

Committee Secretary
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

I am pleased to provide the Western Australian Department of Education and Training's submission to the *Australian Government Senate Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education 2007*.

The attached response provides an outline of the Department's programs and strategies that address student academic and social standards. The response also includes other information relevant to the inquiry.

Please contact Ms Christine Cook, A/Executive Director, Curriculum Standards on (08) 9264 5068 to discuss any aspect of our response.

Yours sincerely

SHARYN O'NEILL
A/DIRECTOR GENERAL

Att.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PURPOSE

The following has been collated on behalf of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training for submission to the Australian Government Senate Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education 2007.

A focus on high standards of academic and social achievement underpins all of the Department's plans, strategies and programs. Western Australian public schools continue to perform well against national and international performance measures. The Department's accountability frameworks provide the basis for a model of continuous improvement.

ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

This submission provides a brief overview of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and addresses each of the Terms of Reference (ToR) questions.

The response to ToR question 1 includes an overview of student performance in System Assessments. This information indicates the extent to which our programs are addressing the needs of students in some learning areas and domains. It also provides an overview of the standards that students are achieving in those years of schooling that are considered to be transitional.

Additional student performance information in random sample testing is available upon request.

The submission also includes an outline of a range of the Department's programs, policies and frameworks which are in place to improve standards of all students.

The information provided in the response to ToR question 2 provides an overview of senior schooling within Western Australian public schools. Whilst the response is brief, the standards required of students engaged in senior schooling are clearly outlined.

The response to ToR question 3 provides a broad outline of how the performance of Western Australian public school students compares to those in other education jurisdictions within and outside of Australia. The response also provides an overview of senior schooling and additional information on the Department's Educational Measurement and School Accountability processes.

OVERVIEW OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The aim of the public school system is to ensure all public school students have ongoing opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence and values to achieve their individual potential and contribute to the social and economic development of Western Australia.

There are 771 public schools educating 247 543 students. In August 2006, there were 543 public primary schools with 153 806 students, 93 secondary schools with 70 901 students, and 59 district high schools with 18 360 students. Included within the total number of schools are 70 education support schools and centres with 3 689 students. Well over half of all public schools are in the metropolitan area and enrol 68 per cent of all public school students. The 345 public schools in rural and remote areas enrolled 79 293 students in August 2006. For students who

do not attend mainstream schools, there are additional specialised services, including campuses of the WA College of Agriculture and the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education.

Public schools are distributed among 14 districts, ranging in size from Fremantle-Peel with 56 361 students and 131 schools, to Esperance with 20 schools and 3 290 students. The other districts are Albany, Bunbury, Canning, Goldfields, Kimberley, Midlands, Mid West, Narrogin, Pilbara, Swan, Warren-Blackwood and West Coast.

Districts support schools through an emphasis on localised approaches and strong relationships between schools and district directors. District directors have responsibility for the performance of schools across their district and are required to develop agreed performance expectations with school leaders, to be communicated through individual performance plans for principals and in-school planning processes. An important role of the district director includes the negotiation of support to schools in the areas of curriculum, student services and corporate services to assist in the achievement of the performance levels that have been set.

The Department's mission is to provide world-class education and training to meet the needs of individuals, the community and the economy of Western Australia.

The Department is responsible for:

- planning, resourcing, managing and delivering high quality public school education accessible to all Western Australians
- planning, funding and strategic development of vocational education and training (VET) to meet the needs of students, employers and the community
- administering legislation that governs the provision of education and training in Western Australia, including the:
 - *School Education Act 1999*
 - *Vocational Education and Training Act 1996*
 - *Industrial Training Act 1975*
 - *Public Education Endowment Act 1909*
- providing strong leadership and strategic advice to all levels of Government on education and training.

The *Plan for Government Schools 2004-2007* sets out the strategies for ensuring that all students in the public school system achieve the highest possible standards of learning.

Western Australian public schools have made excellent progress in achieving the objectives of the Plan. In 2007, the Department released a document entitled *Focus 2007*, clarifying for school staff the priorities for 2007. It describes particular requirements related to student learning, behaviour, health and wellbeing and the expectations that all our staff will maintain the highest standards of professional conduct.

The confidence of the public in the Department relies upon its ability to provide high quality education to all students in safe learning environments.

Focus 2007 also outlines the way in which central and district offices will support schools to address these priorities and to build on the progress made from 2004 to 2006.

Focus 2007 priorities are:

- progress the full implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* and *Outcomes and Standards Framework*
- standards in literacy and numeracy
- building capacity in assessment, moderation and reporting
- standards in science
- standards of student behaviour, wellbeing and health
- professional standards and conduct.

Schools address these focus areas in their own ways, in the context of systemic strategies.

POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

The Western Australian K-12 *Curriculum Framework* includes Overarching (*Generic*) and Learning Area Outcomes that students achieve as a result of their schooling. The implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* in public schools is predominately supported through the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*, *Curriculum Guides* and the *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines*.

The *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines* reflects:

- a continued focus on sustainable curriculum reform grounded in meeting the learning needs of students;
- a recognition of the value of teacher professional judgements in monitoring, evaluating and reporting on students' learning; and
- continued support for whole-school approaches to planning, delivering and assessing learning.

Through performance management (teachers and administrators), school review and general compliance processes, the Department ensures that the frameworks and policies are being followed and that schools are continually seeking to improve outcomes for students.

Through standardised testing processes the Department monitors standards and provides specific support to ensure the testing data is used as an evidence base for improvement planning and action. Additional support is provided through a suite of professional development and support programs to build the capacity of teachers to deliver effective programs that align with frameworks and policies. The imminent reintroduction of syllabuses will provide additional support in these key areas. Large scale evaluations of structures, strategies and programs to inform future directions are regularly performed.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE QUESTION 1

- Q1. *Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:*
- a. the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and*
 - b. the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.*

The Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) Program (Years 3, 5 and 7 students)

In August 2006, the performance of some 78,000 Years 3, 5 and 7 students throughout the State in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy was assessed through the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) program.

The assessment program began in 1998, when Year 3 students were assessed in literacy. In 1999, the program was extended to include Year 5 students and to assess numeracy as well. In 2001, it was further extended to include Year 7 students.

Students who were in Year 7 in 2006 were assessed through WALNA in 2002 when they were in Year 3 and in 2004 when they were in Year 5. Students in Year 5 in 2006 were assessed through WALNA in 2004 when they were in Year 3. The statistical procedures used allow valid comparisons to be made of their performance over time.

Reporting

Three kinds of reports are generated from the WALNA data.

Schools provide parents with individual reports in addition to normal second semester reporting procedures. As is the case with all student reports, these are confidential communications between schools and parents.

Class reports, which contain significant diagnostic information, are provided for teachers.

School reports summarise overall school performance. The data in them are useful resources for school planning.

Participation

All Western Australian schools participate in the WALNA program.

In 2006, about 94 per cent of eligible students were assessed. These students included the first full cohort of Year 3 students resulting from the increase to the age of school entry.

This Year 3 cohort was, on average, about three months older than the 2005 cohort and six months older than previous Year 3 cohorts.

Using the results

WALNA helps schools to identify strengths and weaknesses in individual student and whole-class performance so teachers can focus their programs on students' needs.

Most schools in WA participate in *Data Club*, a program that assists them to interpret results for improvement and accountability purposes.

Assessment Literacy, a professional development program, helps classroom teachers to derive diagnostic information from their student and class results and provide programs for all students, including those at risk of not achieving the benchmarks.

Performance of Years 3, 5 And 7 Students Western Australia (WALNA 2006)

Trends in reading, writing and numeracy

There has been a relatively stable pattern in the mean scores of students in Years 3, 5 and 7 since testing began. However, some variations have emerged in relation to student sub-groups.

Boys and girls

Girls outperform boys at all year levels in reading and writing. In reading in all year levels and across time, this difference is of a similar magnitude. However, in writing the difference increases with student age.

In numeracy, the performance of girls and boys is similar in Year 3 but boys tend to perform slightly better as students grow older.

Students with Language Backgrounds Other than English (LBOTE)

In Years 3, 5 and 7, the reading performance of LBOTE students over time has been slightly below that of the whole population, with the gap increasing slightly with student age. In Years 3 and 5, LBOTE students' reading performance has been commensurate with that of boys as a whole, while Year 7 LBOTE students' reading performance has been slightly below that of boys as a whole.

In writing, Year 5 performance has improved over time and in recent years has been slightly better than that of the whole population. In Years 3 and 7, LBOTE students' performance is similar to that of the whole cohort.

The numeracy performance of LBOTE students in Years 5 and 7 has remained stable, but in Year 3 there has been a recent drop in performance in relation to the whole year cohort.

Any fluctuations can be attributed to the relatively small numbers of students in this cohort, which can affect the volatility of data and care should be taken in their interpretation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students

Long term trends (since the 2nd year of population testing) show a steady performance in ATSI Reading in Years 3, 5 and 7. In recent times, however, there has been a decline in Years 5 and 7.

In writing, there has been long-term improvement in Year 3 ATSI students' performance and Year 7 performance has been steady. Year 5 performance has shown a decline in recent years but that appears to be slowing.

In numeracy, there has been a long-term decline in Years 3 and 5, while Year 7 performance has remained steady.

Variations in the year-to-year performance of ATSI students are, for the most part, similar to those of the whole population. However, as for the LBOTE cohort fluctuations can be attributed to the relatively small numbers of students in this cohort, which can affect the volatility of data and care should be taken in their interpretation.

Attachment 1 *Performance of Years 3, 5 and 7 Students, Western Australia, WALNA 2006* contains additional information on student performance, including graphical representations of whole of population and sub – group performance.

Monitoring Standards in Education Year 9 (MSE9) Assessment Program

The Monitoring Standards in Education Year 9 (MSE9) assessment program was introduced in 2004 in response to the needs of parents and educators for the system to provide student and school information about the performance of Year 9 students.

English and mathematics were assessed in 2004, and in 2005 science was introduced. In 2006, english, mathematics and science were assessed.

The most recent assessments were conducted in August 2006 and nearly 16,000 Year 9 students from all Western Australian public schools participated. Most students from the Independent and Catholic education sectors also participated.

Comparisons with WALNA

The mathematics and reading results of the MSE9 assessment are statistically equated to the existing MSE historical achievement scales. Achievement is measured in the WAMSE (Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education) unit on scales that run from 0 to 800.

As Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) results are also equated to these scales, it is possible to compare performances across year groups and across time within the assessed areas.

Students who were in Year 9 in 2006 were assessed through WALNA in 2004 and performance in mathematics and reading can be compared across these years.

Participation

Approximately 95% of all public school Year 9 students participated in at least one aspect of the MSE9 assessment. This compares to 94% in 2005 and 89% in 2004.

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students from public schools who sat the assessment was 77%, compared with 76% in 2005 and 70% in 2004.

The Assessments

The assessment tasks were developed specifically for Western Australian schools through a collaborative effort between educators from Western Australian schools, district education offices, the Monitoring Standards in Education team and the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER).

MSE9 2006 consisted of assessments in english, mathematics and science:

Learning area	Assessment 1	Assessment 2
English	Reading	Writing
Mathematics ^(a)	Space and Measurement	Number Algebra Chance and Data
Science ^(b)	Natural and Processed Materials Earth and Beyond	Life and Living Energy and Change

(a) Both assessments contained Working Mathematically questions.

(b) Both assessments contained Investigating questions.

The reports

Three kinds of reports are generated from the MSE9 data. Schools provide parents with individual student reports in addition to normal second semester reporting procedures. As is the case with all student reports, these are confidential communications between schools and parents.

Class reports, which contain significant diagnostic information, are provided for teachers. School reports summarise overall school performance. The data in these reports are useful for school planning.

Using the results

MSE9 helps schools to identify strengths and weaknesses in individual student and whole-class performance so teachers can focus their programs on students' needs.

The assessment results also allow administrators to monitor the effectiveness of school programs.

As with the WALNA assessment, most secondary schools in WA participate in *Data Club*, a program that assists them to interpret results for improvement and accountability purposes. Similarly, schools access additional support through the *Assessment Literacy* program.

MSE9 Performance Summary

Performance in relation to the Western Australian Government School Achievement Targets. The Western Australian Government School Achievement Targets (WAGSATs) were developed in 2004 to describe challenging but achievable levels of performance and represent proficient academic performance.

Schools have been provided with information about their performance against the Year 9 WAGSATs.

Performance – mean and distribution

The mean scores and distributions of Year 9 performance in reading, writing, mathematics and science have been relatively stable over the period of testing. There are, however, some differences that have emerged in relation to student sub-groups.

Boys and girls

In mathematics and science, the mean performance of boys and girls was similar. In writing and reading, the mean performance of girls was higher than boys. In writing, the mean performance of girls was 41 WAMSEs higher (47 in 2005) and in reading, the mean performance of girls was 17 WAMSEs higher (20 in 2005).

Students with Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE)

In mathematics and writing, the mean performance of LBOTE students was higher than that of the whole population. In science and reading, the mean performance was lower than that of the whole population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students

The mean performance of ATSI students was lower than that of the whole population in all aspects of the assessment program.

Variations in the year-to-year performance of ATSI students parallel those of the whole population and are generally of a similar magnitude. In some cases, improvements in ATSI performance, such as in mathematics from 2004 to 2005 and in writing from 2005 to 2006, are greater than those of the whole population.

Fluctuations, however, can be attributed to the relatively small numbers of students in this cohort, which can affect the volatility of data and care should be taken in their interpretation.

District performance

The district performance graphs summarise the distribution of the Year 9 cohort of each district.

The number of students in each district varies considerably. For example, numbers of students who sat the writing assessment range from 186 in the Kimberley district and 238 in the Esperance district to 3,186 in the West Coast district and 3,565 in the Fremantle-Peel district.

Sub-group information is not given for districts because extremely low numbers in some districts could allow the identification of individual students.

Attachment 2, *Performance of Year 9 students in public schools MSE9 2006* contains additional information on student performance, including graphical representations of whole of population and sub – group performance.

Performance of Senior School Students

The Post Compulsory Academic Performance Project Team, established in 2004, has developed in both scope and significance of support offered to schools. Now established as the Senior Schooling Academic Standards and Support Directorate (SSASS), schools are provided with support in relation to Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE), Vocational Education And Training (VET) and Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects, and secondary graduation.

Teacher Development Centres (TDCs) are a further key support strategy offered by SSASS designed to help with the successful implementation of the new Courses of Study (CoS) in public schools. Administrators and teachers are able to access high level expertise from consultants who have demonstrated exemplary practice in their fields.

Each TDC has a two and a half year lifespan. TDCs are located in senior high schools, with staff selected via a merit process. TDC Coordinators coordinate the development and dissemination of teaching programs, assessment items and classroom resources; coordinate action research initiatives; and identify issues requiring clarification.

In 2007, efforts continue to recognise and promote academic excellence in public schools. This included the provision of revision scholarships, the continuation of a \$1 000 Best and Brightest Award for the most outstanding student in each school and its expansion to now include both TEE and WSA Duxes, the promotion of individual and/or specific school achievements and the promotion of successes with the publication of an Honour Board listing the TEE and WSA Dux of each school. The alignment of Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) under SSASS is further designed to promote and develop the provision of excellent education programs offered in public schools. A review of existing GATE policies and procedures is currently underway.

Successful strategies such as the provision of revision scholarships, the Best and Brightest Awards and promotion of individual/school achievements will continue. In addition, schools experiencing difficulties in managing moderation activities will continue to be given support.

The Curriculum Council report *Our Youth, Our Future*, launched in March 2002, outlines the processes for developing and implementing a new Course of Study curriculum, assessment and certification system for Years 11 and 12.

Approximately 50 Courses are being implemented in phases. Phase 1 began with Aviation, which was implemented in 2005, and also included English, Engineering Studies and Media Production and Analysis which were introduced in 2006. Four Phase 2 courses have been

implemented in 2007, with the remaining 31 courses to be implemented in 2008 – 2010 after refinement through consultation with practising teachers.

The implementation of the Phase 2 and Phase 3 courses has involved extensive consultation and review to resolve assessment and workload issues, including recent establishment of teacher juries to ensure full consultation with teachers.

Prior to full implementation of the courses, all teachers teaching a course of study will participate in five days of professional development. This involves delivery to an anticipated 6500 teachers across all sectors, with the Curriculum Council committing to train up to 362 trainers. The Department has nominated suitable teachers as part of a cross-sectoral agreement.

A communication strategy has been developed to address the information needs of parents, students, teachers and school administrators.

The Senior Schooling Academic Standards and Support Directorate together with the current and planned Teacher Development Centres, provide public secondary teachers with leadership and support in the implementation and ongoing management of the new courses.

The Department of Education and Training has had a significant impact in improving academic standards and thus enhance the public perception of achievement and standards in public schools. In 2007, the intention is to continue supporting schools in analysing their performance data and in disseminating successful strategies for improvement.

Statistics have been developed over time as data has become available. Improvement in student performance is demonstrated by:

	2001	2004	2005	2006
General exhibitions	25%	42%	28%	37%
Subject Exhibitions	44%	42%	45%	46%
Certificates of Distinction	not available	not available	40%	42%
Median TER*	74.2	75.7	77.7	79.9
Graduation rates	not available	93.2%	93.8%	94.4%

TER – Tertiary Entrance Rank – used to gain entrance to University.

PROGRAMS SUPPORTING THE ATTAINMENT OF HIGH STANDARDS

The goal of achieving high standards is supported by a range of programs which are adapted regularly in response to student and teachers' needs, following analysis of student achievement data.

Curriculum Improvement Program

The Curriculum Improvement Program commenced in 1999 to support Western Australian public school teachers with the implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* in an outcomes and standards paradigm. The second phase of the Curriculum Improvement Program (CIP2) commenced in 2003 and focussed on providing teachers with additional support in the following key areas:

- policy simplification and a review of reporting to parents
- standards and the use of the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*
- quality support for pedagogy in the form of professional learning and support materials.

A priority of the Department is to listen to practising teachers and administrators about managing change and to value their professional views about teaching and learning. Recently, an *Evaluation of the Curriculum Improvement Program Phase 2* was conducted to determine how effectively the Department has been in supporting teachers in these key areas. The report of the evaluation provided the Department with valuable feedback from teachers, administrators and other key groups. The report is available at: www.det.wa.edu.au.

The Department will address the findings of this report, particularly workload issues related to teaching, assessment and reporting so that teachers can concentrate on good teaching. This will allow the Department and teachers to remain focused on ensuring all students achieve high standards.

The Department will take action to reduce work pressure by:

1. providing greater clarity about what to teach and assess
2. supporting teachers with syllabuses and practical resources that lessen the need for individual teachers to develop curriculum at the school level
3. enabling teachers to assess students using methods with which they are comfortable
4. assisting teachers to report formally each semester using grades.

Syllabuses and Practical Support

The Department is developing K-10 Syllabuses to support teachers in the ongoing implementation of the *Curriculum Framework*. Syllabuses focus on explicit information about what content (specific knowledge, skills, understandings and values) teachers should teach in each phase of learning from K-10.

The content described within the K-10 Syllabuses also exemplifies for teachers the common and agreed goals for schooling agreed by State and Territory governments and articulated within the *1999 Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals of Schooling*. National Consistency in Curriculum Outcomes Statements of Learning and Professional Elaborations for English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have been embedded within the K-10 Syllabuses. These statements set out the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities that students in Australia should have the opportunity to learn and develop in the English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship and ICT domains.

K-10 Syllabuses and associated resources will support teachers in preparing students to contribute to the global community by selecting, using and adapting technologies in a critical way. The Syllabuses encourage student engagement in cultural contexts emerging in the digital age as described in the *Curriculum Framework's* Overarching Outcomes.

K-10 Syllabuses will assist teachers to adapt their teaching and learning programs and practices to meet the needs of the 21st Century student. This is complemented by the Department's Learning with ICT professional learning program and the development of the Schools Online Curriculum Services.

Early Childhood Education

Research demonstrates the benefits to children of participating in quality kindergarten and pre-primary programs. These programs promote positive dispositions for learning and facilitate successful transition to the compulsory school years, particularly for children at risk. The research also demonstrates that parental involvement enhances these benefits.

Western Australia has two years of pre-compulsory education, both of which are available to all eligible children. The first year of pre-compulsory education, *kindergarten*, is available to children who reach four years of age by 30 June in the kindergarten year. The second year of pre-compulsory education, *pre-primary*, is available to children who reach five years of age by 30 June in the pre-primary year. Children born in the second half of the year are enrolled at the beginning of the following year. The age at which children become eligible to enter pre-compulsory education are similar to those of a number of other Australian States and Territories, which is of benefit to families moving between states and territories.

Pre-compulsory education programs focus on children's social, emotional, physical, development and literacy and numeracy learning as the foundation for school and life-long learning. There is an increasing emphasis on establishing positive interactions between parents/caregivers and staff in pre-compulsory education programs as the foundation for ongoing, meaningful relationships.

Kindergarten programs may be offered as four half days, two full days or a combination of half and full days per week. The pre-primary program is five full school days per week. Families are not required to pay fees or charges for their children to attend pre-compulsory education programs.

In February 2006, 36 431 children were enrolled in pre-compulsory education programs in public schools. This comprised 17 071 children in kindergarten programs and 19 360 children in pre-primary. The 17 071 enrolments in kindergarten include 1272 children enrolled in 39 community kindergartens that operate under the *School Education Act 1999*. Community kindergartens receive an annual operating grant from DET, all staff, including teachers and education assistants are employed by DET. Parent Management Committees are responsible for financial management and day-to-day operations of community kindergartens.

An Early Childhood Education Directorate was established in 2006 to reflect the growing acknowledgement of the importance of the early years. The Directorate is responsible for providing policy advice on provision and curriculum for children in Kindergarten to Year 3. The Directorate is also responsible for Community Kindergartens and the Home-School Links aspect of the Family Links Initiative and initiatives for children 0-4 years within a 0-8 context.

The Early Childhood Education Directorate has the following four strategic focus areas:

1. Consultation, communication and coordination. This includes statewide school and district consultation; the establishment of advisory and steering groups and the development of a comprehensive communication and marketing strategy;
2. Provision of increased leadership opportunities to promote the professional status of early childhood teachers including the establishment of strategic partnerships with allied professional;
3. Defining high quality early learning/education and developing resources to support classroom teachers and schools including through the development of a Department of Education and Training Early Childhood Position and the coordination of teacher support materials; and
4. Leading the early childhood education agenda within a 0-8 context through collaboration with government and non-government agencies to support positive learning and development outcomes for children 0-8 years.

Early childhood education officers continue to be involved in working across Department directorates, and when appropriate, liaising with other agencies, to ensure young children achieve positive outcomes and establish firm foundations for future learning. Officers support Kindergarten to Year 3 programs and are working with schools and relevant agencies to determine how children and families can best be supported prior to schooling.

Western Australia has led the nation by guaranteeing all eligible Western Australian children a place in kindergarten, (two years prior to compulsory schooling) at a public school as near as possible to their home.

Parental involvement in children's education is an important element in preparing young children for learning and maximising the effectiveness of schooling. Parents are the first and the most important teachers in every child's life. The Department remains committed to maintaining parental choice, and wherever possible, reducing the stress, financial burden and travel demands experienced by families with young children, but most importantly to ensuring that all children are given the best possible start. To this end, the Department will continue to work towards providing easier access to public school kindergarten and pre-primary programs for those families who choose it – ideally at their local public school.

The *Family Links* initiative encourages parents and extended family members to become actively involved in young children's education. The Home School Links strategy, part of the Family Links initiative, was established in 2003. It was re-focused in 2005/06 to provide greater support for schools to improve relationships between families and schools thereby improving educational outcomes for students in the early years.

The revised program focuses on the building of positive relationships with families through effective communication and the development of a range of strategies supporting educators working with families from diverse backgrounds. Twenty four nominated schools receive support in conducting activities that welcome parents/caregivers and inform them about school life and helping their child's learning in the home environment.

Reporting to parents about student progress and achievement in the pre-compulsory years is frequent, focused, supported by evidence and provides the basis for on-going, positive relationships with parents/caregivers. Parents/caregivers of children in these years are entitled to receive two formal reports a years focusing on literacy, numeracy, social and emotional, and physical learning and development. The format and style of these reports are determined by the school in consultation with parent/caregivers.

Implementation of the *Pathways to Social and Emotional Development* resource provides explicit information for classroom teachers about how to promote the social and emotional development of children critical to optimising academic and social outcomes.

To support teachers in monitoring and reporting on children's progress the *Kindergarten and Pre-primary Profile* has been developed. The profile aligns to the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* and the philosophy underpinning the *Curriculum Framework*. The *Profile* assists teachers to monitor children's progress in six areas, literacy, numeracy, social and emotional development, physical development, creativity, and knowledge and understanding of the world. It is intended for sharing with parents/caregivers throughout the pre-compulsory years. The *Profile* was trialled in 2005 and received predominantly positive feedback, particularly from parents/caregivers. Following minor adjustments it has been widely available from mid-2006.

Literacy and Numeracy

The Department is committed to high standards of literacy and numeracy achievement for all students. It recognises the need to support the on-going development of teachers' professional knowledge and expertise. We know that teachers make the biggest difference to student performance when they know their students, know the outcomes and know how to match teaching practice to individual needs.

The Department has established a range of complementary and strategically focused initiatives targeting literacy and numeracy improvement across public schools. Different initiatives target different groups and schools. The common factor and point of cohesion is a clear focus on diagnosing and monitoring the progress of underperforming students and the development of effective literacy and numeracy programs. The major elements of programs are:

- enhanced tools for profiling and tracking students oral language; and
- additional support for teachers in the different phases of schooling.

A range of diagnostic and profiling tools, linked to the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*, are available to teachers to assist in identifying and monitoring those students who require additional support in their literacy and numeracy development. The revised *Literacy and Numeracy Nets* support teachers in monitoring individuals and groups of students in relation to critical aspects of the outcomes for literacy and numeracy. The English for English as a Second Language/English as a Second Dialect (ESL/ESD) Progress Maps, currently being trialled, support teaching in planning for and monitoring student acquisition of Standard Australian English.

Getting it Right, English as a Second Language and Aboriginal Education specialist literacy and numeracy teachers (primary and secondary) receive additional training to diagnose and profile students whose progress is of concern. Documented plans for individual students or groups of students whose performance is below expected levels are developed. The Department's *Getting it Right* Strategy of placing literacy and or numeracy specialists in schools was recently reviewed by the Australian Council for Education Research, with the director claiming it was the best model of professional development he had seen both across Australian and internationally. Dr Ken Rowe in his recent review into the teaching of literacy also cited the model of specialist teachers in schools as one of the most effective means for improving literacy outcomes.

The Department implements the internationally acclaimed *First Steps* in English and Mathematics Professional Learning programs with the accompanying resource materials. These professional learning and support materials enable school staff to accurately diagnose the literacy and numeracy needs of primary aged students and to better target teaching strategies.

Assessment Literacy

The Assessment Literacy program aims to create an organisational culture of evidence-based decision making, to be sustained through building high levels of confidence in the way in which students performance is judged.

The focus of the program is on developing skills of school staff in the collection, analysis and use of student performance information. The project supports classroom monitoring, assessment, planning and the making of consistent judgements of student achievement using the Department's standards framework.

The program aims to strengthen strategic planning, performance and accountability processes focused on outcomes, standards, benchmarks and targets establish through Departmental policy, guidelines and frameworks.

The outcomes-focused process, that leads to improved and high standards of student achievement, is fundamental to and dependant on the creation of data, judgements, information and decision made in relation to student performance at the school and classroom level.

Assessment Literacy professional support programs and resources assists the role of Directors, principals and schools in conducting self-assessments centred around student performance, the collection of data, reporting standards and responding with appropriate improvement plans. It supports the sharing of student achievement information across phases of schooling and schools and assists in the evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching programs.

In 2007 this work will continue and be extended to the development of resources and support to improve teachers' classroom practices. This includes online resource. The aim is to enable more precise and personalised instruction in meeting student needs.

Consistency of Teacher Judgements

The Making Consistent Judgements (MCJ) professional learning modules assist teachers to make judgements of students' attainment of Achievement Targets (standards). Achievement Targets define realistic yet challenging targets for student progress in particular year levels and learning areas outcomes. The Achievement Targets are defined at Years 3, 5, 7 & 9 and reflect the different emphases in the curriculum within the phases of schooling.

The purpose of the Achievement Targets is to provide a focus for school and teaching improvements, enable the collection of system-level information and provide parents with comparative student performance information. This builds public confidence in the ability of teachers to accurately report judgements about student progress in relation to the standards as described in the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*.

MCJ is in place to support teachers to develop a deeper understanding of the outcomes and to maximize consistency and comparability of teacher judgements.

MCJ professional learning is well supported by teachers and administrators. Evidence indicates that although there are concerns about teacher workload and staff shortages, MCJ professional learning has continued to attract a high attendance of participants and positive feedback.

Primary and Secondary Science Project

The professional learning of primary science teachers has been targeted in the Primary Science Project, as evidence highlights that teachers make the most significant difference to the

outcomes achieved by students. Science support teachers in 50 schools across the state are trained to support colleagues in their school to teach science. The intended outcomes of the professional learning is the enhancement of each specialist teacher's repertoire of science teaching skills, understandings of the *Curriculum Framework* science outcomes, and the skills to support colleagues in meeting the needs of students.

The SPICE secondary teachers' enrichment program has been established to address issues identified in recent reports about the difficulties facing science teaching in schools, including teacher dissatisfaction. SPICE will build teachers' knowledge of current science and the effective use of technologies, together with the formation of supportive and collaborative networks of teachers, scientists and science educators.

SPICE has been established through a partnership between The University of Western Australia (UWA) and the Department of Education and Training. Initially it is a three year program from 2006 to 2008.

All public school science teachers will be able to enhance their skills and knowledge of advancements in science and related technology through participation in purpose-designed formal and informal professional learning at UWA. It is anticipated that heightened engagement and interaction between teachers and tertiary scientists will have a significant impact on the enthusiasm of teachers for science that will positively influence their students' attitudes to science and tertiary science courses.

SPICE will support teachers to bring current scientific research into their teaching through the effective use of modern technologies and suitable teaching strategies. To achieve this, there are three interconnecting components:

- *curriculum resources that provide practical ways to include the latest scientific research into their teaching;*
- a professional learning program that supports science teachers use the resources to stimulate student's interest and learning; and
- professional interaction between science teachers and scientists.

The combined effect of these components will be that teachers will:

- have an increased enthusiasm for science and for their role in teaching science;
- have increased knowledge and understanding of the latest science in their specialist area and of the associated investigative skills;
- select and use a range of modern learning technologies in their classrooms; and
- have the knowledge and confidence to implement teaching, learning and assessment approaches to enhance student learning.

The Teacher in Residence (TIR) Program is a major component of SPICE. Teachers will be provided with the opportunity to work at UWA in an environment of scientific research, multimedia development and curriculum design.

The TIR will be supported to become systemic leaders (mentors) in science education for the Department.

Teachers in residence will:

- work with UWA science academics and the project's instructional designers to design curriculum resources, including interactive learning resources;
- assist in developing and implementing SPICE professional learning programs;

- participate in activities in UWA science faculties that expose them to the latest science and its technological applications;
- take new skills and understandings back to their schools and become agents of change; and
- participate in developing and implementing an action research program that will evaluate the SPICE initiative against its stated targets and outcomes.

A comprehensive evaluation strategy has been developed for the SPICE program.

Physical Activity

The Department aims to enhance the level and quality of physical activity undertaken by WA government school students through the achievement of the following objectives:

Enhancing agency collaboration to build effective practices in schools:

Collaborative project work offers the ability to share resources and expertise enabling schools and the Department to offer a greater array of programs in a cost effective structure. Working with other agencies and schools will be utilised to identify enablers and barriers to physical activity. The findings will be used and good practices built upon to support districts and schools; to identify students at risk of low levels of physical activity; and to implement appropriate strategies to increase participation in physical activity.

Provision of support to teachers, school leaders and districts to advance effective curricula, environments and policy in schools:

Resources and a comprehensive professional learning program continue to be developed and made available to schools to support educators at different phases of schooling to develop and refine their skills and knowledge and enhance their capacity to provide physical activity experiences for students. Findings from research into developing effective social and physical environments that support physical activity in schools will be utilised to develop school design processes and guidelines, and social environments conducive to students being physically active in and out of school hours.

Gifted and Talented Education

The needs of gifted and talented students have been addressed in a variety of ways through Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), school-based, Approved Specialist Programs and withdrawal programs that enhance classroom provision. The Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) program has operated successfully as a withdrawal program for students in Years 5-7 for the past 23 years.

Schools, districts and central office plan and implement procedures to identify gifted and talented students and provide the necessary teaching and learning adjustments to ensure that these students achieve optimum educational outcomes. Identification processes and the effectiveness of provision are monitored to ensure that the educational needs of gifted and talented students are being met. There are two forms of provision: school based and supplementary.

School-based provision is applicable to 15% of the population. Primary and secondary school-based provision occurs within the individual classrooms of all teachers on an ongoing basis. Additionally, some schools have developed strategies that allow the most able students to learn together in the form of Department endorsed specialist programs.

The resources for supplementary provision are centrally allocated and provide for approximately 3% of the population in a particular domain or area of talent. Students are placed into a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) school through a rigorous selection process that typically

involves testing and performance assessment. Supplementary provision enables the most gifted and talented students to interact with their gifted and talented peers in specific curriculum fields at higher levels than can normally be provided in the regular classroom or school.

At the primary level, Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) is a part-time withdrawal program allowing upper primary school students (Years 5-7) to participate in differentiated programs offered in a range of delivery modes.

Secondary students have access to a range of selective streams through Academic Talent Programs (ATP), specialist Languages programs and Arts programs in Visual Arts, Dance, Music, Drama and Artsmedia.

In addition, Online ATP and residential options have been developed for country students. Selective schooling commenced in 2007 with the establishment of Perth Modern School as an Academic selective school and John Curtin College of the Arts as a selective Arts school in 2008. Parents highly value the range of opportunities, and competition for program placement has grown significantly (50%) over the past 4 years.

GATE secondary schools in the metropolitan area provide specialised programs in the following areas:

- Fully selective schools (Perth Modern School and John Curtin College of the Arts)
- Academic Talent Programs (ATP) with a focus on either Humanities or Mathematics/Science
- Special Arts Programs including the Special Dance, Music, Drama or Visual Arts Program
- Special Languages Other Than English (LOTE) Program
- Rural and isolated students, may access some programs through ATP Online.

Aboriginal Education

Outcomes and standards education enables students to progress at their own pace. Teachers dedicate much time and energy developing teaching and learning programs that equip most students with knowledge and skills to progress, but there remains a significant group of students who fall behind. The gap between the performance of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students widens as the students get older. Strategies to increase the effectiveness of leaders, enhance the involvement of the parent community and the implementation of documented plans to assist students at educational risk will better equip Aboriginal students to progress to the next stage.

With regard to generic skills, it is not just what skills, but also how they are imparted that is important. Enhanced cultural awareness of teachers improves the participation and retention of Aboriginal students. An eclectic approach has always been the best approach for meeting the varied needs of learners.

The Department has a range of initiatives in place to improve the education outcomes of Aboriginal students. Some incremental progress has been achieved in narrowing performance gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Substantial effort has been made through increased funding for Aboriginal education and the development of many new programs that have demonstrated improved outcomes for Aboriginal students. Broader issues such as health, housing, access to training and employment opportunities, frequent mobility and the fact that approximately one third of the WA Aboriginal population lives in very remote regions are

issues that impact on students engaging in further education and training and in turn affect the ability of the education system to achieve educational parity for Aboriginal students.

Key strategies for improvement is focussing on school leadership, the role Aboriginal parents play, how best practice in education is delivered, the identification of gaps in effective service delivery and opportunities for training and employment in the local area.

The Aboriginal Literacy Strategy is a structured literacy program designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students. The program is compulsory for all Remote Community Schools and school personnel are trained to deliver a consistent and sustained literacy program, regardless of staff turnover or changing school priorities.

This program supports transient students by ensuring a consistency of approach in the literacy program when students move to other remote communities. Aboriginal Education Specialist Teachers provide support for year 3-7 teachers in a culturally inclusive and collaborative program to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme supports Aboriginal students at or below the benchmarks in Years 4, 6 and 8 with the aim of improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

The ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Learning provides training to enable teachers to understand the particular literacy needs of Aboriginal students who do not speak standard Australian English. The program encourages educators to reflect upon the culture and value systems implied in schools. Strategies are discussed to modify all aspects of school life to be two-way processes: the learning and teaching routines; management procedures; selection of resources and collaboration with parents, caregivers and community members.

Cultural awareness impacts on the quality of teaching provided to Aboriginal students and most, if not all, teachers will educate Aboriginal students during their careers. Most graduate teachers complete university with limited exposure to Aboriginal Studies and cultural awareness. The Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum website is a high quality on-line resource to support teachers in the implementation of a culturally inclusive curriculum.

Highly effective leaders make a difference to the quality of teaching in schools. *Dare to Lead* is a national program supporting principals to provide strong leadership in Aboriginal education, through a state wide network of school leaders, professional development and the production and distribution of resources and leadership materials.

Leading from the Front is a joint initiative between Aboriginal Education and the WA Primary Principals Association. Forums are conducted to examine and share leadership strategies in Aboriginal education; current educational thinking and practice in relation to Aboriginal education; and effective whole school strategies for improving outcomes for Aboriginal students. A key component is an action research project which principals develop at forums, take back to their school to implement and then share findings at future conferences. Networks and specialist support enhance the sharing of effective strategies for all teachers, but particularly enhance the professional learning of graduate teachers.

Follow the Dream is a tertiary aspirations strategy that targets high achieving Aboriginal students from Years 6 to 12. The program operates in partnership with industry and Aboriginal communities and enables students to work towards completing Year 12 and entrance into tertiary studies. *Follow the Dream* is conducted after school in learning centres that employ tutors and mentors who assist Aboriginal students in all facets of their education. The

Department of Education and Training is currently developing a proposal to support high achieving Aboriginal students in primary school and assist their progress towards tertiary education and employment.

Social change impacts strongly on schools and there are increasing community expectations about students being given perspectives through education that will influence their lifetime behaviours and choices. Curriculum packages have been developed to support schools to strengthen their programs in many areas, for example in anti smoking messages, driver education, diabetes and drug education. While this is important, many teachers are concerned at taking on more without needing to leave something else out. As society changes, teachers and schools need to work more on an interagency approach to many aspects of children's lives that have not in the past been the responsibility of the school. There is more contact required with Student Services teams in district office, speech and language therapy and the Department of Community Development as more social issues impact on student learning.

Aboriginal culture has changed significantly and the impact of technology, particularly in remote regions, has resulted in a stronger acquisition of English but also a reciprocating loss of culture. The use of technology in schools has been a powerful tool in overcoming the disadvantages of geolocation for many Aboriginal students.

Long term unemployment in families and communities may lead students to believe they will not get a job and this can significantly reduce their reasons to strive academically. Alternatively, others will perceive changes in the mining industry as opportunities for employment that demonstrate why they need skills to get jobs. Opportunities for employment in the local area impacts on how students engage with learning and value knowledge.

Student Behaviour Standards

The Department has in place a range of programs that focus on creating equitable, safer learning environments. These programs focus on addressing student behaviour and creating safe and stimulating learning environments. An overview of some of these programs is outlined below.

Behaviour Management and Student Alienation

All public schools in Western Australia must develop a school behaviour management plan that is consistent with the framework outlined in the Department's *Behaviour Management in Schools* Policy. This plan must be developed in consultation with their school community and include the rights and responsibilities for staff and students, the school's approach to foster positive learning environments and the strategies the school will put in place to address student breaches of the code of conduct. The Department has recently completed a review of the *Behaviour Management in Schools* Policy which will be the basis for refining and extending current programs. All schools will be required to review their school behaviour management plans once the Department's revised policy has been made available.

Behaviour Management and Discipline Strategy

The Behaviour Management and Discipline (BM&D) Strategy was launched in 2001 with a budget of \$28m for four years. The strategy was expanded in 2004 to an annual budget of \$16.5m and now provides additional resources to 277 primary and secondary schools.

The strategy comprises four focus areas: 1) additional teacher full-time equivalents to reduce class sizes; 2) funding to identified schools; 3) classroom management skills program; and 4) district funding for challenging behaviour. The broad outcomes of BM&D are improvements in

behaviour, attendance, learning, teacher competence and confidence, and reduction in class sizes.

The BM&D strategy complements the Department's *Retention and Participation (RAP)* Program where alternative programs are developed for students who are disaffected from schooling. Approximately \$1.6m funding is provided by the RAP Program to district education offices and assists schools to cater specifically for these students and to ensure they receive the necessary support from other government agencies.

Classroom Management Strategies

The Classroom Management Strategies (CMS) program is a skills-based professional learning program for teachers in the area of behaviour management and effective classroom practice. An evaluation of the program has clearly demonstrated the positive impact this program has had in schools. The training has been recommended as a key strategy for schools receiving BM&D funding.

There are currently 35 CMS teacher consultants working across all education districts. In excess of 1300 participants have completed their Level 1 accreditation and in excess of 2100 teachers that have now completed the program.

Health and Wellbeing

It is widely understood that the health and wellbeing of staff and students has a significant impact on work performance and student achievement. Data collected at both state and national levels indicate that social and emotional health issues are increasing and that schools play a critical role in preventing or managing these issues. Accordingly, the Department has developed a range of resources to support districts and schools in the promotion of wellbeing, including professional learning programs and materials for staff, students and parents/carers. Collaboration with other agencies in the delivery of initiatives tackling shared issues is a major strategy for DET.

The Health and Wellbeing portfolio includes the following:

- *Promotion of student wellbeing*
Districts and schools are being supported to use the Health Promoting Schools framework to plan for wellbeing across the domains of curriculum, school organisation and partnerships. Complementary work in the area of risk focused prevention assists schools to identify key intrinsic and environmental factors impacting on wellbeing leading to more effective targeting of mental health promotion and illness prevention strategies across school communities and with at-risk groups and individuals.
- *Internet Safety for Children*
The Department formed a strategic partnership with WA Police to improve the online safety of children and to prevent and manage cyber bullying. Other sectors were invited to join a working party to introduce a coordinated approach across the state. A key component of this strategy is to increase school, student and parent awareness of the risks involved in internet use including a strong focus on cyber bullying.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is defined as the commitment of our staff to the all-round wellbeing and development of each child. It is central to the provision of a quality education for all public school students.

Effective pastoral care in public schools is underpinned by a positive school climate where teacher-student relationships are based on trust and mutual respect, where each student's

physical, social, intellectual and emotional development is promoted and where there are strong partnerships between the school, parents and community. Pastoral care is shared by and is the responsibility of everyone.

The development of a pastoral care strategy is being informed by key stakeholders and research conducted in 2005/06 by the Department and the Child Health Promotion Research Unit at Edith Cowan University.

Student Attendance

Regular student attendance at school is fundamental to the achievement of high standards. In May 2006 the Minister for Education and Training launched the *WA Attendance Strategy*. A key component of this strategy involved an audit of student attendance across all public schools. The audit provided an accurate analysis of attendance with state, district and student profiles by category of risk, year level, gender, Aboriginality and authorised versus unauthorised absences.

Nominated district office staff across the State were trained to provide support in undertaking the audit, analysis and planning of attendance targets with schools. Special software was developed to automate the process of data extraction from schools to both reduce workload implications and streamline processes. The *Student Attendance Monitoring (SAM)* module enables authorised users in school, district or central office to access attendance data in a variety of reporting formats.

The audit results were reported to principals and district directors in Term 4, 2006. The audit information has been used by schools to set attendance improvement targets. Schools will be required to report on attendance improvement target achievement in 2007. The audit process will be run again in 2007 to support planning for 2008.

Community Service

A government commitment to introduce the Community Service Program (CSP) was made early in 2005. The CSP requires all students to complete a minimum 20 hours of community service between Years 10 and 12. The program was piloted in 10 schools in 2006. Implementation commenced in Year 10 in all schools in 2007 and will be extended to Year 11 in 2008. The 2009 Year 12 group will be the first to graduate having completed the community service requirement as part of their WA Certificate of Education (WACE).

Almost \$2million annually is being provided to public schools for implementation of the CSP. Ongoing support is being provided to schools and coordinators during 2007. This includes a Resource Kit advice, opportunities for professional learning and networking and facilitation of partnerships between schools and community groups.

Staff Shortages

Issues associated with teacher shortages may adversely effect student standards. As with other states, the Department of Education and Training is experiencing workforce recruitment and retention issues, with worsening trends predicted for the immediate future. This has adversely contributed to teacher workload. Most schools are unable to release staff during school hours to attend professional learning and central and district teams are experiencing the effect, resulting in depleted teams and a potential inability to deliver on system initiatives.

Within a constrained labour market, attraction and retention initiatives play an important role in workforce distribution. The focus of employees has undergone a significant shift in the past ten years with greater emphasis being placed on the total employment package on offer rather than

just salaries or wages. With increasing focus on the non-cash elements of remuneration packages, jurisdictions face a significant challenge in achieving appropriate workforce distribution without the capacity to directly influence all elements of remuneration.

Distribution levers exist which, potentially, could assist jurisdictions with more appropriate distribution of the education workforce. However, in the main these distribution levers are within the framework of Commonwealth legislation. For example in rural and remote areas some incentives, such as accommodation, that may have a significant impact attract Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) and are captured as remuneration. Debt forgiveness is another way of achieving a more appropriate distribution of the education workforce. Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) results in a significant debt for many teachers. Graduates of teaching courses can incur a HECS liability of between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Debt forgiveness is a method of attracting teachers to remote and rural areas. However, as with FBT, the current structure does not provide an appropriate vehicle for this to occur without prohibitive cost to the employer. These issues would benefit from a collaborative approach between the Commonwealth and States and Territories."

National Goals of Schooling

The Future of Schooling in Australia, based on the review of *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* was completed with limited consultation due to the confidential nature of the work.

The Department's support for the statement that was presented to CAF was conditional on there being significant future consultation following the endorsement of the review and a rationale provided for the change to the eight learning area framework. Early indications were that the changes proposed to the learning areas were not supported. However, making history, geography and economics more explicit was not opposed provided the representation of the other learning areas was treated in the same way. The impact on the Western Australian curriculum will be minimal as the Western Australian Curriculum Framework has, among the eight learning areas, Society and Environment which comprises the social sciences as they are currently taught in schools.

Within the Society and Environment learning area, the following outcomes correspond with disciplines as follows:

- Geography – Place and Space;
- History – Time, Continuity and Change; and
- Economics – Resources.

In the K–10 syllabuses, due to be in schools by the end of 2007, the disciplines of geography and history will be part of the focus of learning in Years 4–7 and the disciplines of geography, history and economics will be part of the focus of learning in Years 8–10.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE QUESTION 2

Q2. *The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.*

The New Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) compares to the completion and achievement prerequisites for the awarding of a Certificate of Education (or equivalent award) in Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania. This differs from

jurisdictions that have a completion requirement alone, which include New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The WACE is an internationally recognised senior secondary certificate, allowing entrance to tertiary institutions around the world.

The WACE is currently in a period of transition with the phased introduction of 47 new courses. With full implementation in 2010, the New WACE will comprise, as it has in the past, both completion and achievement requirements including:

- Complete at least 20 semester units (or equivalent), including at least three two-unit combinations, 50 per cent of which can be endorsed programs
- Achieve an average of a C grade or better across 10 course units from at least five courses/subject equivalents (at least three two-unit combinations must be included, and achievement of an industry specific VET course unit equates to a C grade). Up to 10 unit equivalents of endorsed programs can be included to reduce this load to six course units from three courses (endorsed programs do not count toward the C grade average)
- Complete four units from an English course (two units must be studied in the final year of schooling)
- Meet the language competence standard, as defined by work samples or pass the English language competency test
- Include all 13 overarching learning outcomes in an overall program of study
- Complete 20 hours of community service
- Unless exempt, sit the WACE examinations for courses in the final year where enrolled in stage 2 or 3 units.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE QUESTION 3

Q3. How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

National and International Performance

Western Australian students perform exceedingly well in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted every three years. The latest results in 2003 showed that Western Australian 15-year-old students have a level of reading, mathematical literacy among the best in the world.

Western Australian students performed above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average in mathematical and reading literacy. In both, mathematical and reading literacy, Western Australian students performed higher than every other state except the Australian Capital Territory.⁽²⁾

Reading the Graphs (next page)

The graphs on the following page show the distributions of 2003 PISA testing results on mathematical and reading literacy for the Australian states and territories, arranged in order of performance. On the graphs, each white block with the black line across it shows the best estimate of each state and territory's mean (the middle line) and the range (the white block) within which the mean would be expected.

The shaded blocks out from the mean show the distributions of results, with the darkest blocks the highest and lowest 5 per cent of students, then the highest and lowest 10 per cent and finally

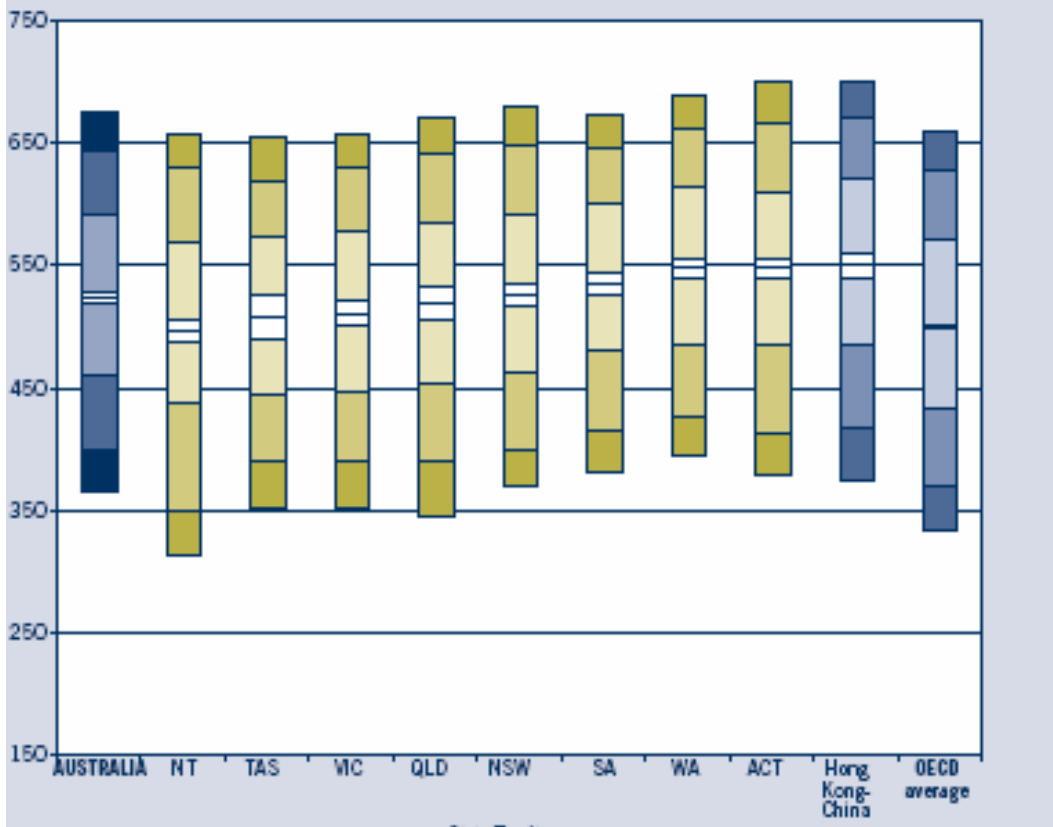
lightest shading indicating some 35 per cent of per cent of students performing around the mean.

Senior Schooling

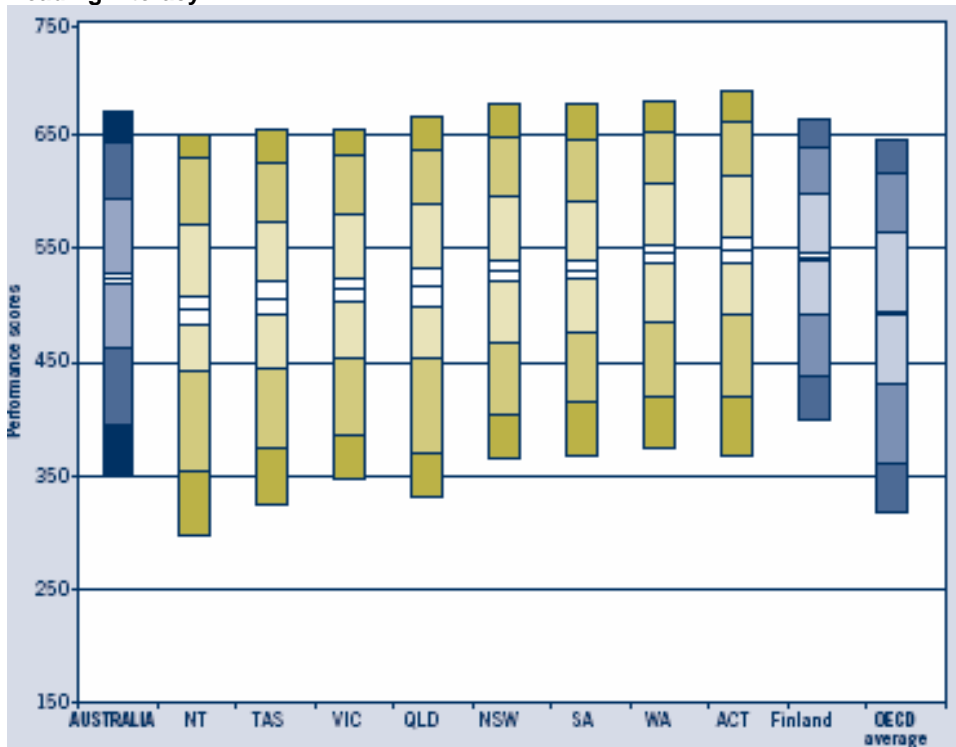
The *Our Youth, Our Future* Post Compulsory Education review (2001) resulted in the development of courses of study that provide greater flexibility of post school opportunities for all students. At this point, eight courses have been fully implemented, 20 are due to commence in 2008 and a further 18 are scheduled for implementation in 2009 or 2010. All new courses are now effectively Tertiary Entrance Examination subjects (TEE), each offering material of sufficient difficulty for students with university ambitions. This brings WA into line with New South Wales and Victoria. Courses are written in three stages, with achievement in Stage 2 or 3 a requirement for traditional methods of university entry. The content of existing TEE subjects has been mapped to new courses and found to cross into Stage 2 and 3. In many cases, new content and the application of content have been identified by professional groups as equal to that studied in the first year of a university course.

Inconsistencies of definitions and terminology do exist across systems. Each system has its own course documents, frameworks and syllabus. In Western Australia, for example, the standards are represented by an 8 level scale. In NSW, student achievement of course outcomes is represented by a 6 stage band. Following a MCEETYA recommendation, AESOC examined the feasibility of a common scale of reporting all senior school subjects, and a quality assurance mechanism to ensure consistency of results of senior certificates across all states and territories. Western Australian teachers were involved in 'pair-wise' comparison with other states in February 2007 for English, Chemistry, Mathematics, French and Drama. A correlation of 0.8 was achieved across these subjects.

Mathematical Literacy



Reading Literacy



² PISA in Brief from Australia's Perspective, Australian Council of Educational Research

Senior Schooling reform has resulted in all subjects moving toward one curriculum structure. Courses developed are designed to enable students to continue their achievement of outcomes from within and beyond the Curriculum Framework. Underlying each course is a common set of standards and defined essential content.

Public and professional consultation continues to support the development of content, course structure and assessment guidelines for all courses.

To increase the consistency of standards between courses, grade related descriptors will be provided to make judgments of student achievement in relation to their understanding and application of set unit content.

In WA, the Curriculum Council (CC) provides Year 12 performance data. DET, AISWA and CEO release this data jointly through the media. Included in this data are summary tables showing the first 50 ranked schools in each of five categories that cover Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE), Wholly School Assessed, Vocational Education and Training performance and graduation rates.

The inclusion of the First 50 Tables provides greater recognition of the broad range of strategies that schools implement to cater for the full range of students and has helped maintain the positive community perception of public schools. There is a public expectation that this data is made available and education agencies such as the CC and TISC have freely provided this information.

The issue of concern for schools that are competitively disadvantaged is that the release and interpretation of this data may label them unfairly. Individual schools are provided with comprehensive data from the CC on the performance of their students as well as the school's subject performance statistics.

The Senior Schooling Academic Standards and Support (SSASS) Directorate provides support to public schools in the interpretation and analysis of this performance data. The support provided by the SSASS Directorate has assisted schools in improving student performance and maintaining high standards of school education.

The median TER continues to improve in public schools (75.2 in 2004 increasing to 80.1 in 2006) as does the number of individual students receiving prestigious CC awards.

Prescribed Population Testing and School Accountability

As with other States and Territories, Western Australia currently operates under its own curriculum frameworks and certification and assessment processes. The most significant benefit of this approach is the diversity and innovation it generates. The jurisdictions are constantly seeking to improve and they learn from each other based on their successes and failures.

Through MCEETYA, Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce Key Performance Indicators have been agreed. These are reported in various publications including the *National Report on Schooling in Australia* and the *Report on Government Services*. Extensive work has been undertaken in relation to the National Assessment Program, including population testing in literacy and numeracy and sample based testing in Science, Civics and Citizenship and ICT. The literacy and numeracy standardised tests at Years 3, 5 and 7 are currently equated to facilitate benchmark reporting. Western Australia is collaborating with other States and Territories to develop and implement common national tests from 2008 onwards in literacy and

numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This includes the reporting of both benchmark and proficiency standards.

The results from international testing programs (PISA and TIMSS) indicate that Australia performs very well internationally. There is no evidence to suggest that (Western) Australia is falling behind comparable countries. Our challenge is addressing a significant performance 'tail' relating to disadvantage that is not as evident in some comparable countries.

Western Australia supports responsible reporting of system and school performance data. Great care is taken to ensure that reporting at a national level is both appropriate and as comparable as possible between jurisdictions.

Within WA senior secondary outcomes and standardised testing results in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 have been publicly reported for many years. The Department also makes available extensive individual school performance data and general information through its online School Profile System.

There are many contextual issues, including circumstances beyond the control of schools that need to be carefully considered when undertaking, reporting on, and drawing conclusions from, educational evaluations. The Department has a significant evaluation program in place and requires all major programs to be subject to appropriate evaluation.

Educational Measurement

The Department conducts annual literacy and numeracy population testing at Years 3, 5 and 7 and English, Mathematics and Science testing at Year 9. The primary testing program is the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) and the secondary program is the Monitoring Standards in Education for Year 9 (MSE 9).

Individual student reports are provided for each student who sits the tests. The student reports provide parents with information regarding their child's performance against state standards, national standards and the performance of other students across the state.

A public system-level report is produced each year for the WALNA and for the MSE9. This report provides system-level data for each assessed area, and provides sub-group data by gender, indigenous background and language background other than English. The reports provide longitudinal trend data and an explanation of performance.

The Department is committed to providing performance information to parents and the wider community. From 2006 the Department made available on its website Years 3, 5 and 7 national benchmark performance data in reading, writing, spelling and numeracy at a school level for all public schools.

Schools will provide MSE9 performance information publicly through annual Schools Reports or supplements to them. These reports will be available directly from schools and will also be accessible to the public from the Department website.