.<sup>9</sup> This diversity of community types also includes further differences in socio-economic status, cultural beliefs and values. The implications of this diversity are that generalisations about the extent of problems faced by the Indigenous population are not always valid; and that universal solutions or programs in Aboriginal education and training will not work.<sup>10</sup>

9.9 Like cultures everywhere, Indigenous cultures are dynamic. The past impacts on the present, and influences the future shape and evolution of culture. These underlying issues of diversity need to be kept in mind as the differing educational needs of remote, rural and urban Indigenous people are explored.

We are all influenced by our history. Our present situation, our motivation and our outlook are strongly influenced by the past. Without an understanding of what has gone before, we are prone to misunderstand the reasons why people think and behave as they do. In the case of Indigenous students in school, the historical influences on their present situation have continued to pervade their lives. We are all familiar with the children of the Stolen Generation and the ongoing debate over Land Rights. However, too few people understand the relevance of the historical processes to the lives of Indigenous people. A history of dispossession, oppression and racism has been instrumental in shaping their lives and constricting their opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

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8 *ibid.*, p. 2

9 Gary Partington ed., *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, 1998, p. 2

10 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, pp. 3-4

11 Gary Partington ed., *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Social Science Press, Katoomba, 1998, p. 1

9.10 Around 23 per cent of the total Indigenous population live in communities of 1,000 or fewer people.<sup>12</sup> They include many outstations and homelands in the Northern Territory, parts of Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia.

9.11 The provision of services and infrastructure in such circumstances is extremely difficult. The Committee did not visit an outstation or homeland, but the difficulty of providing education to such communities was mentioned in submissions and source documents. Limited or no access to formal schooling for compulsory age students is more prevalent in these very remote circumstances. Currently teachers do not usually reside in homelands, but visit them regularly, sometimes distributing food and acting as a conduit to the main centre servicing a number of homelands.

9.12 While homeland communities generally place a high priority on education, its appropriateness and delivery ‘raises a dilemma between the rights of Aboriginal people to retain their identity and associated lifestyle, and the obligation of State and Territory governments to provide schooling to all children.’<sup>13</sup> It has been noted that some remote communities may have less commitment than urban communities to the value of acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. This is not to suggest that they regard education as unimportant. They do not perceive, however, that a European education is urgently needed to live a fulfilling life; ‘indeed, there is much evidence to the contrary, particularly in the homeland centres’.<sup>14</sup>

9.13 Apart from devising programs that are in accord with the aspirations of the community, providing educational programs to outstations and homelands presents a number of resourcing, logistical and operational problems for service providers, not to mention the inhabitants themselves. For example, in the Northern Territory, obtaining a primary school educational service in a homeland is dependent upon the community meeting certain criteria. The community needs to identify, enrol and guarantee the attendance of at least twelve students, and identify and support an Assistant Teacher, who must enrol in a teacher education program. Homelands may also be asked to provide a building for the program. A qualified visiting teacher, usually non-Indigenous, visits the homeland regularly by car, boat or aeroplane, depending on the location. Most educational services are attached to a “hub” school. To meet these criteria, it is clear that people would need to reside permanently in their homeland. More mobile homeland communities need to rely on a sporadic education provision, when visiting bigger centres.

9.14 The diversity of outstations and homelands and their different size, location, level of resources and infrastructure ensure that each has a variety of needs and

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12 [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au), Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

13 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. 38

14 R G Schwab, *Educational ‘failure’ and educational ‘success’ in an Aboriginal community*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Discussion Paper No. 161/1998, Canberra, 1998, p. 15

aspirations. This reinforces the need for policy flexibility, and for an integrated community development approach unique to each community.

9.15 The mobility of remote Indigenous students, families and communities has impacted dramatically on access, participation, attendance, and outcomes in education. Mobility also affects non-Indigenous educators' perceptions and expectations of students and their families, often in a negative way. Mobility has, however, been an integral feature of Indigenous life for some time, and will continue.

Aboriginal people or families move between a range of residential situations, such as between Aboriginal townships, homeland centres and white-populated urban areas. This mobility is not haphazard. It is influenced by seasonal, kinship and ceremonial commitments and is usually within a particular geographical region.<sup>15</sup>

9.16 Apart from instances of random life circumstance, most mobility is predictable. The Committee believes it should be investigated, anticipated, and catered for. In Western Australia, the Department of Education is dealing with problems associated with mobility in remote areas. There is a growing realisation that governments cannot impose a more sedentary lifestyle on Indigenous communities and that more innovative ways have to be found to ensure that students do not miss out on schooling. Tracking students' progress already occurs in some locations and appears to be a way of dealing with mobile students. Exploring the provision of an educational service that has the capacity to address mobility is a challenge. The Committee welcomes the initiatives undertaken in Western Australia and New South Wales (described in more detail in chapters three and four).

9.17 *Learning Lessons* describes in detail the Northern Territory Health Services recent initiatives in tracking patients using the Community Care Information System (CCIS) and outlines the system's coordination capacity, which has benefits for service delivery and cost effectiveness. The report recommends that the Northern Territory Department of Education 'consider the cost effectiveness of the CCIS and the potential for linking it with mandated school-based student tracking systems.'<sup>16</sup>

### **Recommendation 30**

**9.18 The Committee recommends that MYCEETA look at the Northern Territory Community Care Information System's potential for other parts of Australia.**

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15 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *A Chance for the Future*, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p. 4

16 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 147

*Papunya*

9.19 The Committee visited two remote settlements in the Northern Territory during this inquiry. One of these was Papunya, west of Alice Springs, where the Community Council and school staff have formed a strategic alliance. The Anangu Tjuta Nintirrikupayi Aboriginal Corporation (ATNAC) has been incorporated especially to look at the education of all people in the settlement. Disenchantment with the Department of Education, extending back to 1992, and a determination to deal directly with appropriate providers and arrange courses were part of the rationale for ATNAC's formation.<sup>17</sup>

9.20 The reasons for the disagreement between the community and the Northern Territory government, partly to do with electricity charges, need not be detailed here. Enrolments dropped to 18 pupils from about 180. Part of the problem was the posting of a school principal to Papunya who appeared to be out of sympathy with the community's expectations of the school program. The fall in enrolments was followed by a deliberate neglect of the school by the Northern Territory Department of Education official responsible for the region. As a result, public works department maintenance officials failed to carry out essential work on the school buildings and electricity and associated facilities. The Committee found the situation at Papunya a matter of concern. The school was run down, with heating equipment breaking down on the day of the visit. The appointment of a new principal concerned to rebuild relations with the community had seen enrolments increase to almost pre-1992 levels of 180 pupils, but the poor state of the school indicated that departmental attitudes remained unchanged.

9.21 The Committee questioned officials of the Northern Territory Education Department about the conditions at Papunya School in Alice Springs the day following the visit. In response, the Department outlined the Principal's role in requesting repairs and maintenance and minor new works. Of eight submissions for minor new works, seven had been returned to the school, unactioned, by the area Group School Management Council because of inattention to submission guidelines and requirements. The Department of Education referred to the need for a cooperative relationship between the Principal and the Group School Management Council and advised that assistance was available to complete these formalities.<sup>18</sup> The Committee did not consider this response to be convincing, as evidence from other representatives stressed that two departmental officers visit all bush schools once a year to assess repairs and maintenance needs, and proposals for minor new works. It is inconceivable that the Department knew nothing of the poor state of facilities at Papunya. Nor did the Department's response deal with the wilful negligence of senior Departmental officials.

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<sup>17</sup> Submission No. 26, Papunya Community Council, vol. 2, pp. 196-197

<sup>18</sup> Mr R Harvey, Northern Territory Department of Education, supplementary letter, 1 October 1999

9.22 It is a matter of interest to the Committee that since its visit, the record of the Papunya school in developing good practice in community involvement has been cited for special mention in the report *Learning Lessons*.<sup>19</sup> As the Committee observed, the Papunya story could be viewed as a nine-year political struggle for community control over education.

### *Yuendumu*

9.23 The Committee visited a settlement of similar size, also west of Alice Springs, and saw a very different school. The dramatic stand-off between the government and the local community that caused problems for Papunya were not experienced here. The Committee learned much about the problems facing remote community schools during this visit.

9.24 To begin with the Committee was advised that funding of schools was often poorly targeted. The current emphasis is on resource development and administration. Much more beneficial would be a reallocation of funds into staffing so that the benefits could be delivered to students. The Committee inferred from this that current funding arrangements support the positions of central administrators. It was put to the Committee that principals and teachers are in a better position to understand problems than the administrators in Darwin and Alice Springs. As it is, the Yuendumu principal bends the rules to spend IESIP funds for additional AIEWs, the best possible use of this valuable source of funding. CDEP funds are used for the same purpose. Funding application processes are not user friendly, however, with too many layers of administration for principals to have to deal with. Funding programs also assume a homogeneous target group, and Indigenous people are not homogeneous.

9.25 At the social level, Yuendumu suffers the same problems as most Indigenous communities, although 'problem' youth are in a small minority. The Committee visited the community on the day when social welfare payments were made, so the township was very quiet. As the Principal stated, 'Most of the young men drive into Alice Springs to buy grog and return to disrupt their families'. It was a serious problem for children growing up accustomed to so much welfare dependency. Gambling was seen by young Indigenous people to be a way to economic advancement.

### *Remote Secondary or Post Primary Education*

9.26 Secondary education presents unique problems in remote areas. One submission argues that an examination of the availability of suitable education programs for this group needs to be undertaken urgently. The submission cites a study done in the Northern Territory in 1993 that identified 41 per cent of teenagers as being

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19 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, p. 175

outside any educational program. Of the 409 identified, 113 were still of compulsory school age.<sup>20</sup>

9.27 It is also argued that the Northern Territory Department of Education has been inconsistent in its delivery of education and training models to this group, even when particular approaches have been shown to be successful.

In the Territory there has been two major remakes of this area of educational delivery in the past ten years. One was the shift from TAFE funded adult educators to the NT Open College structure. The other was the dismemberment of the Open College and the creation of the Northern Territory Employment Education and Training Authority. Each change has swept away productive and unproductive arrangements alike. Morale at the community level has been eroded as programs in which people had invested energy and trust were discontinued.<sup>21</sup>

9.28 For adolescent boys, initiation often precludes a continuing association with school, which is seen an institution for children. Many adolescent girls have family responsibilities. Those who continue their education away from their communities:

... find the going extremely difficult because of home sickness, wrong sexual liaisons, and conflicts with students from other areas. In addition, the students are away at a crucial time in their induction to traditional knowledge and status within the community.<sup>22</sup>

9.29 Another submission asserts that the majority of secondary-aged Indigenous students living in the Northern Territory are not enrolled in formal secondary educational programs with recognised qualifications that translate into pathways to further education or employment. Where access to secondary education is available, it is through Community Education Centres (CECs) which provide an alternative to secondary education. Primary school teachers usually staff these centres. According to this submission, '... this systemic disadvantage at the level of secondary education needs urgent attention, preferably at the level of a Royal Commission into Indigenous education'.<sup>23</sup>

9.30 There have been some attempts to overcome the jurisdictional problems associated with mobility across state borders. Education officials from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland have met, under a tri-state agreement, to discuss issues relating to the needs of border inhabitants. In Western Australia, this arrangement has resulted in an experimental approach to secondary program delivery in remote areas. Two Aboriginal traineeships in small business, a travelling disco, a clothesline manufacturing and erection enterprise, and an 'Op' shop

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20 Submission No. 4, Mr Peter Toyne MLA, vol. 1, p. 21

21 *ibid.*, p. 25

22 *ibid.*, p. 22

23 Submission No. 12, Dr Christine Nicholls, vol. 1, p. 137



are examples of this approach, which involves and engages students directly. An evaluation will be conducted by the Central Queensland University early in 2000.<sup>24</sup>

9.31 Although a small percentage of the overall Indigenous population live in remote areas, this 'remote' factor accounts for a much larger percentage of the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The provision of education in such circumstances is labour and resource intensive, and presents endemic problems for education providers and Indigenous communities alike. Outcomes and attendance are affected by health, nutrition, housing, socio-economic factors, teacher preparedness, the provision of appropriate teachers both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and culturally appropriate curriculum issues which may be linked to an aspiration for wider community development.

9.32 Most remote schools have a predominantly Indigenous student body. The Committee believes that strong community leadership and direction is important in developing a resilient community able to maximise opportunities for self-determination in the school and wider community. The Committee saw first-hand examples of the involvement of Indigenous elders in school affairs, and of strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school staff which integrated other community services, especially those affecting health. Where aspirations for community involvement are pronounced, it is important that they be actively and appropriately supported. The provision of community development and management training on site is one way to provide such support. Thus, adult education has a vital role to play:

It is essential to acknowledge that educational levels across the whole community need to be addressed if communities are going to be able to grow and develop.<sup>25</sup>

9.33 The Committee encourages partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. Where this is accompanied by a long term aspiration to Aboriginalise staff in both the school and other community services, non-Indigenous staff should acquire an appreciation for and develop skills in community development and empowerment techniques.

9.34 The issues of autonomy and self-determination have wider relevance to education. As referred to in para. 2.38, education may be regarded as a 'social resource'; as a process through which a community comes to understand what it values and to determine how community aspirations are to be achieved. Education therefore cannot be seen only as a service to be provided by a remote government through bureaucratic processes. Even matters like routine building maintenance, something many communities and schools will happily delegate to distant agencies,

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24 Site Visit, Kalgoorlie. Meeting with Regional Office staff.

25 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin, 1999, p. 112

may be regarded by Indigenous communities as a responsibility to be undertaken at a local level. It may also be more efficient to undertake such tasks at a local level.

### **Recommendation 31**

**9.35 The Committee recommends that responsibility for school programs and overall administration be devolved to school communities where appropriate; that this include financial self-management; and that assistance be given to local communities in developing a culture of management accountability for decisions made in their name.**

#### *Torres Strait Islands*

9.36 The Committee visited the Torres Strait Islands, discussing educational issues with school administrators on Thursday Island and visiting the school at Badu Island. During the visit to Badu Island, one of 14 outlying islands in the Torres Strait, the Committee was informed of a number of problems faced by remote communities. It was also told of the successful efforts of the parent liaison officer, one of the local elders, in contributing to good links between school and community, and particularly in ensuring good attendance. There were said to be only 'pockets' of non-attendees. Fundraising for the school was a highly successful social activity for the whole community. The CDEP was the means by which employment in seasonal industries such as crayfishing and pearling was provided for. Of more relevance for this report, the CDEP also provided for the employment and training of Indigenous teachers aides over and above normal staff allocations.

9.37 Despite improvements, literacy levels were still substantially behind those on the mainland, and the school struggled to find the right direction in literacy teaching. Even though English is a second language for all inhabitants of Badu Island, there was no qualified ESL teacher on the school staff. Lack of accommodation was an obstacle to recruiting qualified teachers. One ESL advisory teacher served the district. Teachers did their best with transition from Kriol to standard English. There was no LOTE program. Literacy problems were particularly acute for Year 7 students going south for secondary education. Only a small percentage overcame language problems sufficiently well to enable them to continue their studies through secondary school.

9.38 Providing secondary education to scattered populations separated by stretches of water brings its own problems, notably the cost of transport. Commuting is not an option because of the high cost of flying and the absence of suitable water transport. The use of private dinghies is prevalent, but fast water transport is subject to the vagaries of weather and sea conditions.

9.39 Apart from this practical difficulty, parents anxious to have their children continue secondary education sometimes bypass Thursday Island High School in favour of boarding schools on the mainland. Abstudy assists them in this choice. Central to this choice is a belief that their children have a better chance of learning English in mainstream (mainland) schools. There are also perceived problems with boarding arrangements at Thursday Island, specifically a lack of accommodation at

the beginning of each year. As students drop out beds become available, but by then other students have made their own arrangements away from Thursday Island.<sup>26</sup>

9.40 The Committee also heard the views of the Deputy Principal of the Thursday Island High School on a range of issues. Vocational education was seen as a promising way of keeping students at school longer, especially boys, and efforts were being made to enlist the support of local businesses in providing incentives to improve attendance and student achievement. Thursday Island High School suffers the endemic problem of high staff turnover, a particular disadvantage in a predominantly Indigenous school where building personal trust is important. The high staff turnover was also an impediment to running a successful vocational education program. The Queensland Education Department provides no advantageous staffing formula for schools with predominantly Indigenous students, so class sizes of 23 to 25 can be reduced only by eliminating subjects from the curriculum.

9.41 Martin Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander academic, reflects the aspirations expressed in the Badu Island site visit. He argues strongly for the pursuit of a Western type education focusing on English acquisition and related skills, and links this to Islanders appropriating a better economic and political position for themselves in the future - literally, the ability to 'cut a better deal'.<sup>27</sup> Nakata advocates the development of location specific and effective English language and literacy pedagogies rather than transposing models, such as bilingual education, from other contexts<sup>28</sup>.

9.42 In light of the educational challenges outlined by witnesses from the Torres Strait Islands, the Committee is sympathetic to Nakata's point of view. The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is unique in Indigenous governance, leading the way in the Commonwealth's advocacy of increased regional autonomy. The Committee believes that the Authority is in a strong position to influence the Commonwealth and the Queensland Government to develop a strategic plan that addresses the education and training concerns and aspirations of the people of the Torres Strait.

### **Differing rural needs**

9.43 The ABS Census category 'other urban' relates to townships that range in size from 1,000 to 99,999 people. Around 42 per cent of Indigenous Australians live in centres of this size.<sup>29</sup> Some remote Indigenous communities fall into this category, although not many. Most rural townships and regional centres fall into this category but differences in size, location, and proportion of Indigenous population result in a

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26 Site visit Thursday Island

27 Martin Nakata, 'Cutting a Better Deal for Torres Strait Islanders', *The Aboriginal Child at School*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1995, p. 20

28 *ibid.*, p. 25

29 [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au), Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

diversity of circumstances. Generally, a major difference in such communities is that Indigenous people form a minority within a dominant culture. Large centres such as Cairns, Alice Springs and Geraldton often have a sizeable Indigenous minority (6 per cent; 12 per cent; and 7 per cent respectively). In some smaller towns like Tennant Creek and Brewarrina, Indigenous people comprise nearly half the total population (40 per cent and 55 per cent respectively). For schools in these towns, the Indigenous student body usually reflects the general population, although there are exceptions.

9.44 The challenges facing mainstream schools catering to a minority of Indigenous students are considerable. The Committee found that successful outcomes were more likely to be achieved where an integrated local strategy towards Indigenous education existed at the school level, replicating statewide strategic plans to implement the NATSIEP. Crucial features of such local strategies included the principals' commitment and leadership, the valuing of Indigenous identity in a variety of ways (including consultation and negotiation with Indigenous parents), expectations and support of students being evident, appropriate pedagogy and materials being employed, and student progress being evaluated regularly.

There are an increasing number of schools that are providing an education that is genuinely responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These schools are characterised by staff committed to meeting the social, emotional and educational needs of Indigenous students. It usually begins with the principal and a high level of support from Indigenous families and educational networks strengthens it.<sup>30</sup>

9.45 The Committee also heard repeatedly that regular student attendance is critical, with the employment of Indigenous role models contributing significantly to the retention of students. In many of the mainstream primary schools the Committee visited, there was evidence that one or more of the factors outlined above were addressed. However, it was rare to find them all operating simultaneously, in a strategic and systematic framework. The Committee also noted many negative comments from non-Indigenous educators and parents about the perceived inequity of resource allocation to Indigenous students, as opposed to non-Indigenous students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This was particularly evident in rural and regional Australia.

9.46 The Committee visited several towns and heard evidence that suggests successful educational outcomes result from particular approaches, practices, and models. In some cases, the successful outcomes fell outside the parameters of those stated in official policy documents, but were socially and culturally worthwhile. In others, the successful outcome was that students went on to further educational experiences. This suggests that a more flexible approach to performance indicators may be warranted, especially where the community is able to articulate specific qualitative indices. The Committee also gained an appreciation of the complexity of

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30 Submission No. 34, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, vol. 5, p. 133

some of the issues which face schools in both delivering appropriate programs to a cross cultural student body, and achieving outcomes identified by official policy. They also heard some of the reasons for non-attendance, and why Western education systems often fail Indigenous students. The following case studies come from evidence given in submissions, and at hearings and site visits. They illustrate a diversity of circumstances, needs and aspirations, and a variety of responses.

### *Geraldton*

9.47 The Committee visited three schools and a TAFE institution in Geraldton. One was the only pre-school visited during the inquiry. When the Committee visited Meekaway Aboriginal Pre-School they were struck by the similarity in physical appearance to any other well-run mainstream pre-school. Catering to an establishment of 40 children, Meekaway has been run by Indigenous parents for 25 years and differs in philosophy and emphasis in ways that are important to the Indigenous parents who choose to send their children there. Control of decision-making, an emphasis on Indigenous identity (Wajarri language and culture), attention to specific health issues which affect learning and the provision of transport all contribute to the achievement of 74 per cent attendance. Their target is 75 per cent. Although funded by the Department of Family and Children's Services, staff have always been employed by the Department of Education. Funding arrangements for community pre-schools in Western Australia are due to change next year, when the Department of Education will assume responsibility for funding. Staff outlined the benefits of a culturally appropriate curriculum and approach as starting children's education off well. During the course of the program they develop fine motor skills, become involved in creative table activities, improve their social skills, overcome shyness, and gain confidence in their Indigenous identity through language and culture taught by grandmothers and other role models.<sup>31</sup>

9.48 Geraldton Secondary College is a large government secondary school with two campuses and a total population of around 1,700 students. There are about 220 Indigenous students (around 13 per cent of the total population). The Indigenous students tend to be concentrated in the younger years. There were only twelve Indigenous students in year 12, eleven of whom were female. The numbers were said to start falling at around year 9. Truancy could be a problem, although this was mainly on pension days. The Geraldton Youth Support program picks up some truants and provides them with the opportunity to make up work off-site. Incentives such as fishing trips are provided for students who stick to the program. Parental involvement was said to be rare, partly due to the parents' negative experiences of their own schooling. The College was running a language program with a local grandmother. There was also a vocational program available at one of the campuses, which had been set up for young people (not necessarily Indigenous) who were not succeeding in the mainstream. A Commonwealth funded remedial reading program provided intensive assistance to small groups of students, around one third of whom were

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31 Site visit, Meekaway Pre-School, Geraldton, WA , 13 September, 1999

Indigenous. These students were said to do well on the program as long as they attended regularly. The school also employed a number of Indigenous education workers (AIEWs).

9.49 The Central West College of TAFE also has its main campus in Geraldton. The College covers a large region, including regional centres such as Geraldton and Carnarvon as well as some remote locations. The College is currently in a joint venture with Edith Cowan University, which has a regional centre program that moves from one centre to another. The program sets up in an area for four or five years. This allows enough time for a group of people to do a bridging course and a degree without having to leave their local area. An enabling course is being run in 1999 for people interested in going on to degrees. Next year the university will start a Bachelor of Education course. The overall aim is to increase the numbers of primary school teachers in the region. There are 21 people doing the enabling course this year. The College has also formed a partnership with Normandy Mining Company to run a program for Indigenous trainees. Eight out of the twelve participants who completed the program gained employment with the mining company. However, private sector outcomes were said to depend on the willingness of employers to employ Indigenous people and the level of cultural awareness of the organisation. Poor employment outcomes were a potential limiting factor in the ability of the College to gain funding for Indigenous vocational programs.

### *Kalgoorlie*

9.50 East Kalgoorlie Primary School has an enrolment of 122 students, of which approximately 78 attended on the day of the Committee's visit. Around 99 per cent of students are Indigenous. They are drawn from the Kalgoorlie-Boulder townships and around fifteen fringe camps. Many students are transient, coming in from the Nganyatjarra Lands for periods of time. Staff said that it was not uncommon for two or three new children to arrive at school each day. Little or no information about the children comes with them.

9.51 The mainly Indigenous pupils come from a range of socio-economic circumstances and have had widely varying school experiences. This presents challenges that require imaginative solutions. Ensuring students actually get to school through the provision of a bus service is seen as essential. Students' 'learning readiness' is given priority through services offered by the Henderson Centre, an on site, privately funded, purpose built facility catering for all aspects of student health and well-being. The school relies heavily on the Centre to look at all issues that impact on the students' education, including health, behaviour and problems at home. Staff of the Henderson Centre check the hearing and general health of students when they start at the school and these are systematically followed up. Other community agencies come to the Centre and use the facility to access the students. Food, showers, and clean clothes are available, if required.

9.52 The school itself is well staffed, being based on enrolments rather than attendance. Student transience presents problems for delivering a planned educational

program and achieving results. Regular attendance is the key to achievement, with data showing that children who consistently attend are at or above average compared with other students. Teachers need to be flexible in the way they plan and deliver programs, balancing the needs of students who attend regularly with those who are transient. Teachers also rely heavily on the AIEWs and teacher aides to assist with the varying literacy and numeracy levels of transient students.

9.53 A strong Indigenous presence was evident in both the classrooms and the Henderson Centre. The Committee believes that the pro-active approach to getting students to school through the provision of a bus service is an important component of success. At some public schools there was opposition to the provision of transport on the grounds that this undermined parental responsibility or entrenched already negligent behaviour.<sup>32</sup> Staff at the Henderson Centre believed that when the parents were caught up in drink or just not caring for their kids, the Centre had to take responsibility so that the children did not miss out.<sup>33</sup>

9.54 The 'best practice' demonstrated at East Kalgoorlie was the practical concern for the physical well-being of children and the obvious attention to early intellectual development which was paying off with improved levels of literacy. The Committee was told, however, that the work the school put in to reading skills could be at risk due to a lack of reinforcement by parents at home. Even with a good foundation and fluency in reading to grade 4 level, literacy skills could taper off through lack of extension.

### *Cairns*

9.55 At Caravonica Primary School outside Cairns, a school with an Indigenous enrolment of 35 students out of a total of 500, the Committee discussed with the Principal and staff of the school the difficulties for Indigenous students in coping with the way the curriculum is delivered in a mainstream school. The Committee was told that process rather than content had become a focus for alternative strategies for Indigenous students. Some of the strategies employed to improve Indigenous student performance centred around changing students' perceptions of themselves from remedial students to active learners. At the parents' suggestion, Caravonica staff had initiated twelve culturally appropriate learning strategies or processes, which supplement their teaching expertise. A self-paced, cross-cultural, maths and literacy computer program from the United States called 'Successmaker' was introduced three years ago. This program has the capacity to highlight and redress problem areas through exposure to familiar material, presented repetitively in incremental small steps. The Committee questioned the cultural relevance of the program, but was assured that the academic benefits were such that its use was justified. Interestingly, the Principal of Hope Vale Community School had objections to 'Successmaker' on cultural grounds. Staff at Caravonica, however, believed cultural relevance came into

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32 Site visit, Rangeway School, Geraldton, WA, 13 September 1999

33 Site visit, Henderson Centre, Kalgoorlie, WA, 14 September 1999

the curriculum in other ways. This program was supplemented by teachers developing problem solving skills, with AIEWs and teacher aides generally supporting Indigenous students and non-Indigenous staff. In-school tutorials, the withdrawal of year 4/5 students for intensive work, the establishment of a learning unit, and monitoring by the ASSPA Committee, were other strategies employed by the school. Caravonica impressed the Committee in its commitment to raising the achievement levels of its Indigenous pupils. They appear to have a special place in the school, being a core group rather than a marginalised group. It appeared to be a successful case of affirmative action at work in both the academic and cultural life of the school.

9.56 At Caravonica Primary School the Committee heard complaints about delays and other administrative problems associated with Commonwealth funded programs for Indigenous students. Short term funding programs place schools in a dilemma because the formalities for application are onerous to the point of being out of proportion to the amounts of money allocated. The Principal suggested that Commonwealth funds be managed by the state education department to ensure accountability. The inability of the Commonwealth to guarantee funding for more than one year was also a source of frustration because short-term funding jeopardised good initiatives and made difficult the retention of valued Indigenous staff. By comparison, the state government had devolved management responsibility, including the discretionary use of finances, to the school and this was claimed to be operationally superior. The Committee was pleased to hear that local DETYA staff in Cairns used all of their discretionary powers and more to address problems that appear to result from policy implementation defects in Canberra.

### **Recommendation 32**

**9.57 The Committee recommends that funds under special purpose grants be provided to schools over a triennium.**

9.58 The Committee heard varying evidence on the worth of homework centres funded under ASSPA. Some schools acknowledged that they had been using homework centre funding to provide individual or intensive learning programs.

### **Recommendation 33**

**9.59 The Committee recommends that DETYA guidelines allow for flexible use of ASSPA funding to allow school communities to apply grants that fit local educational programs most appropriately.**

#### *Brewarrina*

9.60 Brewarrina in north western New South Wales has most of the characteristics of a township where half the population is Indigenous and employment opportunities are limited. At Brewarrina Central School 250 students are enrolled in programs from K-Y12. About 97 per cent of these students are Indigenous. The school is able to access several different sources of funding as a result of being designated 'disadvantaged' and through Aboriginal programs. This enables the school to focus on



innovative programs to address particular problem areas such as running a full senior secondary program for a small number of students. The school maintains links with other educational bodies such as the Distance Education Centre at Dubbo and the local TAFE.

9.61 Five of the 23 staff at Brewarrina Central School were Indigenous. In 1998 there was a staff turnover of 19, which was exceptionally high. Most new teachers were inexperienced and without experience of small-town life. Many had never met an Aboriginal person before. A local induction program was devised and funded by the NSW Department of Education. It allowed staff to travel to other areas to be mentored by more experienced staff, or for mentors to come to the town. Local Aboriginal people supplemented the program with Aboriginal history in Brewarrina, cultural education, and appropriate teaching methods for implementing the NATSIEP. This year the expected staff turnover is 7 or 8. There is an emphasis on Indigenous culture in the school and on awareness of the students' individual circumstances. While a few Aboriginal teachers had been employed in the past, there were no Aboriginal teachers in 1999. Most had gone on to better paying jobs in the public service, while one alluded to difficulties working with a predominantly white staff.

9.62 The Committee noted three aspects of particular interest arising from its visit to Brewarrina. The first was the fact that non-Indigenous pupils, with few exceptions, were enrolled at the local Catholic school. The second is the scheme in operation in New South Wales to track mobile pupils to ensure that they receive as much value from their schooling as possible. This matter is dealt with in Chapter 4. The aspirations of the Principal of Brewarrina Central School to incorporate TAFE accredited courses in the school curriculum are also noted in Chapter 4.

#### *Bourke*

9.63 Bourke High School has 160 students, just over 50 per cent of whom are Indigenous. A significant proportion leave school at fifteen or at the end of year 10. Some sections of the student population were said to be highly mobile. There were 78 movements in and out of school in the first two terms of 1999, although many of these movements involved the same students. The secondary curriculum and the need to teach to two major exams were described as significant limiting factors in teaching Indigenous students. Staff were restructuring the curriculum in order to make it more relevant to students.

9.64 The school offers a mixture of traditional academic subjects and vocational courses. The vocational options include part-time work placements. The school has a work education program in years 9 and 10 and a series of TAFE courses from year 10 upwards. Dual accredited vocational education courses in hospitality, rural industries, and building and construction are offered from year 9 upwards. The school is also represented on the Bourke Education Council, which involves educational institutions, community organisations and employer representatives. The Council aims to coordinate approaches to improving education and employment opportunities in Bourke.

*Alice Springs*

9.65 Yipirinya School in Alice Springs, is an independent, Indigenous controlled primary school used as a case study in *Learning Lessons*. Catering to an all Indigenous student body from several language groups in Central Australia, its strategies, including a partnership with the University of Canberra to pilot a ‘scaffolding literacy’ project, offer insights into the potential success of taking a culturally appropriate, rigorous approach and adopting high expectations of Indigenous students.<sup>34</sup>

9.66 Yirara College is a Lutheran co-educational, secondary boarding school in Alice Springs, which caters for Indigenous students from remote Northern Territory communities. Its capacity is 250 students but the average enrolment is 220. As a boarding school regular attendance is assured. There is an emphasis on teaching basic living skills in the boarding house, including tasks associated with general health and well being. This is supplemented by the provision of a balanced diet and access to a full-time health clinic. Visiting specialists, including dentists, come to the school regularly. The student body is mainly comprised of traditionally oriented Indigenous students whose families want them to be able to live in ‘two worlds’. Yirara provides an accelerated pre-secondary and secondary learning program with a strong emphasis on literacy.

9.67 Yirara College is noted in *Learning Lessons* for demonstrating the relationship between learning outcomes and attendance.

Among the forty-four schools that the review visited, Yirara College was unique in that they analysed routinely collected data on student attendance and achievement. The high correlation that they found between attendance and improvement in scores in aptitude tests administered at the beginning and end of each term provides valuable evidence of what we know to be true – regular attendance is an essential starting point for improvement in educational outcomes.<sup>35</sup>

9.68 The Yirara submission to the inquiry called for the Government to be more insistent about school attendance, recommending legal action for non attendance, or welfare payments to be withheld. The Committee believes, however, that in line with their preference for a community development approach, Yirara’s recommendation that Indigenous people need to be informed about the issues is a better one.

The expectation that children attend school, along with the other major issues needs to be put before Indigenous people so that they can think through the issues in an informed way. That is to say, raise the issues to a level such that people can consciously grapple with the issues. At the moment people out bush do not spend much time thinking about the issues

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34 Northern Territory Department of Education, *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, NTDE, Darwin, 1999, pp. 132-133

35 *ibid.*, p 155

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because school is seen as non-compulsory, a place for students to be entertained.<sup>36</sup>

9.69 The Irrkerlantye Learning Centre (formerly the Detour Program) in Alice Springs is an example of an alternative approach to education, undertaken in response to unique local circumstances. Within the Indigenous community of Alice Springs there is significant diversity. Tangentyere Council's eighteen town camps which caters for local Arrernte and other Central Australian language groups living (or visiting) Alice Springs is part of that diversity. Tangentyere Council, the Indigenous equivalent of the Alice Springs Town Council, caters for the infrastructure and other needs of town campers, and is pro-active in seeking improvements to all facets of town campers' lives. Tangentyere Council often forms strategic alliances with other agencies and organisations to ensure such improvements occur and are maximised, and run a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) ("work for the dole") funded by ATSIC.

9.70 The Irrkerlantye Learning Centre is a joint initiative of Tangentyere Council, Centralian College, and the Northern Territory Department of Education. The Centre's physical location is considered an important factor in respect of cultural appropriateness. The Centre is located at Hidden Valley, one of the three town camps the Centre serves. It adopts an inter-generational approach to the provision of an integrated, culturally appropriate educational program, which targets people from 11-55 years of age and over. An agreed model has been developed in consultation with the town campers, whose needs and aspirations have driven the process. The model takes a community development approach, so the educational program revolves around projects and activities, which directly benefit the town camps involved, and leads to enterprise development and the creation of real work options for participants. At the heart of the model is Arrernte language and culture. The provision of education and training, and the health and well being of families is integrated in the model.

### **Differing urban and metropolitan needs**

9.71 In 1996, around 30 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians lived in major urban centres (100,000 people or more) compared to 63 per cent of the general population.<sup>37</sup> For the majority of Indigenous students in metropolitan centres, their choice of education is limited to mainstream provision, with some exceptions. English as a first language is the norm, which should indicate greater literacy proficiency than their remote and rural counterparts. It was reported to the Committee, however, that literacy problems were as pronounced in the city as in the country. Available data suggest that urban dwelling Indigenous people have higher levels of literacy than their non-urban dwelling counterparts but that they remain well

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36 Submission No. 9, Yirara College, vol. 1, p. 80

37 [www.gov.au](http://www.gov.au), Australia Now – A Statistical Profile, Special Article, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: A statistical profile from the 1996 Census*, p. 4

below the levels of non-Indigenous people. The NATSIEP had ensured improvements in the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, and the involvement of parents through ASSPA Committees, but more needed to be done. One Indigenous educator's perception was that in some cases the teaching of history was still not inclusive of Indigenous people and that mainstream teachers still needed cross cultural awareness training and support from greater numbers of Aboriginal Education Assistants.

9.72 Improved resources were also needed to address the lack of confidence and general education of Indigenous parents.<sup>38</sup> It was noted that many Indigenous parents had negative experiences at school themselves and found it difficult to promote school or to place the importance on schooling that would result in improved attendance and achievement. Family support for Indigenous students was identified as crucial in promoting attendance, and addressing the lack of confidence and general education of parents was seen an important factor.

9.73 The Manager of Aboriginal Programs in the NSW Department of Education and Training informed the Committee that Aboriginal History is a compulsory module in Stages 4 and 5 of the NSW Board of Studies History Syllabus. Aboriginal Education Consultants are located in district offices throughout the state to run workshops to assist teachers implement Aboriginal Perspectives across the Curriculum from K-Year 12. There has also been a Cross Cultural Awareness program delivered over the last three years to between 60 and 90 per cent of teachers, at an average cost of approximately \$1 million per annum. The Department intends to implement a similar program for new teachers once the current program is completed. It was noted, too, that 'confidence' courses *per se* were usually the province of the Adult Community Education sector, who have specific strategies to encourage Indigenous adults to participate. In contrast, TAFE is vocationally oriented and runs courses in response to communities expressing a need. However, a substantial percentage of Aboriginal TAFE students enrol in Aboriginal Art and Cultural Practices, in which a unit on Aboriginal Identity targets improved confidence and self-esteem.<sup>39</sup>

9.74 Despite greater access to services in metropolitan areas, submissions to the inquiry and subsequent requests for detail indicate that 'remoteness' and 'isolation' could be just as prevalent in 'The Block' in Redfern, or Mount Druitt and Penrith in Western Sydney as in Kalgoorlie, Bourke, or Papunya. Metropolitan schools contacted by the Committee spoke of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage in the Indigenous community as the major contributing factor to high levels of absenteeism, transiency, lack of punctuality, and literacy problems. The President of the Mt Druitt AECG, Ms Christine Forshew, spoke of children as young as 12 years old being lost to the system, and other school age children presenting with huge gaps in their

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38 Comments from Bruce Kendall, Eora Centre, Redfern, 22 November 1999

39 Comments from Pam Gill, Manager, Aboriginal Programs, NSW Department of Education and Training, 23 November 1999

education. Options to access an appropriate education for such children were extremely limited. Of more concern to the Committee was Ms Forshew's assertion that government agencies were bypassing established AECGs and other Indigenous bodies in matters where consultation with Indigenous people was critical. This was usually in relation to funding for programs for Indigenous youth. In some cases AECGs were ineffective in coordinating partnerships, good relations and leadership.<sup>40</sup>

9.75 'Discrimination, racism, colonial structures and attitudes and neo-tribal imperialism' were said to impact adversely on Aboriginal staff working as facilitators between the wider community and the Indigenous community, as well as undermining the community as a resource. Factionalism between family and community groups and organisations was also said to be detrimental to initiatives aimed at assisting youth, and Indigenous advancement generally, as well as impacting on efficient service delivery.<sup>41</sup> The Committee was advised that sometimes ASSPA committees and AECGs were not always aligned in their views.<sup>42</sup>

9.76 Indigenous students are often scattered across a number of metropolitan schools. The result of such a dispersed student body often means that small numbers of Indigenous students in a range of metropolitan schools do not benefit from some of the initiatives that would flow on to larger numbers of students. In contrast to this view, the Principal at Redfern Public School mentioned that the school's Indigenous student body was drawn from surrounding suburbs, mainly because it was seen as a Koori school. Resources and initiatives included a Reading Recovery program, two Aboriginal Education Assistants, an Aboriginal Resource Teacher, four classroom teachers, and part time specialists in ESL and Specific Teacher Learning Difficulties.<sup>43</sup>

9.77 The success of Meekaway Aboriginal Pre-School in Geraldton was replicated in metropolitan Sydney. Two inner-city Indigenous pre-Schools, Murawina, located in 'The Block', and Wannanbiri, established at the Cleveland Street High School campus, were praised for providing a 'good start' to Indigenous children's education. An eight week term 4 'Kids to Kindy' program had been developed as a transition program for pre-schoolers from Murawina going on to Redfern Public School, and this was viewed positively for consolidating the good start at pre-school.<sup>44</sup>

9.78 Co-operation between inner city schools optimises the sharing of best practice and resources. Cleveland Street High School (55 per cent Indigenous students) was working with Redfern Public School (57 per cent), Waterloo Public School (25 per cent and growing) and Alexandria Public School (20 per cent) on developing

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40 Comments from Christine Forshew, President, Mt Druitt AECG, 22 November 1999

41 Briefing Paper, from Christine Forshew, President, Mt Druitt AECG, 23 November 1999

42 Comments from Pam Gill, Manager, Aboriginal Programs, Department of Education and Training 23 November, 1999

43 Comments from Cheryl Robens, Principal, Redfern Public School, 22 November 1999

44 Comments from Cheryl Robens, Principal, Redfern Public School, 22 November 1999

measures for keeping Grade 5 to 8 students in school and optimising their educational outcomes. Although this was an initiative covering all students, the high numbers of Indigenous students in these schools ensures a focus on issues specific to them.<sup>45</sup> Redfern Public School and Darlington Primary School are to share a school bus funded by a local Indigenous group. One inner-city Principal stated that instead of viewing attendance and punctuality as a problem created by Indigenous people, it should be viewed as a public transport problem. She stated that adequate public transport was not available to inner-city families who lived in close proximity to their schools, unlike their suburban counterparts who traversed many suburbs to attend school. She had noted an increase in attendance and improved punctuality when a school bus provided transport for inner-city families. 'If you have a family of six kids and it's a rainy day, its easier to keep the children at home than worry about how to get them there on time'.<sup>46</sup>

9.79 Cleveland Street High School is addressing problems facing Indigenous students with a range of strategies underpinned by strong links and relationships with community organisations. The school recognises that Indigenous students feel more comfortable in a predominantly non-Indigenous setting if they are part of a larger group. The school has adopted an integrated, inter-agency approach, and runs Secondary Schools/TAFE programs in partnership with the Eora Centre at Redfern, which is part of the TAFE system but well known for its education and training provision to Indigenous people. The school also undertakes special initiatives such as the Koori Youth Program, and have been funded to run an Aboriginal Literacy Stage 6 Program. Attendance is maximised by the provision of a school bus run every morning and the employment of Indigenous Home-School Liaison Officers, who are viewed as critical in improving attendance and tracking transient students.

9.80 Tracking students is a major issue for Cleveland Street High School. There is a 60 per cent turnover in the Indigenous student population, and this creates many difficulties for students and staff alike. Every student coming into the school in Grade 10 or below is tested for literacy and, depending on the results of this test, is slotted into an intensive reading program of three 75 minute sessions each week. Underpinning this is a comprehensive student welfare safety net involving many different agencies, without which classroom learning would be severely diminished. The Principal said that the value of this student welfare safety net has only been realised over the past two or three years. She praised her teaching staff for their flexibility and professionalism. Teachers are never sure who is going to turn up in their classes on any given day. Continuity of good teaching staff was viewed as one of the bonuses of working in a metropolitan school.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Comments from Peter Spiers, Acting Principal, Cleveland Street High School, 22 November 1999

46 Comments from Principal, Darlington Public School, 22 November 1999

47 Comments from Sue Holden, Principal, Cleveland Street High School, 23 November, 1999

9.81 The NSW Department of Education and Training funds Year 11 and 12 students, both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, from all over the metropolitan area to attend the Aboriginal Studies Access Program at Cleveland Street High School. This subject is part of the Higher School Certificate syllabus.

9.82 The submission from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) outlined details about the Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) project, an initiative of the Victorian Department of Education and the VAEAI, begun in 1995. The project operates in three Victorian State schools, one located in metropolitan Glenroy. KODE schools take a whole of family or inter-generational approach. Schools interested in becoming a KODE school must have the capacity to run a program from early childhood to Year 12, have a stipulated information technology infrastructure, be prepared to facilitate self-determination within the Koorie community, and involve the wider community in intensive consultation. There is a standard particular participative process involved in the planning and implementation of a KODE school, including calling for expressions of interest, and visiting the community to consult with Indigenous people and the wider community. A local task force is then established.

9.83 The curriculum seeks to meet the needs of Koorie students and the community by providing a Koorie inclusive curriculum. Attention to cultural maintenance, Aboriginal pedagogy, appropriate support for students, sensitising teachers to issues affecting Indigenous students, and maximum Koorie participation in all aspects of schooling, especially through Koorie representation on Campus Councils, are other important aspects affecting the curriculum.<sup>48</sup>

9.84 An initial review of the existing KODE schools is currently before the Victorian Minister for Education, but early indications of success are improved participation and retention rates, and reduced numbers of youth on the streets or in conflict with the police. One difficulty in metropolitan Glenroy is that Indigenous students travel from surrounding suburbs to school but do not interact outside school hours, diminishing the positive effects of the family approach. However, the VAEAI and interested people are currently discussing this with a view to improving social interaction on weekends.<sup>49</sup>

9.85 Tauondi College is an independent post-secondary education provider based in Port Adelaide. The College caters specifically for Indigenous students and provides both accredited VET sector courses and non-accredited adult education courses. One of the principal roles for the College has been to take students who do not fit into mainstream institutions. The College currently has about 240 students. All enrolled students are studying accredited courses, although they can elect to undertake some non-accredited courses as part of their studies. Community members are also invited

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48 Briefing Paper from Lionel Bamblett, VAEAI, 19 November 1999

49 Submission No. 20, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, vol. 2, p. 78, and comments from Lionel Bamblett, VAEAI, 19 November 1999

to take part in the non-accredited courses. About twenty community members were taking part in short non-accredited courses offered by the College in 1999. There was said to be increasing interest from community members in the short courses.

9.86 One of the main difficulties for the College is dealing with the complex emotional and social needs of students who come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds. The College puts a strong emphasis on addressing the cultural, health and social welfare needs of students. Courses run by the College include Aboriginal cultural instruction, tour guiding, art and design, community services/community development, and community services/primary health care. The primary health care course was not run in 1999 due to insufficient numbers.

### **Conclusion**

9.87 This chapter has documented some of the diverse educational arrangements encountered by the Committee in the course of the inquiry. This diversity reflects the high level of cultural, social and geographic diversity among Indigenous communities. Most of the reports and inquiries undertaken over the last ten years have sought to take this diversity into account but there have been criticisms of the way in which it has been done. Some commentators argue that the NATSIEP contains rather than encourages diversity by favouring particular models of educational disadvantage. Cultural models, for example, fail to reflect the wishes of those communities seeking access to mainstream educational opportunities. Other submissions to the inquiry, however, criticised the policy for failing to allow real self determination and community control of educational institutions. This was highlighted in particular in relation to adult education.

9.88 The Committee was encouraged by the diversity of educational arrangements encountered in the course of the inquiry but recognises that this diversity was in many cases one of content and method rather than structure. The NATSIEP appears to have facilitated the introduction of more diverse curricula and teaching practices in schools and other educational institutions. In most instances, Indigenous communities have been involved in these changes. Some of the results have been documented in this chapter. Many people pointed to the real and potential benefits of these changes for Indigenous students. What was less apparent to the Committee was whether the NATSIEP had done enough to facilitate diversity in structural arrangements. The Committee received evidence from only a few community controlled institutions, but was made aware of some of the barriers to community control of education. These barriers have been documented in various inquiries and reports. The community controlled institutions encountered in the course of the inquiry appeared to be providing a valuable service to Indigenous communities, particularly in catering for students who had experienced little success in mainstream educational institutions. Their importance needs to be recognised and supported by governments. The Committee is equally aware, however, that not all Indigenous people see community control as a priority. Governments need to keep in mind that Indigenous communities have diverse expectations of education and that access to good mainstream services will be a significant priority for many. Empowering Indigenous people 'to exercise the



maximum degree of choice in education', as recommended in the National Review, means providing Indigenous people with the alternatives to choose from.<sup>50</sup>

#### **Recommendation 34**

**9.89 The Committee recommends that the Minister initiate through MCEETYA a review of current processes for determining the allocation of capital works grants to schools with a substantial Indigenous enrolment.**

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50 *ibid.*, p. 27

