

SENATE INQUIRY

Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee will conduct an inquiry into the current level of academic standards of school education, with particular reference to:

1. 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.
2. The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.
3. How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

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DEST Submission

Context

A well-educated, flexible, creative and self-confident population is a key element to achieving economic prosperity and social and civic engagement. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), education remains the gateway to employment.¹ By increasing the knowledge and skills of the future workforce, and preparing students for further education and training, the school system contributes significantly to higher national income and economic growth. This benefits all Australians.

The basic skills acquired in schooling, particularly literacy and numeracy, are the necessary foundation for developing higher-order skills that create a more productive workforce. McMillan and Marks, in their research based on the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), find that literacy and numeracy achievement is the single most influential factor in Year 9 students staying on to complete Year 12 and the strongest predictor of tertiary entrance performance.²

Low achievers are not only more likely to leave school before completing Year 12, but they are also more likely to drop out as early as the end of Year 10.³

There is a growing body of national and international evidence that suggests that teacher quality is the most critical factor in improving student outcomes. Rowe concludes that teacher quality is the single most important contributor to student outcomes after the socio-economic status and background of the student,⁴

Research also points to school autonomy in staffing decisions and allocating resources,⁵ accountability for performance,⁶ and early intervention, particularly for disadvantaged students,⁷ as key features of high-quality, high-performance schools across the world.

¹ OECD, *Education at a Glance*, OECD 2006.

² McMillan, J and Marks, GN, *School Leavers in Australia: profiles and pathways*, ACER LSAY Research Report No 31.

³ McMillan, J and Marks, GN, *School Leavers in Australia: profiles and pathways*, ACER LSAY Research Report No 31.

⁴ Rowe, K, "The importance of teacher quality as a key determinant of students' experience and outcomes of schooling," background paper to keynote address presented at the ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, 2003.

⁵ See for example OECD, *School factors related to quality and equity – Results from PISA 2000*, OECD, 2005.

⁶ See for example Hanushek and Raymond, "School accountability and student performance," *Regional Economic Development*, Volume 2 (1), Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2006.

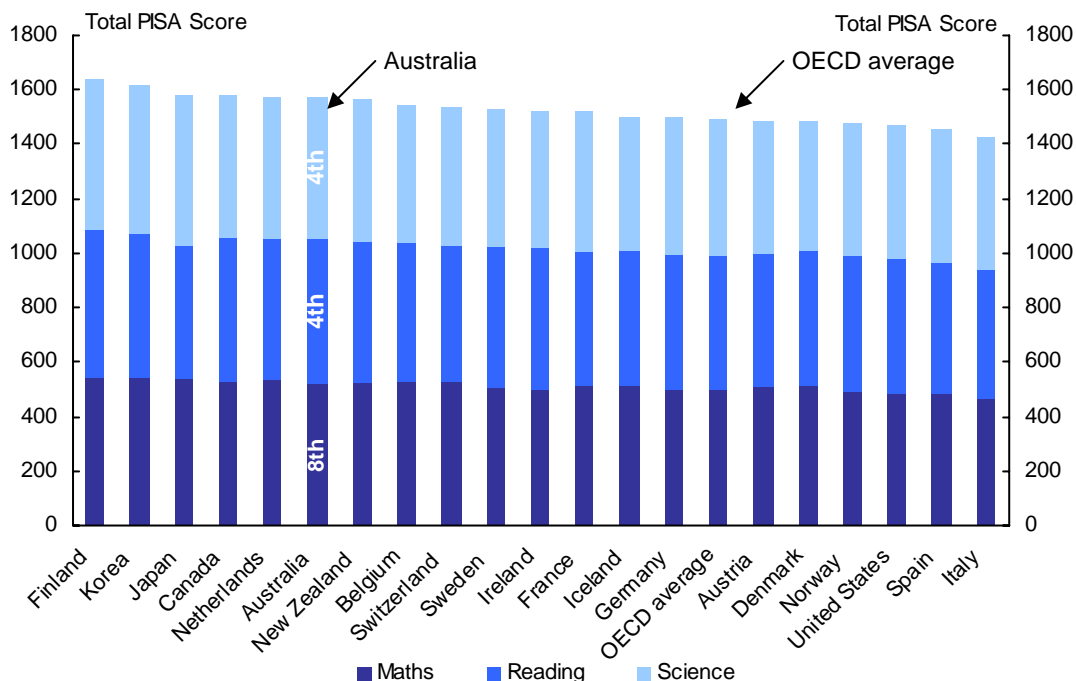
⁷ See for example Heckman, James J. "Policies To Foster Human Capital," *Research in Economics*, Volume 54(1), pp 3-56, 2000.

Australia's current position

National and international comparisons – Literacy and Numeracy

Australia's schools are delivering good results for many of the 3.4 million students enrolled across the country by international comparison. This is seen in the performance of Australian students in standardised international testing conducted by the OECD, where Australian students ranked 4th in science and reading proficiency and 8th in mathematics in 2003⁸ (Figure 1). While there is some variation between performance in each of the States and Territories, individually they also performed on average at a level that was at or above the OECD average.⁹

Figure 1: 2003 OECD standardised test results



Source: OECD 2004

Notwithstanding these good results, too many young Australians are inadequately prepared for a productive and fulfilling life in Australian society in the 21st Century.

PISA results indicate that 30.1 per cent of Australian 15 year old students did not achieve a level of reading proficiency regarded by the OECD as being needed to meet the demands of lifelong learning in rapidly-changing knowledge-intensive societies.¹⁰ The equivalent figure for Indigenous students was 62 per cent. Of even greater significance is that 11.8 per cent of Australia's students (representing 30,000 of 15 year old students in Australia in 2003¹¹) achieved at or below Level 1. This compares with 5.7 per cent in Finland and 9.6 per cent in Canada. Students at this level or below are described by the OECD as being 'at risk of not acquiring essential life skills, partly because they do not have the foundations of reading literacy needed for continued learning and extending their knowledge horizon.'

⁸ OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World: First Results from PISA 2003*, OECD, 2004.

⁹ OECD 2004.

¹⁰ OECD, *Education Policy Analysis 2004*, p 78 and OECD, *Learning for Tomorrow's World, First Results from PISA 2003*, 2004, p. 443.

¹¹ ABS Schools Australia 2003, Table 43.

Failure to develop basic reading skills by age 9 predicts a lifetime of illiteracy.¹² Research also shows that the majority of children entering school with difficulties can and do learn to read if taught effectively. The empirical evidence indicates that the proportion of variation in students' achievement progress due to differences in student background (around 9-15 per cent) is considerably less important than variation associated with class/teacher membership (around 30-55 per cent).¹³ The data in Australia confirms that children not achieving basic standards at an early point in their schooling tend to become adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Importantly, there is a consistent group of people representing around 10 per cent of their age group who do not meet basic standards in these skills: around 10 per cent for Years 3 and 5¹⁴; 11.8 per cent for 15 year olds¹⁵; 14.8 per cent for 15-19 year olds; 9.5 per cent for 20-24 year olds; and 11.2 per cent for 25-29 year olds¹⁶.

A recent Canada/OECD study indicates that a country that achieves literacy scores across its population higher than the international average improves its labour productivity and GDP per capita. The study also found that the returns of human capital in terms of higher economic growth are more sensitive to the average skills of the entire population than to the share of individuals with higher level skills, suggesting that it is more beneficial to aim for a general lift in standards of performance than only at the top end.¹⁷

While Australian schools have a strong international reputation, there are several countries exhibiting ongoing improvement and now achieving comparable outcomes or even overtaking Australia on international rankings. For example, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands all surpassed Australia's performance in mathematics between PISA 2000 and PISA 2003. This is occurring as Australia's literacy and numeracy results are stabilising or even declining, impacting on our international standing, and more importantly, impacting on the futures of Australian students.

Nationally, literacy and numeracy results, as measured by the proportion of students meeting national benchmarks and reported by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), are not improving over time. Numeracy outcomes in particular have shown little sign of improvement and are significantly lower than reading or writing outcomes, particularly in Year 7.¹⁸

Underlying Australia's literacy and numeracy benchmark results, is a persisting performance gap between students in metropolitan areas and regional and remote Australia. Indigenous students also continue to perform significantly below their non-Indigenous peers across all year levels in literacy and numeracy, although promising signs of improvements against the benchmarks have been seen in recent years.

The move to national tests for literacy and numeracy and the extension of literacy and numeracy benchmarking to Year 9 students in 2008 will be a useful addition to the story of literacy and

¹² United States of America National Institute for Child and Human Development.

¹³ Cuttance (1998); Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005); Hattie (2003, 2005) Hill and Rowe (1996, 1998); Loudon et al. (2005b); Rowe (2004 b, c, d) and Rowe and Hill (1998) cited in *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations*, National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, December 2005, page 58.

¹⁴ MCEETYA 2007.

¹⁵ The number of 15 years olds below Level 1, OECD PISA 2004.

¹⁶ Those achieving only Level 1 in ABS, *Aspects of Literacy*, 1996.

¹⁷ Colombe et al. *Literacy Scores, Human Capital and Growth across 14 OECD Countries*, Statistics Canada, 2004.

¹⁸ MCEETYA, *National Report on Schooling in Australia 2005*, MCEETYA, 2007.

numeracy performance in Australia, particularly given the importance of Year 9 in influencing a student's decision to complete Year 12.

Enrolments in science and mathematics

Fewer students are enrolling in senior science subjects and enrolments in senior mathematics have stagnated. This has been identified in several reports, including *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future – Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics*, the report of the Australian Government's 2003 Independent Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, as restraining Australia's future capacity in innovation and scientific and mathematical research.¹⁹

School participation rates and student performance in science, technology and mathematics are indicators of Australia's preparedness to meet the imperatives of the knowledge society and economy.

Over the decade to 2003, Year 12 enrolments in science declined from 173,029 to 146,106.²⁰ The Australian Government's 2006 *Audit of Science, Engineering and Technology Skills Summary Report* forecast a likely shortfall of around 35 per cent in Australia's supply of science professionals by 2013.²¹

These statistics correspond to shortages of mathematics and science teachers identified in the Productivity Commission report on *Public Support for Science and Innovation* and MCEETYA's *Report on Teacher Supply and Demand in Australia*. The 2005 report by the Australian Council of Deans of Science, *Who's Teaching Science?* also found that:

- more appropriately trained teachers in chemistry and physics are required, particularly to further develop science education in schools and to fill current and future vacancies;
- nearly 43 per cent of senior school physics teachers lacked a physics major and 25 per cent had not studied the subject beyond first year; 25 per cent of senior school chemistry teachers lacked a chemistry major;
- 40 per cent of schools surveyed reported difficulties in attracting physics teachers; and
- 50 per cent of the rural and remote schools in the survey sample reported difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified science teachers willing to stay due to geographic isolation. Science staff in these areas were also generally less experienced.

Curriculum

Two recent reports, commissioned by the Department of Education, Science and Training, have examined aspects of national senior secondary qualification frameworks and senior secondary content and achievement standards, in particular, issues relating to the comparability of year 12 academic achievements across Australia.

¹⁹ Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, *Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future - Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, pp 3-6 and pp 12-15 of Volume 3, Background Data and Analysis available at http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/097DAD07-3C82-47B3-9BF3-25283759E627/1657/Data_Analysis.pdf.

²⁰ 2006 *Audit of Science, Engineering and Technology Skills Summary Report*, Chapter 3

²¹ Department of Education, Science and Training, *Audit of Science, Engineering and Technology Skills Summary Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2006.

The *Australian Certificate of Education – Exploring a Way Forward* report was released in May 2006. The *Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards* report was released in February 2007. Both reports can be found on the Department’s website under ‘Publications and resources/Publications A to Z’.

As part of the first report, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reviewed existing curriculum, assessment and certification arrangements for the senior years across Australia.

In the second, the content, curriculum and standards of five Year 12 subjects (English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and Australian history) across Australia were compared. The study found that in physics, chemistry and mathematics there was a high level of curriculum content consistency. However in mathematics there were 27 different tertiary entrance courses and the group of expert mathematics reviewers for the study felt that some essential topics were missing from some state curricula. There were significant inconsistency in history, 20 courses were offered across Australia (only two called Australian history); and in English, 18 courses were offered across Australia.

The reports found that even with common elements of curriculum it would be difficult to compare student performance across Australia without common assessment tasks and/or achievement standards across all jurisdictions. In all five subjects compared there was a degree of consistency in what is looked for when assessing students’ achievements. However, while it was possible to identify what students are expected to be able to do, the study was not able to draw conclusions about relative performance expectations across jurisdictions, in part because of differences in terminology and in part because there is no available comparative assessment of student work across jurisdictions.

Testing mechanisms and reporting reflect this inconsistency. Across Australia students are assessed through external examinations and/or school based assessment or scaling tests depending on which state they are in. Once assessed, student results are reported against scales as listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Reporting of results on Senior Secondary School Certificates by State and Territory.

State or Territory	Reporting of Year 12 results on certificates
Australian Capital Territory	One of five grades represented by the letters E, D, C, B, A; derived from school assigned marks (mean 70, standard deviation 12)
New South Wales	One of six bands (Band 1, Band 2, Band 3, Band 4, Band 5, Band 6); derived from marks attained out of 100
Northern territory	As for South Australia
Queensland	One of five achievement levels (Very Limited, Limited, Sound, High, Very High) represented as VLA, LA, SA, HA, VHA; based on subject-specific standards descriptors
South Australia	One of five grades represented by the letters E, D, C, B, A, derived from a score out of 20. Proposed for the future – 7 levels (not yet achieved, E, D, C, B, A, A+)
Tasmania	One of five achievement levels (Preliminary, Satisfactory, Commendable, High, Exceptional) represented as PA, SA, CA, HA, EA
Victoria	A score out of 50
Western Australia	One of five grades represented by the letters E, D, C, B, A. Proposed for the future – a level (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) and a band (first/medium/high) within that level

Source: *Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards Report*

The reports identify significant benefits of core national standards in Australian senior secondary school content, assessment standards and reporting of results, in addition to enabling an accurate comparison of achievement across states and territories that can also be benchmarked internationally.

The studies present a compelling case for the identification of core curriculum that specifies what all students are expected to learn in a subject and for the development of achievement standards so that there is a nationally-consistent description of how well students are expected to learn the core in each subject.

In addition, research conducted for the Australian History Summit on 17 August 2006 shows that there is currently no guarantee that the majority of students in Australian schools will have progressed through a systematic study of Australian history by the end of Year 10:

“Indeed, the opposite is almost certainly the case. By the time they reach leaving age, most students in Australian schools will have experienced a fragmented, repetitive and incomplete picture of their national story.”²²

Teacher Training

Australian and international evidence confirms that teacher quality is the single most important influence on student achievement.

Improved teacher quality will contribute significantly to overall improvements in student outcomes and motivation for higher educational attainment. Importantly, teacher quality will also contribute to lifting Australia’s average literacy and numeracy results in all schools.

Responses to the national survey of primary teacher preparation courses undertaken by the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, for example indicate that:

- in almost all of the courses included in the survey less than 10 per cent of instructional time in compulsory subjects is devoted to preparing student teachers to teach reading; and
- in half of all courses included in the survey less than five per cent of instructional time in compulsory subjects is devoted to this task.²³

The quality of new teaching graduates can be enhanced through improvements to the quality of teacher education in universities and the establishment of national standards for teacher registration.

Providing principals with greater autonomy (including the capacity to employ and dismiss staff) and ensuring the best teachers are appropriately rewarded for their performance in the classroom will enhance the quality of the teaching workforce by attracting and retaining the best candidates to teaching. A report summarising the proceedings of a recent international seminar on Teaching Policy to Improve Student Learning convened by the Aspen Institute concluded that:

Creating a stronger connection between individual teacher contributions and what they are paid lies at the heart of redesigning teaching for the next generation²⁴.

²² Tony Taylor with Anna Clark, *An Overview of the Teaching and Learning of Australian History in Schools*, DEST, 2006, p 34, available at www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/australian_history_summit)

²³ National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy

This conclusion is supported by other reports, for example:

- The recently released Productivity Commission Research Report, *Public Support for Science and Innovation* (2007), argues that greater flexibility in pay and related reward structures for teachers would make teaching more attractive to prospective high quality entrants and help to address the ongoing shortage of high quality science and mathematics teachers.
- The Review of Teaching and Teacher Education (2003) found that highly accomplished teachers were disadvantaged in comparison to other professionals in their inability to access pay commensurate with their performance. It recommended that career progression and salary advancement be based on performance rather than years of service.
- The DEST commissioned report, *Research on Performance Pay for Teachers*, conducted by ACER highlighted that there is increasing recognition nationally and internationally that career paths and pay systems need to be stronger levers for ensuring quality learning outcomes for all students.

There is evidence to suggest declining aptitude of students entering teaching.²⁵ This has accompanied increasing wages and better conditions in alternative occupations relative to those available in the teaching profession.²⁶

The quality of the existing teaching workforce can also be improved through the introduction of core curricula standards in schools across Australia.

Australian Government priorities to improve academic standards

The 2007 Budget has delivered \$843 million over four years to schools through the *Realising Our Potential* package. The initiatives in the package will drive the Australian Government's priority of high standards overall and ensure the Australian education system better meets the needs of students, the tertiary education sector and employers. It is targeted at improving quality, ensuring consistency and assisting students falling behind in literacy and numeracy through the delivery of four important priorities.

- delivering higher quality curriculum standards;
- ensuring higher quality teaching;
- focussing on literacy and numeracy including providing intervention for students not meeting minimum national standards; and
- increased accountability.

The Council of Australian Governments through its National Reform Agenda and the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs have taken steps to improve academic standards and the Australian Government's 2007 Budget takes this work further by providing significant support, identifying timeframes and by signalling that the Quadrennium Funding Arrangements for 2009-12 will require government and non-government education authorities to focus on quality improvement through:

²⁴ Olson 2007 in Ingvarson, Kleinhenz and Wilkinson (2007) *Research on Performance Pay for Teachers*, ACER, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra. (April 2007)

²⁵ Leigh and Ryan 2006.

²⁶ Leigh and Ryan 2006.

- introducing national teacher training and registration standards to improve the skills of new teachers;
- introducing core national standards for curricula in key subjects including English, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Australian History for Years 11 and 12 and in English, Maths, Science and Australian History for Year 10 to deliver higher and more consistent quality in these subjects;
- including some external assessment as part of Year 12 certificates and common descriptions of levels of attainment;
- introducing principal autonomy in school management and teacher employment arrangements, and performance-based pay to encourage and reward excellent teaching; and
- reporting school and student performance against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks, with school and state comparisons.

To encourage greater choice within the government school sector, the Australian Government will also encourage the establishment of more selective high schools.

The *Realising Our Potential* schooling package recognises the higher costs of delivering high quality schooling in regional and remote Australia, and will provide \$121.1 million over four years from January 2008 to fund a regional and remote loading to non-government schools in addition to current funding. The next schools funding agreement will require state and territory governments to provide an equivalent increase in funding for regional and remote government schools from 2009.

The Budget initiatives include:

- \$457.4 million over four years for the *National Literacy and Numeracy Vouchers* programme which will provide assistance to parents of students who have not achieved minimum literacy or numeracy standards in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- \$101.7 million over four years for a new *Australian Government Summer Schools for Teachers* programme to be delivered by Australia's best tertiary educators for our best teachers. The 10-day residential programmes will up-skill teachers in the core subjects of Literacy and Numeracy, English, Maths, Science and Australian History to support their ongoing professional learning and leadership role in schools. Teachers chosen for the Summer Schools will also receive a \$5,000 bonus on completion of the programme.
- \$53.2 million over four years for the *Rewarding Schools for Improving Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes* initiative. Schools that can demonstrate sustained improvements measured against student literacy and numeracy achievement will be eligible for a grant of up to \$50,000. This is a tangible incentive for schools to improve.
- \$77 million over four years for the *Improving the Practical Component of Teacher Education* initiative, which will boost funding for universities to ensure the practical experience of student teachers is of high quality and represents a substantial component of teacher education courses.

These measures are in addition to the significant funding (some \$33 billion in the 2005-08 quadrennium) that is provided by the Australian Government for schooling across Australia. Information about the Australian Government's policies, priorities and programmes to improve schooling is provided at **Attachment A**.

Australian Government policies, priorities and programmes to improve schooling

This attachment outlines the Australian Government's approach to improving school education under eight headings.

1. Provisions of the 2007-08 Budget
2. Quality early childhood and preschool education
3. Capital grants
4. Improving teacher quality
5. Improving standards and national consistency in curriculum
6. Helping students with special needs
7. Student well being

1. Provisions of the 2007-08 Budget.

Around 3.4 million students from over 9,600 schools and school communities across Australia will benefit from almost \$1.2 billion in additional funding over four years. This additional funding takes the total level of investment by the Australian Government for schooling to over \$9.7 billion in 2007-08. This represents a 172% increase in funding since 1996.

The 2007-08 Budget includes:

- \$457.4 million over four years to provide direct assistance to thousands of parents of students who have not achieved minimum standards in reading, writing or mathematics in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9;
- \$101.7 million over four years for the new Australian Government Summer Schools for Teachers programme to be delivered by Australia's best tertiary educators for outstanding teachers. Each teacher will be rewarded with a \$5,000 bonus on completion;
- \$53.2 million over four years to reward schools for improving literacy and numeracy. Schools will be eligible for a grant of up to \$50,000;
- \$77 million to boost funding for universities to ensure the practical experience of student teachers is high quality and represents a substantial component of teacher education courses;
- an additional \$127.8 million over four years to double the rate of funding for intensive English as a Second Language (ESL) tuition for students entering Australia under the Humanitarian Programme;
- \$195.9 million to extend the highly successful Investing in Our Schools Programme for small infrastructure projects;
- \$121 million over four years to support students in more than 400 regional and remote non-government schools achieve better educational outcomes;
- \$14.5 million over three years for a new pilot programme to trial the use of aptitude tests by universities as an alternative or supplementary method for assessing Year 12 students seeking tertiary entrance each year;
- \$5 million over two years to work with stakeholders to develop national teacher training and registration standards; and
- \$13 million over two years to work with states and territories to develop core curricula standards in English, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Australian History for Years 11 and 12; and English, Maths, Science and Australian History for Year 10, to assist in

raising standards in schools. Adopting the resulting standards will be a condition of Australian Government funding from 2009 onwards.

This \$1.2 billion injection provided to government and non-government schools is in addition to the record levels of funding provided to schools over the 2005-2008 period. However, there must be a sustained effort by government and non-government education authorities to lift school standards. To ensure this happens, the Australian Government will, from 2009, require that government and non-government authorities:

- introduce national teacher training and registration standards to improve the skills of new teachers;
- include external assessment as part of Year 12 certificates and common descriptions of levels of achievement;
- introduce greater principal autonomy in school management and teacher employment arrangements;
- introduce performance-based pay for teachers to encourage and reward excellent teaching; and
- report school and student performance against national benchmarks (including literacy and numeracy results), with school and state comparisons.

Indigenous students

The educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians have improved over the last decade in the enrolment, participation and achievement of Indigenous students in both the early education and school sectors.

This Budget provides an additional \$214 million in increased education and training funding to support Indigenous education, particularly to support Indigenous students living in remote communities where secondary education and training choices are limited.

The 2007-08 Budget will provide:

- \$36 million over four years to expand the Indigenous Youth Leadership Programme from the current 250 scholarships to 1,000;
- \$33.2 million over four years to expand the Indigenous Youth Mobility Programme from the current 640 places to 1,500;
- \$27.7 million for up to 1,000 Indigenous higher education students annually, particularly those who need to relocate from rural and remote areas, to receive a one-off payment of \$4,000 to take up a university undergraduate or enabling course;
- \$5.2 million for enhancements to ABSTUDY;
- \$50 million to assist non-government boarding schools, particularly those in remote and regional areas, that accommodate significant numbers of Indigenous students to upgrade facilities; and a \$15.3 million investment for upgrades to their accommodation facilities;
- \$21.4 million over four years to fund projects aimed at attracting, engaging and supporting Indigenous adults in regional and remote communities to take up training opportunities in their local area, particularly through the Australian Government's Work Skills Voucher programme;
- \$15.1 million to convert around 200 Community Development Employment Project positions into jobs in the education sector; and
- \$10.2 million to complete the preservation of a unique historical and cultural resource collection held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Technical and Vocational Training

A skilled workforce is the cornerstone of healthy industry and healthy industry is the foundation of a strong economy. The 2007-08 Budget recognises that restoring the true value of technical and vocational training is crucial for the future wellbeing of the Australian economy.

The \$3.5 billion Realising Our Potential package includes an additional \$638 million for vocational training, building on the 2006 \$837 million Skills for the Future package.

Skills shortages, especially in the trades, open up more opportunities for individuals to pursue a worthwhile and financially rewarding career through VET. The upfront costs in the early stages of a career can present a real financial challenge to individuals to the point that they are a disincentive. The Australian Government is addressing that disincentive in a number of ways to encourage greater VET participation, especially in the trades.

This Budget provides:

- \$83.6 million in funding to establish three additional Australian Technical Colleges in northern Perth, southern Brisbane and the greater Penrith region of New South Wales;
- \$342.5 million in funding to provide first and second year apprentices in trades facing a skills shortage, who are under 30 with a tax free, \$1,000 wage ‘top up’, and \$206.4 million to provide up to \$500 each year, without an age restriction, towards their TAFE or other training fees;
- \$58.5 million to assist Registered Training Organisations to work with industry and local employers to develop and implement ‘fast-track apprenticeships’;
- FEE-HELP will be extended to full-fee-paying students in Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses that are accredited as VET qualifications, where agreed credit for a university degree is available to the student; and
- \$8.7 million in new funding over four years to assist people with a disability to access post-school education and training.

2. Quality early childhood and preschool education

High quality education programmes in the early years have been shown to have a profound effect on children’s development, influencing their ability to learn, their acquisition of pre-literacy and numeracy skills and their social development.

Like all schooling, early childhood education, including pre-school, is the responsibility of the States and Territories. The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) agreed in July 2006 to a goal of provision of two years of preschool education for Indigenous children in order to improve ‘school readiness’ and successful participation in primary school.

COAG has agreed to develop, by 2008, an intergovernmental agreement on a national approach to quality assurance and regulation in early childhood education and care. This agreement aims to streamline and remove duplication in state and Commonwealth regulations, reduce red tape for providers and achieve national consistency over time.

3. Capital Grants

The Australian Government provides significant funding under the Capital Grants Programme to support the construction and upgrading of schools, in partnership with State and Territory Governments and school communities, so that children have the best possible environment in which to learn.

Funding allocated under the Capital Grants Programme in 2007 is estimated at \$412 million, with over \$292 million for government schools and over \$119 million for non-government schools.

Investing in Our Schools Programme (IOSP)

The *Investing in Our Schools Programme* aims to deliver much needed school infrastructure projects through an injection of additional Australian Government funds. In February 2007, the Programme was bolstered with a \$181 million funding increase.

In total \$827 million will be provided to state government schools and \$354 to Catholic and independent schools across Australia to help repair, replace or install new items critical to their school's overall needs.

The almost \$1.2 billion investment adds significantly to the \$1.7 billion already committed by the Australian Government for capital works in schools across Australia over the next four years.

4. Improving teacher quality

The National Inquiry into Literacy found the factor (other than parents) that provides the greatest influence on student outcomes is teacher quality. Factors which affect how well teachers are able to achieve educational outcomes include the quality of school leadership, remuneration and reward structures, public accountability, principal autonomy and in-service and pre-service training.

School leadership

Currently in state school systems they have little capacity to reward good teachers, or to remove or replace poor teachers. Requirements under the 2005-2008 Funding agreement made some progress towards greater autonomy for school principals, but this needs to be strengthened particularly around the power to hire and fire staff. With greater autonomy principals will need increased support for leadership responsibilities, particularly around managing teacher performance.

Teacher quality

National measures are required in order to recognise and reward those teachers who achieve outstanding results. The Australian Government has endeavoured to work with jurisdictions to explore options for implementing performance based pay for teachers. States and territories did not agree to this notion at MCEETYA this year, while agreeing that recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and commitment to the profession is critical to education quality.

It is the Australian Government's intention to continue to press for flexible, performance-based pay arrangements for teachers that demonstrate to the Australian community and the teaching profession that quality teaching is essential and that quality teaching will be rewarded.

The \$300 million Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme (AGQTP) is the Australian Government's flagship initiative for supporting quality teaching and school leadership. Its primary function is to fund professional learning activities for teachers under agreements with state and territory government and non-government education authorities.

The Australian Government has also helped the profession establish *Teaching Australia - Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership* - to raise the status, quality and professionalism of teachers and school leaders throughout Australia.

Since 2003, the Australian Government has also paid tribute to inspiring and talented teachers, principals and schools through the National Awards for Quality Schooling.

5. Improving standards and national consistency in curriculum

Literacy and numeracy

To support the goal of raising literacy and numeracy levels in Australia a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan has been implemented. An important aspect of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan has been the collaborative work of the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments to establish national standards (benchmarks) in literacy and numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7 students and to ensure student performance against these standards is reported at the school level and reported to parents at the individual student level.

In the 2007/08 Budget, the Australian Government announced funding of \$457.4 million over four years to provide assistance to the value of \$700 to parents whose children in Years 3, 5 and 7 do not meet benchmarks in literacy or numeracy. From 2008, national literacy and numeracy assessments will include Year 9 students. Students who do not meet the Year 9 national benchmark for literacy or numeracy will receive assistance from 2009.

The Australian Government makes a significant financial contribution to support the work of schools and teachers in improving the literacy and numeracy skills of young Australians. This is continuing through the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN) Programme. An estimated \$2.0 billion will be provided over the four years 2005 to 2008.

National Literacy and Numeracy Week

National Literacy and Numeracy Week, held in September each year, raises community awareness of the importance of all Australian school students developing effective literacy and numeracy skills and highlights the outstanding initiatives and programmes schools are implementing to help students attain these vital literacy and numeracy skills.

Science, technology and mathematics

Funding of \$35.2 million over seven years for the *Boosting Innovation Science Technology and Mathematics Teaching Programme* was announced in 2004, to strengthen Australia's capacity to generate ideas and be internationally competitive, and is part of the *Backing Australia's Ability* second stage suite of initiatives.

Over the seven years the Programme will fund innovative projects in schools and provide specialists in science to engage and assist with aspects of these projects.

Funding of \$1.5 million over seven years is also available under the Programme for data collection and research projects to support future workforce planning and help advance science, technology and mathematics professional practice in schools.

Science and mathematics

The Australian Government has funded a range of other initiatives to improve science and mathematics education in schools. These include:

- professional development activities to improve classroom teaching of science (undertaken as part of the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme);
- activities to raise science awareness and increase student interest in continuing the study of science to tertiary level through aspects of the National Innovation Awareness Strategy/Science Connections Programme;
- development of online assessment resources through the Science Education Assessment Resources project;
- the Smart Moves programme being run by Questacon to bring innovative science to rural secondary students;
- the Fostering Scientific, Mathematical and Technological Skills and Innovation in Government Schools initiative;
- the development of national Statements of Learning;
- funding of \$7.81 million over four years (2003-04 to 2006-07) for The International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics, established through the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute; and
- the development of high quality, Australian online resources through The Le@rning Federation.

Primary Connections – Primary School Science and Literacy Project

The Primary Connections Project combines the teaching of science with the teaching of literacy in primary schools, through a teacher professional learning model and curriculum resources, to enable all primary teachers to confidently and effectively teach science in their classrooms.

Stage 2 of the Primary Connections project involved Australian Government funding of \$1.8 million for the development and trialling of a professional learning model and curriculum resources to improve the teaching of science in primary schools across Australia.

Following the successful completion of Stage 2, the Australian Government is providing funding of \$3 million, from 2005-06 to 2007-08, to the Australian Academy of Science to continue this work into Stage 3, with implementation of Primary Connections into schools across Australia.

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) programmes in schools

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in Schools are programmes undertaken by school students as part of the senior secondary certificate that provide credit towards a nationally recognised VTE qualification within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The Australian Government's funding to States and Territories of \$21.8 million in 2006 was intended to achieve the outcomes of:

- high quality VTE in Schools programme delivery and outcomes;
- sustainability of programme delivery and;
- the further integration of VTE in Schools programmes into the resourcing, operations and culture of the school systems and schools.

Australian Technical Colleges

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$530.9 million, to establish 28 Australian Technical Colleges providing tuition for up to 8,400 students in Years 11 and 12.

The Colleges have adopted a new industry-led approach to providing education and training in partnership with local communities and meeting regional labour market needs.

Colleges are also eligible to attract recurrent funding consistent with the general recurrent funding formula currently applied to both government and non-government schools.

Languages

The Australian Government is committed to the improvement of languages and cultures education in Australian schools. It is providing approximately \$26 million a year directly to education authorities to support languages generally in school programmes.

In addition, it is providing approximately \$1.3 million each year in 2005-2008 for national strategic projects to support nationally agreed areas of need, identified in the *National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008*.

The Australian Government also provides additional funding for professional learning programmes to improve the quality of languages teaching through:

- \$2 million per annum for Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowships and
- \$2 million over 2006-2007 for a national professional learning programme for languages teachers on intercultural language learning.

In addition, the Australian Government is providing \$1.8 million annually in 2005-2008 to the Asia Education Foundation to support studies of Asia in our schools.

Values

A National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools was developed by the Australian Government and endorsed by all State and Territory Governments. The Framework serves as the basis for the implementation of values education in all Australian schools.

The Australian Government has committed \$29.7 million over four years to support values education in Australian schools.

Civics and Citizenship

The Australian Government is committed to helping young people understand the history and operations of Australia's democracy through its Civics and Citizenship Education Programme for schools and its support for national assessment and nationally consistent curriculum outcomes in this area. Civics and citizenship education was funded with \$4.9 million in the 2004 Budget.

In addition, the Australian Government is providing funding of \$16.3 million over four years from 2006-2010 for the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for students in school groups to visit national institutions including Parliament House, Old Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that learning through technology and innovation, particularly ICTs, is given a strong foundation in our schools.

The Australian Government's commitment to The Le@rning Federation supports the development of online curriculum resources, services and applications for Australian schools. The Australian Government is providing \$60 million over the eight financial years 2001-02 to 2008-09 to support this initiative. This funding is matched by State and Territory Governments and New Zealand is also participating in the initiative.

Music

The National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) sponsored by the Australian Government has resulted in a number of initiatives that are currently being progressed. This demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to, and national leadership in, promoting and enhancing music education in schools.

The Australian Government's initial response to the *National Review of School Music Education* (NRSME) has included the 2007 National Awards for Excellence in School Music Education and \$500,000 for curriculum resource development. Funding has also been approved under the Investing in Our Schools Programme for over 400 projects, which will provide music facilities and equipment in government and non-government schools.

Statements of Learning

The Australian Government is strongly committed to promoting high educational standards in Australian schools. At present, there is little consistency between State education systems, including what is specified in the school curriculum, and no guarantee that school students have the opportunity to acquire the key knowledge they need in fundamental areas.

That is why the Australian Government has required all states and territories, as a condition of funding, to ensure the achievement of greater national consistency in the curriculum. This has been progressed through the development of Statements of Learning in English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship; and information and communications technology for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

National testing

If Australia is to remain competitive internationally, we need to lift the bar on our current efforts to achieve high academic standards. Recognising this, the Australian Government is again demonstrating strong leadership in ensuring the implementation of national benchmarking standards. From 2008, all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 around Australia will undertake common national tests in literacy (reading, writing and spelling) and numeracy. These tests are important for moving towards national consistency and setting national standards in literacy and numeracy.

Plain English student report cards to parents

A fundamental principle underpinning the Australian Government's leadership role in school education is supporting the right of parents to choose the educational environment that best suits the needs of their child, whether it is in the government or non-government sector. To do this, parents need accurate, up-to-date, readily understood information about how their child is learning.

The Australian Government requires that parents are provided with plain English student reports showing their child's achievement against A-E grades or equivalent thus giving parents access to information about how their child is progressing.

Performance of schools

Successful Australian schools strive for continual improvement. The Australian Government requires a range of information on the performance of schools to be provided to parents and the community. Information in key areas such as professional engagement, key student outcomes and parent, student and teacher satisfaction is important information for parents to have about their child's school.

6. Helping students with special needs

Indigenous

The Australian Government in continuing to work towards closing the gap between the education outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian school students. Indigenous education is a major priority of the Australian Government which has committed funding of \$1.9 (including ABSTUDY) billion for Indigenous education over the 2005–2008 quadrennium.

Funding under the Indigenous education programme is supplementary to mainstream education funding, and is intended for strategic interventions that will accelerate improvements in Indigenous student learning outcomes.

During 2005–2008, the Indigenous education programmes, will focus more closely on:

- requiring education and training providers to report on how their responsibilities for Indigenous education and training are being met through funding sources other than the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* – including funding from the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* and other Acts having similar purposes;
- directing Australian Government resources towards those areas that have the greatest need, particularly remote Australia where gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes are at their widest; and
- directing Australian Government resources toward programmes and projects which have demonstrated their effectiveness in the past.

Initiatives include:

- **Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA)**
SRA provides supplementary per capita funding to eligible education providers to assist them in accelerating the improvement of educational outcomes for Indigenous students beyond that which could be achieved through mainstream funding alone.
- **Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS)**
ITAS provides targeted tuition for Indigenous students in schools, vocational education and training, and tertiary education.
- **Whole of School Intervention (WoSI) Strategy**
The WoSI strategy involves communities and parents working with schools and other organisations to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous school students. The WoSI Strategy is made up of two elements; the Parent School Partnerships Initiatives (PSPIs) and Homework Centres (HWCs).
- **The Indigenous Youth Leadership Programme (IYLP)**
The IYLP encourages talented Indigenous students, mainly from remote areas, to apply for school and tertiary scholarships which will support them in undertaking further education and training, moving towards fulfilling employment and developing their skills to become leaders in their communities

- **The Indigenous Youth Mobility Programme (IYMP)**
The IYMP provides young people from remote areas with an opportunity to access training and employment opportunities in major centres. Young people who are selected to participate in the IYMP relocate to one of these major centres with the support of their families and communities. Through the IYMP, participants may undertake post secondary training options including prevocational training, certificate courses, Australian Apprenticeships or tertiary courses such as those leading to qualifications in nursing, teaching, business management and accounting, in recognition of a need for these skills in remote areas.
- **Sporting Chance Programme**
The Sporting Chance Programme aims to build on Indigenous young people's interest in sport as a means of engaging them in their schooling and improving their educational outcomes. The Sporting Chance Programme will support the operation of 20 school-based sports academies across Australia.
- **National Accelerated Literacy Programme (NALP)**
The Australian Government is working in partnership with education providers in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia, to trial the Accelerated Literacy methodology and measure its impact on the educational outcomes of Indigenous students.
- **What Works (WW)**
The What Works project provides professional development for principals and teachers to improve their skills in working with Indigenous students, parents and communities. The Work Program is a set of planning and professional development materials designed to help teachers and school administrators to learn and, to take action in their own location.
- **Dare to Lead**
The Dare to Lead project aims to effect change in schools through the formation of a Coalition of school leaders enlisted to place priority on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The project provides professional learning opportunities to principals and promotes cultural understanding and intercultural exchange through cultural tours, school visits and access to best practice resources.

The implementation of the Parent School Partnerships Initiative from 2005-2008 encourages schools and Indigenous communities to work together to develop and implement creative projects that address local barriers to education success.

English as a second language (ESL) – New Arrivals Programme

The English as a Second Language – New Arrivals (ESL-NA) Programme addresses the special needs of newly arrived migrant students by providing a once only payment to state and territory government and non-government education authorities per eligible student. In 2006 a per capita grant of \$5,277 was provided to education authorities to support non-English speaking primary and secondary school students.

Eligible students are expected to receive a minimum of six months intensive English language tuition either in an intensive language centre or in a school. In the latter case, it is expected that students will be provided with a minimum of ten hours ESL assistance per week. In 2006, over 13,000 students were assisted at a cost of \$69.1 million.

The 2007-08 Budget included an estimated \$127.8 million over four years to increase assistance for intensive English language tuition for students entering Australia under a range of visa categories under the Humanitarian Programme. This will be achieved by doubling the rate of per capita funding provided under the ESL-NA Programme.

Total ESL-NA Programme funding for the 2005-08 Quadrennium is estimated at \$311 million.

Support for students with disabilities

The Australian Government supports the right of children with disability and learning difficulties to access the same educational opportunities as other children and is committed to providing ongoing funding to both government and non-government schools for this purpose.

The Australian Government provides additional targeted funding under the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Programme (LNSLN) for students with disability. Over the 2005-2008 quadrennium, the LNSLN Programme will provide an estimated \$2 billion. Under this programme an estimated \$1.8 billion will be provided through the Schools Grants element and an estimated \$144 million through the Non-government Centres Support element.

Youth Pathways

The Australian Government provides approximately \$24 million per annum to fund 100 Youth Pathways projects for the years 2006-2008 to assist at least 17,000 young people each calendar year. The programme will target those 13-19 year olds who are the most at risk of not making a successful transition through school and from school to further education, training or work.

Country Areas Programme

The Australian Government, through the Country Areas Programme (CAP), recognises that primary and secondary students in rural and geographically isolated areas face educational disadvantage due to distance. The CAP aims to give these students the opportunity to improve their educational experiences and learning outcomes through curriculum enhancement and increasing the quality of learning opportunities.

CAP funding for the 2005-2008 quadrennium is approximately \$115 million.

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme helps the families of primary, secondary and certain tertiary students who are unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis because of geographic isolation. Allowances under the AIC Scheme include boarding, second home and distance education allowances as well as pensioner education supplements.

Non-Government School Term Hostels Programme

The Non-Government School Term Hostels (NGSTH) Programme is a four year initiative which targets not-for-profit non-government school term hostels that operate principally to accommodate primary and secondary students from rural and remote areas of Australia.

In 2007 under the NGSTH Programme, eligible hostels will attract an initial grant of \$2,600 per year per eligible student. This amount is indexed annually by the Wage Cost Index No 1. Programme funds are to be used for the maintenance, operational and capital costs of the hostel and are not to be used to reduce hostel fees.

Reading Assistance Voucher programme

The Reading Assistance Voucher programme was announced in May 2006 and is part of the Australian Government's approach to providing direct help for children struggling with reading skills. The Australian Government will provide funding of \$20.6 million in 2006-07 and 2007-08 for the programme to assist parents/caregivers of children who did not meet the Year 3 national benchmark for reading in 2006.

Under the Reading Assistance Voucher programme parents of eligible students will be able to access \$700 worth of reading tuition for their child and tutors of the programme will be able to access Reading Assistance Kits.

7. Student wellbeing to improve the health, welfare and learning outcomes of students

Safe schools

Preventing bullying in schools is of utmost priority to the Australian Government. It has provided \$6.5 million to date to support the implementation of the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) which provides a consistent national approach to promoting safe and supportive school environments, and includes guidance for schools in addressing bullying, harassment, violence and child abuse and neglect.

Under the Schools Assistance Act 2004 all Australian schools are required to implement the NSSF by 1 January 2006. The agreements for funding under the Act also include a requirement that the NSSF poster be displayed prominently in all schools to support implementation of the Framework.

Health and physical education

To address the rise in childhood obesity and associated fitness and health issues, the Australian Government is providing \$116 million under the *Building a Healthy, Active Australia* package to encourage physical activity and healthy eating in school children. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) manages the *Active School Curriculum* component of these measures.

Under the *Schools Assistance Act 2004*, State and Territory government and non-government education authorities are required to commit to providing in their curriculum at least two hours of physical activity each school week for primary and junior secondary school children.

DEST has also provided sponsorship support for the Pedestrian Council of Australia for Walk Safely to School Day of \$50,000 in each of 2005-06 and 2006-07. This event promotes the health benefits of walking by encouraging parents and carers to walk to school with their primary school age children and reinforce safe pedestrian behaviour.

The Healthy Living Initiative was launched on 19 July, 2006 by the Minister for Health and Ageing. It aims to reinforce the Australian Government's position and leadership on promoting healthy eating and physical activity and to facilitate collaborative efforts across all portfolios to combat the growing incidence of obesity.

Drug Education

The National School Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) strengthens the provision of educational programmes and supportive environments that contribute to the goal of 'no illicit drugs in schools'.

The Australian Government has provided \$47.5 million for school drug education under the NSDES over the period 1999-2000 to 2007-2008. This has enabled the development of a range of

resources and initiatives that assist schools and the broader school community to deliver effective drug prevention and to prevent the harm that substance abuse can cause young people.

In addition to funding for the NSDES, as part of the Government's values education initiative, there is an additional \$6 million over four years to 2007-08 for drug education forums in every school to inform students about drugs, drawing on peer participation.

Chaplains

The National School Chaplaincy Programme supports all Australian schools and school communities that wish to establish school chaplaincy services or to enhance existing chaplaincy services in providing pastoral care and supporting the spiritual well-being of students.

Funding of up to \$115 million per annum for three years is available, commencing in the 2007 school year. Government and non-government schools and their communities can apply for up to \$20,000 per annum (up to a maximum of \$60,000 over the life of the Programme).

Boys' education

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that no Australian student falls behind in our education system. However, a number of recent reports have found that boys generally are not performing to their capacity on a range of education achievement measures and on a range of broader social indicators.

In response, the Australian Government has implemented a package of initiatives to support boys in schools to the value of approximately \$27 million. These include the national Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools (BELS) Project to identify and showcase successful practices and promote professional learning in the education of boys.

The \$19.4 million Success for Boys initiative, announced in June 2005, aims to build on the BELS programme to help schools improve boys' learning outcomes and engagement in learning by providing teachers with access to a high quality professional learning package.