

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY**

**Prepared by: the NSW Department of Education and Training,**

**February 2009**

## INTRODUCTION

The NSW Government is committed to improving educational outcomes for all Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> students and the NSW Department of Education and Training is working towards achieving the goal that Aboriginal student outcomes will match or better outcomes of the broader student population.

The NSW Government's various commitments under the NSW State Plan, *Two Ways Together* (the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan, 2003-2012), the Department of Education and Training's *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2006-2008* (currently being updated) and *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006-2008* (currently being updated and due for release in February 2009) and the new *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*, released in November 2008, all focus on honouring this commitment and consequently on strengthening Aboriginal peoples and communities.

The Department of Education and Training recognises that improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children and young people cannot be achieved in isolation from the work being undertaken in other key service delivery areas such as health, housing, juvenile justice, employment and economic development. In the area of housing for example, NSW has a mix of urban, regional and remote housing needs, and particular housing problems are experienced by its highly urbanised Aboriginal population. A lack of access to good quality, affordable, appropriate housing, impacts negatively on the educational, health, and other social and economic outcomes of Aboriginal peoples.

Hence, a whole-of-government approach is unequivocally regarded as the most effective way in which to address Indigenous disadvantage.

Decades of policy development and implementation have proven that past approaches have failed to ensure that all Indigenous peoples have access to a fair, just and equitable society. Where there have been improvements in outcomes for Indigenous peoples, the rate of improvement is widely acknowledged as being far too slow.

While the focus of this Inquiry is on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, this submission will highlight the fact that many Indigenous people in NSW live in urban areas.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is currently examining the need to develop a strategy to improve urban and regional service delivery to Aboriginal people. COAG recognises that if its 'Closing the Gap' targets are to be met, there must be a significant improvement in outcomes in urban and regional areas, throughout Australia, given that the majority of Indigenous Australians live in urban and non-remote regional areas.

---

<sup>1</sup> A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives. In referring to Aboriginal people, this submission is referring inclusively to all Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander people and, in so doing, is referring inclusively to all Indigenous Australians.

NSW acknowledges the Commonwealth Government's recognition that its own policy focus needs to extend beyond remote communities, predominantly in the north and west of Australia.

At its most recent meeting, COAG asked for a Regional and Urban Strategy to coordinate the delivery of service to Aboriginal people. This is of particular interest to the NSW Government given that NSW has the largest Indigenous population of all states and territories, with the majority of Indigenous people living in urban or regional locations – thirty-two per cent of NSW's Indigenous population live in Sydney.

## **THE NEW SOUTH WALES CONTEXT**

NSW has the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of all Australia's states and territories, comprising approximately twenty-nine per cent of the total Australian Indigenous population. Seventy-seven per cent of Aboriginal people in NSW live in major cities or inner regional areas, and fifty-three per cent live in the corridor encompassing the major cities of Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong<sup>2</sup>.

Similar to other states and territories, the Aboriginal population for NSW is a young population with forty per cent being less than fifteen years of age. The NSW Aboriginal population is younger than the NSW non-Aboriginal population and NSW Aboriginal population growth is double that of the general population. It is estimated that the Aboriginal population of NSW will grow by thirty-five per cent between 2006 and 2021, implying an average growth rate of almost two per cent per year during the next fifteen years. In comparison the annual growth rate of the total NSW population in 2006 was estimated to have been 0.9 per cent.<sup>3</sup> The young Aboriginal population of NSW in particular is expected to continue growing. This population growth will impact on service delivery in NSW not only in the area of education and training but in areas such as housing and related services.

### *Trends in Western NSW*

It is estimated that the Aboriginal population of the (previously ATSI) regions west of the Great Dividing Range will rise in line with the NSW Aboriginal population. For example, in Kamilaroy [*sic*], the population of Aboriginal people will increase by 5,277 from 14,545 to 19,822 between 2006 and 2021. However over this time, the Aboriginal population of Kamilaroy [*sic*] will remain at 9.8 per cent of the NSW Aboriginal population<sup>4</sup>.

### *Regional towns in NSW*

While the Aboriginal population in Western NSW will increase in line with the overall Aboriginal population in NSW, demographic trends within the region will see many more Aboriginal people living in regional towns.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Two Ways Together* Report on Indicators 2007, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, p.2

<sup>3</sup> Indicative New South Wales Indigenous Population Projections 2006 to 2021, *NSW Aboriginal Housing Office*, 2008

<sup>4</sup> As above

Many regional towns are experiencing significant in-migration of Aboriginal people, drawn primarily from western and northern areas of the state and from smaller towns, while at the same time there is an out-migration of non-Aboriginal people drawn to the coastal areas. Combined with natural Aboriginal population increase, this has already led to a large relative increase in the Aboriginal population of these towns with major implications for future demand for Government services.

In some regional towns the only population growth has been due to an increase in the numbers of Aboriginal people. For example between 1996 and 2001:

- the Aboriginal population of Broken Hill increased by 50.5 per cent, while the non-Aboriginal population fell by 5.9 per cent; and
- the Aboriginal population of Wilcannia increased by 14.4 per cent while the non-Aboriginal population fell by 6.5 per cent<sup>5</sup>.

Many of these towns are characterised by low levels of Aboriginal employment, low education outcomes, poor health outcomes and higher levels of engagement with the criminal justice system.

Other towns remain predominantly non-Aboriginal, but the majority of their population growth is now due to an expansion of Aboriginal numbers.

For example between 1996 and 2001:

- the Aboriginal population of Dubbo increased by 29.7 per cent, and non-Aboriginal by 4 per cent;
- the Aboriginal population of Orange increased by 39.2 per cent, non-Aboriginal by 5.1 per cent; and
- the Aboriginal population of Tamworth increased by 39.5 per cent, non-Aboriginal by just 1.5 per cent<sup>6</sup>.

These towns are emerging demographic “hot spots” in the sense that Aboriginal population dynamics require that planning for future service provision acknowledges the towns’ changing demography.

Decisions regarding equitable allocation of resources are complicated by the rapid changes in population growth described above and the challenges associated with developing appropriate weighting factors<sup>7</sup> to account for variations in the cost of service delivery and need in different geographic areas.

Whilst it is true that Aboriginal people residing in NSW live mostly in major urban areas, it is not true that their levels of disadvantage are any lower than those of Aboriginal people living in regional or remote areas. Addressing barriers to Aboriginal students achieving successful educational outcomes is a challenge for urban schools just as they are for regional and remote schools. Consequently, the reasons that Aboriginal children perform statistically poorly in the education system are multi-

---

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics census table based on Local Government Area

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research

<sup>7</sup> The process of **weighting** involves emphasising some aspects of a phenomenon, or of a set of data — giving them 'more weight' in the final effect or result. It is analogous to the practice of adding extra weight to one side of a pair of scales to favour a buyer or seller.

faceted and include issues such as poor attendance, higher levels of suspension and a lack of engagement and, in many circumstances, they do not have an understanding or awareness of what their own particular learning needs are in relation to their cultural backgrounds and experiences and expectations. These factors are relevant for many school communities across NSW.

Addressing issues such as overcrowding, high unemployment and access to health and education services, is a challenge and the NSW Government requires the support of the Commonwealth to address these issues in an holistic way.

An Aboriginal child born in New South Wales today will be born into any one of a diverse range of communities across the state. These communities may differ in geographical location, population size and density, socioeconomic and social cohesion levels, though what these babies will have in common is that they are more likely to: live in poverty, be of low birth weight, have substantially worse health than other Australians, experience hearing problems (otitis media), experience domestic violence and/or neglect, and have no access to prior-to-school services.

In NSW, the majority of people do not question the ready availability of access to early childhood education programs, for example, and that it is well established that children who have access to, and attend, good quality early childhood education programs have a head start at school. However, many Aboriginal families and communities do not have access to, or do not access, these services. This is one area impacting on the capacity of Aboriginal students and communities to engage successfully in education and training systems and broader issues must be considered when formulating future directions for NSW Aboriginal communities similar to other Aboriginal communities throughout Australia.

Traditionally, Aboriginal families have taken responsibility for nurturing and educating their children, particularly in the early years. In many contemporary Aboriginal families, this reality has not changed, despite the nature of the individual family's geolocation and/or socio-economic circumstances.

The Department of Education and Training and other human services providers, systemically, need to respond differently in the way early years programs are communicated, planned and delivered, so as Aboriginal families do not feel that their cultural and family rights are overridden, de-valued or removed.

Most importantly, Aboriginal families and communities themselves must be engaged as active participants in every stage of the planning, implementation and evaluation of particular strategies.

The NSW Aboriginal population is highly mobile and this impacts on the capacity of many Aboriginal families to establish and subsequently sustain educational and economic stability and success.

Nearly ninety per cent of NSW Aboriginal students are enrolled in government schools making up five per cent of the total NSW public school population and while Aboriginal students represent a high percentage of enrolments in remote and

community-based schools, the majority of Aboriginal students attend regional and urban schools where most of their peers are non-Aboriginal.

In order for NSW to achieve its goal of closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student performance, it needs to particularly prioritise: early childhood education; Quality Teaching<sup>8</sup>; support for Aboriginal students with disabilities; school retention and completion; and, pathways to training, employment and higher education. The setting of targets, the development and implementation of plans and the allocation of resources must be undertaken with a much more intense focus on the needs of Aboriginal students.

The fact that funding from the Commonwealth Government has not always proportionately reflected the high number of Aboriginal people who reside in NSW has affected the implementation of priorities under the *NSW State Plan* and the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003-2012, *Two Ways Together*.

Traditionally, provision of Indigenous education funding by the Commonwealth Government was subject to criteria that disadvantaged NSW. For example, as the majority of NSW Aboriginal school students reside in metropolitan locations, they have not been eligible to attract the more generous rural and remote weighting formulae peculiar to supplementary assistance. In addition, grants for metropolitan Aboriginal school students were no longer eligible for indexation between 2005 and 2008. Other states and territories with greater numbers of Aboriginal school students living in rural and remote areas have been able to attract rural and remote supplementary assistance. The issues for the NSW education and training system are similar to those for other systems, and are not particular only to regional or remote communities. For example, attracting and retaining quality teaching staff is an issue for all systems in all communities, urban, regional and remote alike.

Commonwealth funding for government schools will now be provided through the National Education Agreement, with Specific Purpose Payments for schooling being the primary vehicle for the Commonwealth to provide funding to assist the states and territories to deliver schooling. Whatever impacts this change in the delivery of funding may ultimately have, the fact remains that NSW has the highest Aboriginal population in the nation, with eighty per cent of its Aboriginal students not attending schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal students. And because of this last fact, NSW has traditionally had access to less Commonwealth funding, per capita, for Aboriginal education and training than any other state or territory based on the previously favoured geo-location Commonwealth funding model.

For NSW to target its identified Aboriginal education and training priority areas, which is essential if the educational achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-

---

<sup>8</sup> The NSW Quality Teaching model provides a framework to focus attention on, and provide consistent messages about, pedagogy in public schools. The model can be applied across all Key Learning Areas from Kindergarten to Year 12. The NSW QT model identifies three dimensions of pedagogy that have been linked to improved student outcomes: **Intellectual quality** refers to pedagogy focused on producing deep understanding of important, substantive concepts, skills and ideas; **Quality learning environment** refers to pedagogy that creates classrooms where students and teachers work productively in an environment clearly focused on learning; **Significance** refers to pedagogy that helps make learning meaningful and important to students.

Aboriginal students is to be closed, access to increased mainstream Commonwealth funding is crucial.

## **THE NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING – THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTEXT**

The NSW Department of Education and Training is committed to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. It has developed, and is in the process of implementing, a sustainable, broad-ranging, multi-faceted and long-term strategy to ensure that Aboriginal student educational outcomes match or better those of all students in NSW. Moreover, the Department is committed to doing this in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people at all levels.

The NSW Review of Aboriginal Education, conducted in 2004, is of fundamental importance in this context. The Review gathered extensive qualitative and quantitative data from Aboriginal communities and organisations, educational leaders, teachers, parents and students along with representatives from a range of key interest groups. The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* contained a total of seventy-one recommendations in nine key areas. These recommendations have informed the Department's initiatives in the area of Aboriginal education and training in the period since the Report's publication.

Much of 2005 was devoted to Departmental planning. In 2006, the *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2006-2008* (currently being updated), which outlines the Department's commitments and action plan for responding to the recommendations emanating from the Review, was introduced. 2006 also saw the implementation of the *School in Partnership* (SiP) initiative and the development of the *Targeted Aboriginal Students Strategy* (TASS) and the *Targeted School Initiative* (TSI). The Department also began working towards the progressive development and implementation of Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) for all Aboriginal students in NSW government schools, with over fifteen and a half thousand PLPs for Aboriginal students being implemented by the end of 2008. The promotion of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework, the release of the Department's *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006-2008*, the increase in funding for Aboriginal Languages programs in schools, the provision of state-wide targeted training in *Accelerated Literacy*, the establishment of the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program and providing priority of access to Aboriginal children in the Department's 100 preschools, are also noteworthy elements in the Department's suite of interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Taken together, these initiatives and programs represent an extensive, multi-pronged yet strategically integrated and interrelated approach affecting state offices, regional offices and TAFE Institutes as well as individual schools and TAFE campuses.

Given the breadth and depth of the strategies and programs developed in response to the recommendations of the Review of Aboriginal Education, an unequivocally collaborative and concentrated effort is required before significant changes in state-wide literacy and numeracy data or other quantitative measures of Aboriginal student performance will be evident.

Addressing: the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities; the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

- THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY

The primary goal of the NSW Department of Education and Training, as outlined in its *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*, is that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population.

Also as outlined in the Policy:

The NSW Department of Education and Training including schools, TAFE NSW and community education settings (The Department), is committed to improving the educational outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so that they excel and achieve in every aspect of their education and training.

The Policy was developed in collaboration with key partners, including Aboriginal communities, to provide policy advice for all employees of the Department. It fulfils a commitment to review the *Aboriginal Education Policy 1996 (Schools)* made in response to the Aboriginal Education Review.

The Policy highlights the need for all staff to focus on three guiding elements for its effective implementation:

- Relationships
- Engagement
- Ongoing Learning

The Policy prioritises:

- Aboriginal education and training as the core business of all Departmental staff
- increasing cultural competencies in Aboriginal cultures for all staff
- an acceleration and maintenance of the Department's progress in achieving its goal that '*by 2012, Aboriginal student outcomes will match or better outcomes of the broader student population*'.

As the Policy applies to all employees of the Department, it includes specific responsibilities for staff within all public education and training sectors in NSW and describes Aboriginal education and training as core business for all staff.



- **THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING STRATEGY**

The NSW Department of Education and Training has developed, and is implementing, a sustainable and broad-ranging *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy* (currently being updated for 2009-2012) to ensure that Aboriginal student education and training outcomes match those of all students in NSW. The Strategy has been designed to focus the work of schools, colleges, regions, TAFE Institutes and state office directorates towards achieving the goal that Aboriginal student outcomes will match or better outcomes of the broader student population.

Moreover, the Department is committed to achieving its goal in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people at all levels. It should be noted that the approach taken to doing business with Aboriginal people in NSW under the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs Plan, *Two Ways Together*, is a community-oriented, consultative process in which communities articulate their needs to Government, rather than vice versa. A number of strategies and approaches adopted by the Department of Education and Training invoke an Alternative Service Delivery (a Canadian coined term) model, in that they focus very firmly on engagement with community and the development of community partnerships as key elements of effective education service delivery. The Strategy and *Two Ways Together* are underpinned by the principles which characterise Alternative Service Delivery.

The Department understands that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to improving educational outcomes must be avoided, given that different communities may identify different needs. One example of a community-tailored approach is the 'ensuring school readiness' objective of the *NSW State Plan Priority F1: Improved health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal people*, in which the strategic focus is implementation of a pilot project in four Departmental preschools providing transport where required for young Aboriginal children in order to facilitate attendance.

Therefore, within the Strategy, programs are being targeted to communities where there is particular potential to improve school retention and completion rates – those that currently experience early school disengagement and poor school outcomes for Aboriginal students. The *Schools in Partnership* initiative, the *Targeted Aboriginal Students Strategy*, the *Targeted School Initiative*, *Kids Excel*, *Youth Excel* and *Aboriginal Student Scholarships* (detailed below) all focus on improving engagement, attendance, retention, and literacy and numeracy achievement with the view to achieving educational success for Aboriginal students.

- **THE ABORIGINAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006 – 2008* was developed as a response to Recommendation 8 of the Aboriginal Education Review. The Plan aimed to achieve increased participation and retention of Aboriginal staff in its workforce and thereby help to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Employing more Aboriginal people in schools, TAFE Institutes and regional and state offices provides a greater diversity of role models for young Aboriginal students. The

visibility of such role models encourages young Aboriginal students to see and hear the value of learning and achievement from Aboriginal people and the life opportunities available to them. Greater Aboriginal representation in the teaching workforce contributes to the development of teaching and learning practices that recognise and meet the needs of Aboriginal students.

The *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006 – 2008* focused on recruitment, participation, professional learning and network support strategies along with promotion and communication initiatives. The outcomes of the *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2006-2008* were reviewed during 2008. Some key achievements include:

- the percentage of Aboriginal people employed in the Department in 2008 was 2.3% up from 1.7% in 2006. Prior to the release of the Plan the percentage of Aboriginal people employed in the Department was 1.4% [DET Workforce Profile, weighted estimates]
- advertising for vacant positions now includes a statement encouraging Aboriginal people to apply for positions with the Department
- all people applying for promotions positions within the Department are now required to demonstrate knowledge of and commitment to the implementation of Aboriginal education and training policies and programs
- since the commencement of the 2004/2005 staffing operation on 27 April 2004 to 11 November 2008, 258 teachers who have identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander have been permanently appointed as teachers in NSW public schools
- an increasing number of school administrative and support staff positions are designated for Aboriginal people in schools with a significant number of Aboriginal students. From April 2006 until December 2008, 47 Aboriginal administrative and support staff positions have been filled
- the number of teaching scholarships awarded to Aboriginal people to become secondary or primary teachers has doubled from 30 and at least 60 scholarships are now offered annually
- more Aboriginal community members are participating in our recruitment processes. In 2006 more than 750 selection panels included Aboriginal representatives; in 2007 this increased to 870
- a dedicated site on the Department's intranet was developed to promote careers for Aboriginal people, and to provide valuable resources for current Aboriginal staff to plan their professional development or contact local networks.

The new *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan 2009-2011* (being released in February 2009) builds on the achievements and experiences gained from the previous Plan. It is informed by the *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy* and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy* (currently being revised).

It aims to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed and retained in our workforce. Professional development and leadership opportunities for Aboriginal staff are given a focus, as well as partnerships with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. and local Aboriginal communities.

### Addressing Aboriginal employment and economic development:

While approximately thirty-two per cent of the NSW Aboriginal population lives in Sydney, it is clear that many NSW regional towns are experiencing significant in-migration of Aboriginal people (Taree, Armidale, Lithgow, Griffith, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Broken Hill particularly) drawn mainly from western and northern areas of NSW.

Many of these regional towns are characterised by low levels of Aboriginal employment, low education outcomes, poor health outcomes and higher levels of engagement with the criminal justice system.

The NSW Government plays a leading role in promoting economic development for all Aboriginal people in NSW and has a continued focus on creative employment and economic development activities, not only in urban areas, but specifically in regional and remote locations due to increasing Aboriginal populations and high levels of disparity across a range of outcomes.

Addressing Aboriginal economic development is one of the seven priority areas identified under the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan, *Two Ways Together* and NSW agencies, through the Aboriginal Inter-agency Economic Development Working Group, are developing a NSW Aboriginal Economic Development Policy. The NSW Department of Education and Training is a member of this Working Group.

The NSW State Plan, which has as its primary objective the better delivery of government services to the NSW community, focuses strongly on the imperative to strengthen Aboriginal communities and to ensure that Aboriginal peoples and communities have an equitable share of the growth in the prosperity of NSW.

The NSW Government acknowledges that the many significant barriers limiting Aboriginal people's access to employment opportunities are the responsibility of a range of government departments and therefore, that these barriers need to be addressed through a coordinated and holistic approach.

Priority F1 of the NSW State Plan: *Improved health, education and social outcomes for Aboriginal people*, aims to address the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal peoples and communities in a holistic manner across five diverse objectives: safe families; education; environmental health; economic development and building community resilience.

With regard to the economic development objective, the Government's focus is on increasing employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, by:

- Establishing, as of 30 June 2008, 12 Job Compact agreements in regional and urban locations (Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Blacktown/Mt Druitt, Campbelltown/Macarthur, Eastern Sydney, Redfern/ Waterloo, Tweed Heads, Illawarra, Dubbo, Newcastle/Hunter, Cobar (Mining)) to generate local employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. These Job Compacts seek to identify how government agencies, the private sector, industry groups, employment services, training providers and Aboriginal communities can work together to overcome local barriers and facilitate greater employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The Compacts were developed in a flexible manner so that they relate to location or industry specific circumstances. Signatories made the commitment to take action to improve the participation of Aboriginal people in the local workforce, and to undertake steps to develop and maintain Aboriginal cultural awareness within their organisation. A number of Job Compact signatories also committed to specific actions to support employment related strategies.

Whilst the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs has lead agency responsibility for the economic development objective of Priority F1, the NSW Department of Education and Training is signatory to the Overarching Job Compact Memorandum of Understanding and is working with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and other signatories to overcome the barriers restricting Aboriginal people from accessing employment opportunities and to directly assist the employment of Aboriginal people locally.

In particular, the NSW Department of Education and Training has been involved in identifying regional skills shortages and has provided the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs with a comprehensive list of Aboriginal student enrolments in TAFE courses across the state.

The NSW Government is also addressing economic participation and welfare reform through the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform.

In addition to programs provided by the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, the NSW Department of Education and Training delivers education and training programs, such as the Aboriginal Cultural Arts Program, through the education and training units attached to all detention centres located throughout NSW. NSW Department of Education and Training programs also include remedial, general and vocational education, literacy and numeracy, personal development and TAFE, school certificate and higher school certificate courses.

The focus on economic development in relation to Aboriginal peoples and communities is also relevant to two other NSW State Plan priorities which are led by the NSW Department of Education and Training:

- Priority S5: 'More students complete Year 12 or recognised vocational training'. A key strategy of Priority S5 relates to increasing vocational education and training opportunities for Aboriginal students by supporting more Aboriginal students to take up Certificate III courses.
- Priority P7: 'Better access to training in rural and regional NSW to support local economies'. Priority P7 focuses on increasing the number of training courses for

Aboriginal students in regional and remote locations as well as offering more apprenticeships and traineeships for Aboriginal people.

The NSW Department of Education and Training's *Corporate Plan 2008-2010* identifies key strategies relating to the improvement of economic opportunities for Aboriginal people. These include:

- offering a broader range of quality education and training options for students in the senior years
- providing more school based apprenticeships and traineeships
- targeting specific population groups for increased participation and implement workforce re-entry initiatives.

Desired outcomes of these strategies include:

- increased training places in regional and rural areas targeting skill shortage occupations
- more people commencing, participating in and completing apprenticeships and traineeships
- increased participation by targeted specific population groups.

The Corporate Plan links with the *NSW State Plan* and the *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy*.

Actions within the Strategy which relate to improving economic opportunities for Aboriginal people include:

- improving pathways from education to employment and further study for Aboriginal students
- implementing the *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan* to strengthen workforce planning, recruitment, career development, succession planning, professional development and mentoring
- developing and implementing, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, a range of programs and strategies to build capacity in Aboriginal communities and use community profiles as a basis for planning the most useful courses for Aboriginal students
- strengthening the focus on TAFE courses aligned to employment opportunities, particularly those at Certificate III or above
- developing and implementing an Aboriginal Teaching and Learning Framework to support vocational Education and Training delivery.
- developing and implementing the Aboriginal Offenders Action Plan for TAFE NSW Provision and Post Release Pathways 2008 - 2012

The Strategy and the *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Plan* link directly to *NSW State Plan* and *Two Ways Together* initiatives and address the imperative of strengthening Aboriginal communities by implementing measures which focus on improving economic opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The NSW Department of Education and Training's actions in working to overcome the multiple disadvantages confronting Aboriginal peoples in NSW and in ensuring the economic strength of Aboriginal communities is reflective of the national Indigenous agenda. Both the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs and the National Framework inform and guide Aboriginal policy initiatives in NSW.

The Taskforce has identified three key priorities encapsulating the seven strategic areas for action under the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework. The key priority, which relates to NSW's intent to develop an economic development schedule for Aboriginal peoples and communities, is:

- building Indigenous wealth, employment and entrepreneurial culture, as these are integral to boosting economic development and reducing poverty and dependence on passive welfare.

The Council of Australian Government's National Framework of Principles commits all levels of government to 'achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians, improving the delivery of services, building greater opportunities and helping Indigenous families and individuals to become self-sufficient'. The Framework is structured around a number of main areas which includes a focus on priority areas. One of these priority areas is economic participation and development.

- **Aboriginal Community Governance**

*Good governance requires communities having genuine decision-making powers. Sustained and measurable improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people only occurs when the real decision-making power is vested in their communities, when they build effective governing institutions, and when the decision-making processes of those institutions reflect the cultural values and beliefs of the people.*<sup>9</sup>

Aboriginal communities in both urban and regional locations have in place governance structures that assist and support cultural, social and economic progress. The Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Medical Centres are clear examples.

Governance belongs to an organisation or company – not a community: Members of the community however, practice Governance procedures, when they actively participate in the operations of their local community organisations.

'Good Governance' is represented by models of good practice that empowers members of their local organisation to make informed decisions based on sound judgement that benefits the whole organisation (and ultimately its members). A standard model of governance in most Aboriginal organisations is articulated by a Board, which is elected by its members. The Board's Chair is decided by the Executive.

Most Aboriginal organisations have a Chief Executive Officer and related administration staff, who are responsible for the management of the day to day operations of the organisation. The CEO regularly reports to the Board on key matters relating to the organisation's Business Plan.

---

<sup>9</sup> 'Contested Governance: Culture, power and institutions in Indigenous Australia', Janet Hunt, Diane Smith, Stephanie Garling and Will Sanders (Editors), Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University, Canberra, Research Monograph No. 29 2008, p. xvii

It is suggested that Government needs to rationalise the number of organisations funded, based on the number of skilled people available to exercise due diligence and probity at a board and CEO level.

It is then that Government can best support the process of effective governance structures in Aboriginal community organisations by providing high quality training on all elements pertaining to governance responsibilities, including compliance training and fiduciary obligations.

## NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Programs:

The Department provides education and training services across the whole of NSW; access to services in regional and remote locations is not the primary issue per se<sup>10</sup>. The Department is more intent on improving the quality of service which is being delivered in order to positively impact on Aboriginal student educational and training achievement.

The range of initiatives which are operating to improve the educational and training outcomes of Aboriginal students aim to build in school regions and TAFE NSW Institutes a capacity to sustain change in teaching practice in order to impact positively on the achievements of all Aboriginal learners.

Sustainability is a key factor of these initiatives, as is community capacity building. Schools and regions are supported to develop and implement practices, strategies, initiatives and plans that essentially become self-sustaining and do not require recurrent, long term State funding support.

Schools and regions are also being supported to focus on changing how they deliver Aboriginal education and training services (community partnerships; shared decision making; community consultation and engagement, and quality teaching practice) in order to ensure that the educational needs of Aboriginal children and young people are being met and closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal peers.

- **Preschools servicing Aboriginal communities** – Across NSW the Department of Education and Training operates 100 preschools for young children one year prior to school entry. In all of the preschools priority of access is given to children whose families experience disadvantage including Aboriginal children. Eleven of

---

<sup>10</sup> One area where improving access has been identified as a priority is in early childhood education. Under the State Plan's education focus for F1: *Increase the readiness to learn of Aboriginal children prior to school entry*, it is acknowledged that if children get a good start in the early years, they are much more likely to get good results as they progress. Under this priority, the Department of Education and Training, in collaboration with the Attorney General's Department, Department of Community Services and the Department of Health, is piloting a before school transport service in four communities, where it has been identified that transport has been a barrier to access and hence has impacted negatively on school participation and attendance by young Aboriginal children. These communities are Liverpool, Mt Druitt, Dubbo West and Coonamble.

the preschools are designated specifically for Aboriginal children and thirteen are located in areas with significant Aboriginal populations.

- **Aboriginal Early Language Development Program** - implemented in 24 schools (four of which are in remote or very remote areas) to improve the language and literacy skills of Aboriginal students in the early years of school. An Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher develops and produces appropriate resources in consultation with the local Aboriginal community that supports the implementation of the program.
- The ***Schools in Partnership Initiative (SiP)*** was designed to assist schools with significant Aboriginal student populations in both urban and remote/regional locations to build capacity and strengthen partnerships with communities and other agencies. The program allows communities to develop strategies according to their needs, including personalised learning programs for every Aboriginal student, Aboriginal cultural education training for all staff, programs that help prepare students for Kindergarten and transition into high school, development of quality teaching strategies for Aboriginal students and the implementation of mentoring programs. SiP assists 30 schools throughout the state to improve the literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes of all of their students and to specifically improve outcomes for Aboriginal students within the context of the whole school.

The Department of Education and Training is currently reviewing its funding allocation model for SiP with the view of expanding the initiative to include more schools as well as dovetailing or synergising SiP funding with other program funding available to schools will aim to ensure that true equity is achieved.

- ***Personalised Learning Plans*<sup>11</sup> (PLPs)** (15,669 as at the end of 2008) for Aboriginal students continue to be developed and implemented by NSW schools

---

<sup>11</sup> Personalised Learning Plans are intended to be an integral part of teaching and learning. The emphasis is on the process of building partnerships between schools and communities to support learning achievements and enhance the well-being of students.

Personalised Learning Plans are localised and as such may reflect a combination of varying formats. The fundamental characteristic of Personalised Learning Plans is that they are developed in partnership with the student, parents and/or caregivers and teachers, while co-opting the assistance of Aboriginal support staff and other 'specialist' staff and agencies. Personalised Learning Plans are dynamic documents that are monitored and reviewed periodically, ensuring currency of student progress and development.

Personalised Learning Plans focus on student learning and outcomes, taking into account a student's interests and abilities. They seek to incorporate comments from parents/carers and, where appropriate, students. While documentation associated with the planning process will vary from school to school, it should be a practical and user-friendly document that is clear, concise and easily understood by parents, students and staff.

The consultation process and planning that occurs in conjunction with the teaching and learning are the focus of Personalised Learning Plans. The process of connecting parents/carers to their children's learning is as significant as the production of the actual plan, which sets the directions. People working together in this way will be the basis for achieving the necessary improvement in educational outcomes.



in partnership with parents/carers and these Plans include targets for learning against syllabus outcomes and agreed family support strategies. The process of developing and implementing Personalised Learning Plans has improved the engagement of and support provided by parents in their children's education. The development and implementation of these Plans is an important strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement as it tailors service delivery to address the specific learning needs and help meet the goals of individual students. The specific benefits of such Plans for the learning achievements of Aboriginal students are of particular relevance within the context of the Department's goal.

- The **Targeted Aboriginal Students Strategy (TASS)** is being implemented in schools with a significant number of Aboriginal student enrolments in both urban and regional locations. TASS was established to provide specific strategies for a number of identified medium density schools, which were not serviced by the *Schools in Partnership* initiative. TASS schools are provided with targeted funding, based on the number of Aboriginal students enrolled, to establish representative committees. These committees:
  - contribute to student planning, monitoring and evaluation;
  - plan specific student improvement targets including targets for academic performance behaviour;
  - attendance and retention;
  - support for quality teaching;
  - provide access to the Aboriginal cultural education program for staff; and
  - assists with developing personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students.

In 2009, TASS will be extended to include four additional schools in a targeted regional location.

- The **Targeted School Initiative (TSI)** is being implemented in a number of schools in non-urban locations to provide targeted support and funding to address issues impacting on Aboriginal student outcomes. Strategies include initiatives that focus on student improvement targets, such as:
  - targets for academic performance;
  - behaviour and attendance and retention;
  - quality teaching;
  - principal mentor support;
  - community capacity building;
  - leadership;
  - professional development opportunities; and
  - Aboriginal student and community support programs such as: *Feeling Deadly not Shame* in association with Mind Matters.
- In all schools where initiatives are operating to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, there is a focus on implementing the NSW Quality Teaching Framework. **Quality Teaching** is directly linked to improving student engagement because it involves implementing strategies and pedagogies which are relevant and appropriate to Aboriginal learners.

- The Department of Education and Training continues to support schools and local Aboriginal communities to implement the *Two Ways Together* Funded Initiatives Package (*Kids Excel*, *Youth Excel* and *Scholarships for Aboriginal Students*), to target localised strategies that address the school participation and the learning achievements of Aboriginal students. The Department has lead responsibility for *Kids Excel*, *Youth Excel* and *Aboriginal Student Scholarships*.
  - ***Kids Excel*** is a whole of government early intervention strategy which aims to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in communities where there are significant issues in early school disengagement and poor school outcomes through targeted local initiatives. These focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes; social, emotional and cognitive development outcomes; and, student, parent and teacher perceptions of school social environments for Aboriginal children 0-12 years of age. These initiatives also focus on attendance and engagement. The program operates in five public schools, three of which are located in regional/remote locations. The program is due to end in 2009 and *Kids Excel* schools are being supported to develop and implement exit strategies in order to transition smoothly in order to sustain the benefits and positive impacts of the program.
  - ***Youth Excel*** is the secondary school support strategy being implemented across nine targeted high schools, four of which are located in regional locations, where there are significant issues in early school disengagement and poor school outcomes. *Youth Excel* assists Aboriginal students in these targeted high schools, aged between 13-18, in these high schools, to maintain a connection to learning and to improve their educational outcomes. Funding for *Youth Excel* provides services such as student learning centres, student mentoring and links to employment and higher education. As with *Kids Excel*, funding for *Youth Excel* will cease in 2009 and schools are being supported to transition smoothly into a post-program phase, ensuring that local strategies implemented during the funding period are sustained and that the benefits of the program persist.

The Kids Excel and Youth Excel schools are currently engaging in a transitions phase which includes an exit strategy and formal evaluation procedures.

- ***Aboriginal Student Scholarships***. In 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, 160 Aboriginal students in Years 9 to 12 were awarded individual scholarships. The scholarships are awarded annually with the aim to improving retention in the later years of schooling and in Vocational Education and Training courses, and to encourage further efforts to excel at school.
- ***Priority Schools Programs (PSP)***:  
 The NSW Priority Schools Programs support public schools serving the highest concentrations of students from low socio-economic status families. Priority Schools Programs comprise two key funding programs: the Priority Schools Funding Program and the Priority Action Schools Program. Forty-five per

cent of all school age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in NSW are enrolled in schools receiving Priority Schools Programs resources, or Priority Schools.

The purpose of the Priority Schools Programs is to improve the literacy, numeracy and engagement outcomes of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Priority Schools benefit from the use of Priority Schools Programs resources through a whole school approach to student learning in the critical areas of literacy and numeracy as well as participation. This participation includes student engagement in learning as well as development of genuine partnerships between the home, the school and the wider community.

In order to achieve improved student learning outcomes all Priority Schools work through strategies in the inter-related areas of quality teaching and learning, classroom and school organisation and school culture and home school partnerships.

Socio-economic status, most commonly measured by parental education and income, is a powerful predictor of school achievement and school completion. Priority Schools Programs have a twenty year history of addressing the links between low socio-economic status and learning, student achievement and schooling.

Socio-economic status is highly correlated at the school level with learning outcomes. It is recognised at the national and international levels as an appropriate and valuable surrogate of educational disadvantage. Using such a surrogate rather than direct measures of student performance removes the risks of culturally inappropriate assessment and the dilemma of whether to reward (by the provision of support) success or failure of schools in improving student achievement.

Priority schools can participate in the *Schools in Partnership initiative*, *Targeted Aboriginal Student Strategy*, *Targeted School Initiative*, *Kids Excel* and *Youth Excel* as well as engaging in *Accelerated Literacy*, *Count Me in Too* and other programs specifically targeting literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students.

- The **Country Areas Program (CAP)** is designed to redress the effects of geographic isolation on the learning outcomes of rural and isolated students. In excess of seventeen per cent of enrolments in CAP schools are Aboriginal students. There are over 225 schools involved in the Country Areas Program, with the majority servicing small rural communities.
- **Support for Aboriginal students with a disability or learning difficulties:**

In order for NSW to achieve its goal of closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student performance it needs to prioritise a range of areas. One of these is support for Aboriginal students with disabilities.

The NSW Department of Education and Training recognises the significant disadvantage that many Aboriginal students with a disability face - especially those living in regional and remote communities - and is strongly committed to supporting all students with disability or learning difficulties to access and participate in quality education that meets their specific needs.

In addition to the wide range of programs outlined in this submission which are targeted to Aboriginal students, communities and schools, the Department provides a wide range of services and programs for supporting students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties that are available to support Aboriginal students.

The *Learning Assistance Program* supports students in regular classes who are experiencing difficulties in literacy, numeracy or language, regardless of the cause. The program addresses the specific learning needs of students through direct and intensive instruction and through the professional development of teachers. The Learning Assistance program employs more than 1,378 specialist teachers in primary and secondary schools across the state. These specialist teachers work directly with students and their teachers in assessing students and in developing and implementing programs to meet their specific learning needs in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. The program is flexible, locally managed and able to directly respond to the individual learning needs of students.

The *Funding Support (Integration)* program supports students with a confirmed disability enrolled in regular classes. The program provides funding to supplement existing school and regional resources. Funding may be used in a range of ways to meet the needs of students and the school including additional teacher or teacher aide time and training and development activities for school personnel.

A range of specialist services also support the work of teachers, including:

- Itinerant support teachers who provide practical support to students with disabilities and their teachers. These specialist teachers have expertise in areas such as autism, transition, vision, hearing and behaviour.
- Disability Programs Consultants who provide advice on programming and assessment of learning programs and information on appropriate support to access the curriculum.
- School counsellors who work in consultation with teachers, the school, parents or carers and other agencies, where appropriate, to improve student learning and behaviour and provide counselling and psychological assessment.
- Student Services Officers who coordinate student welfare and behaviour provisions within a region.

In addition, in the recent mini-budget in November 2008, the NSW Government approved an additional \$9 million for the Department to better support students with complex needs and their teachers. These funds are enabling the Department to establish an additional specialist teacher presence in 265 schools in 40

communities of schools right across the state from the beginning of the 2009 school year. Participating schools were identified on the basis that they were part of the Priority Schools Program (described elsewhere in this submission) and/or were already members of a community of schools. This includes schools in regional and remote areas. The following link provides a list of participating schools:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/programs/disability/slscinfo.pdf>

These specialist teachers, to be known as *School Learning Support Coordinators*, will help classroom teachers to meet the diverse needs of students with complex additional learning needs. This includes students from a range of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, including Aboriginal students, who have difficulties with reading and language and other learning and behavioural difficulties.

The School Learning Support Coordinators will also receive substantial training in a range of areas relevant for their role including specialist training in autism, speech, language and communication needs, managing behaviour, motor coordination difficulties and curriculum access for students with additional learning needs.

This initiative was introduced because of the changing needs in our schools and community. Students in NSW public schools come from diverse cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as having diverse learning histories. Up to twelve per cent of students in regular schools have complex additional learning needs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder, difficulties in learning such as dyslexia, language and communication, behaviour disorders and various confirmed disabilities. This includes Aboriginal students.

Legislation such as the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and its associated Disability Standards for Education 2005 make it a legal obligation to treat all students with a disability, including those who are Aboriginal, “*on the same basis as*” other students.

The Department has a range of initiatives in place to support work toward achieving State targets for improving learning outcomes and school retention.

To respond to these factors, the Department needs to better engage with every student and their parent/carers and support schools and learning communities to work together to effectively support students with complex additional learning needs. The School Learning Support Coordinator initiative has been designed to achieve these aims. It also has the flexibility to respond to the diversity of our students and their school contexts, including the diversity of circumstances and needs of Aboriginal students.

- ***Aboriginal Languages Programs in schools*** operate to enable Aboriginal communities to preserve, teach and utilise traditional language and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal students (and non-Aboriginal students) from Kindergarten to Year 12 to learn an Aboriginal language. Twenty-five schools

have been funded to date to develop and implement Aboriginal Languages Programs including the employment of Aboriginal Language Teachers and development of language resources including the compiling of dictionaries.

The Department offers sponsorships to train Aboriginal teachers from both schools and TAFE as qualified Language Teachers in the *Masters of Indigenous Languages Education* program. The aim of the program is to provide specialist language training to teach NSW Aboriginal languages in NSW public schools. To date, three teachers have been successful recipients.

- **Aboriginal Studies Strategies** have been developed to support schools and students in K-12. A range of support materials have been developed to promote Aboriginal Studies to students and teachers in secondary schools. Some of the initiatives pursued include further promotion of Aboriginal Studies emphasising community capacity and engagement across the regions and facilitating Curriculum Support and Professional Development Workshops.
- **Aboriginal Cultural Education**, as mandated by the *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*, through professional learning and career development experiences for all Departmental staff, is anticipated to have major impacts on the education of Aboriginal children and young people. By Building Cultural Competencies in Aboriginal Cultures, the intent is to develop in staff, various knowledges and skills which are necessary to engage effectively and genuinely with Aboriginal peoples in all settings in order to build and maintain relationships and continually improve service delivery. The Department's commitment to deliver Aboriginal cultural education within all schools and TAFE colleges is yet another strategy to improve service delivery.
- The **In-Class Tuition** program provides tutors to work with Aboriginal students in classrooms to support them to participate in, understand and complete class work as taught by the teacher. A total of 447 NSW schools, located in both urban and regional/remote locations, participated in the In-Class Tuition program in 2008 with funds allocated to provide individual support for Aboriginal students in remote and very remote schools being twice the rate provided to support Aboriginal students in provincial and metropolitan schools.
- The development of **Aboriginal student leadership** skills is promoted by the NSW Department of Education and Training as an important element to address disadvantage in Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate provides funds to assist a limited number of Aboriginal students to participate in the annual state student representative council conference and the NSW Student Representative Council. Other student leadership opportunities for Aboriginal students such as participation in forums, conferences, public speaking and career goal setting activities are provided in regions.

Aboriginal students in remote and regional locations, like their metropolitan and urban counterparts, are encouraged to become members of school representative councils or their equivalent and to participate in inter-school, regional and state student representative council forums.

- **Telecommunications & ICT.** Many government agencies are now using enhanced access to broadband to provide better services in rural and remote parts of NSW. The NSW Department of Education and Training is providing video conferencing and educational materials for students and teachers in regional and remote areas. (See below for detail.)
  - The Department's *Connected Classrooms Program* demonstrates its commitment to deliver a set of tools to meet the needs of students in their school environments that can also be accessed in other environments. The Program facilitates learning, wherever and whenever, as students consume, remix and create knowledge.

The Program involves the use of interactive whiteboards and video conferencing which have shown to increase student engagement, which will enhance learning outcomes.

Through the Program students will have access to a personalised online workspace with 'when and where they require' access to appropriate resources, resulting in increased efficiency.

Parents will be able to have online access to their children's student reports. Parents will also have peace of mind in relation to the appropriateness of the electronic content their children are exposed to due to filtered browsing.

- One of the projects coming under the Program's umbrella is the *Interactive Classrooms Project*. This project:
  - equips every NSW public school with an Interactive Classroom (interactive whiteboard, video conferencing facility and data collaboration)
  - enables direct video links to allow online field trips to places such as the State Library, The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the National Museum of Australia
  - allows university and industry experts to be connected into classrooms to deliver lectures and take questions
  - supports increased use of Information and Communication Technology within Quality Teaching
  - supports teachers to personalise learning
  - enhances opportunities for collaboration between students, teachers, classes and schools across the Department.
  - provides necessary infrastructure to facilitate collegial support networks for teachers.

- *Virtual Selective Class Provision:*

This provision, being implemented in 2010 as part of the *Connected Classrooms Program*, will enable gifted and talented Aboriginal students to have access to selective schooling and a more challenging academic program without leaving home and friends to do so.

The model for the virtual selective class provision in Western NSW will connect students from across the region into a selective strand, covering English, Mathematics and Science using a suite of sophisticated technology as well as face-to-face teaching.

Students will enrol in the selective class provision and also in their local government high school.

Western NSW Region schools have for many years successfully used innovative technology to connect students and teachers in different locations. The selective class provision builds upon and extends this experience into a much needed new opportunity for students.

Technological advances, including very high speed internet access, quality video-conferencing equipment with excellent audio and classrooms specifically designed to make full use of digital technology, now mean students can fully participate in classes delivered by expert teachers from another location.

Strategies such as peer-to-peer networking; blogs; wikis; podcasts and vodcasts will be adapted into the learning environment.

Up to 30 students will be invited into the virtual selective class provision. These students will need to enrol in a government high school in the Western NSW Region for 2010.

## Literacy & Numeracy

The NSW Department of Education and training has developed a number of programs and strategies that are designed to address literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal students. These include Aboriginal specific programs as well as those that are taught universally. The work of the Department is guided by the *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2006-2008* (currently being updated), which links to *Two Ways Together* and the *NSW State Plan*. Through the implementation of the Strategy the Department is actively engaged in achieving the targets of the relevant State Plan's priorities relating to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

One of the key strategies being pursued involves introducing the **Accelerated Literacy** pedagogy into primary schools, which is proving to be instrumental in increasing the literacy proficiency of Aboriginal students at an accelerated rate, while improving outcomes for all students. *Accelerated literacy* provides opportunities for the additional benefits of improved attendance, engagement and behaviour as students experience success and engage at the same level as their peers.

The NSW Department of Education and Training's Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate's state-wide *Accelerated Literacy* training program for regional consultants and classroom teachers began in 2006 and continued throughout 2008. Improving literacy achievement for Aboriginal students is a high priority and is



articulated through the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* and the *NSW State Literacy Plan 2006-2008*.

Regional Accelerated Literacy training aims to build the capacity of regions to continue to expand the pedagogy to maximise the learning achievements of Aboriginal students in their region.

The training model is two tiered, as once participants complete the initial training in the pedagogy, they may apply to receive additional training to equip them to train others in *Accelerated Literacy*. These participants are then known as *Regional Accelerated Literacy Tutors*. By the end of 2008, approximately 700 consultants and teachers had been trained in the pedagogy.

Initial data from a small number of teachers who completed *Accelerated Literacy* training in 2007 shows strong improvement in the literacy achievements of Aboriginal students. In the sample classrooms, the Aboriginal students' literacy achievement not only caught up, but exceeded the progress of their non-Aboriginal peers.

Student literacy achievement data collection is being collected again from 2008 participants. In addition, the Department of Education and Training targeted thirty effective practitioners from 2007 training to continue to collect long term data. As the *Accelerated Literacy* program extends its scope, data collection case studies will be launched from schools which have all classes using the pedagogy.

The research findings emanating from the evaluation of the National Accelerated Literacy Program undertaken by Charles Darwin University, reported that the improvement in student literacy outcomes was outstanding, as their reading age improved by a minimum of eighteen months after six months of accelerated literacy instruction.

The NSW Department of Education and Training's *State Literacy and State Numeracy Plans 2006-2008* clearly articulate the shared responsibilities that schools, regions and state offices have in recognising and addressing the literacy and numeracy needs of Aboriginal students. They focus on the effective use of data to align and target support to significantly improve the performance of Aboriginal students.

Comprehensive implementation plans which are aligned with the strategic action areas in the Plans are in place. Twice-yearly reporting of progress on these Plans and twice yearly training to ensure consistency of practice is integral to the Plans.

From the Department's Curriculum Kindergarten – Year 12 Directorate, literacy and numeracy support for teachers is provided through the development of new materials and focused professional learning programs. Literacy and numeracy professional learning programs include the **Best Start** initiative, **Count Me In Too**, **Counting On**, **Literacy On Track**, **Literacy In The Middle Years** and **Reading Recovery** (an early literacy intervention strategy).

**Reading to Learn** training was offered in 2008 to regional consultants and Stage 3 and 4 classroom teachers in targeted locations across the state. The *Reading to*

*Learn* program trains teachers to teach reading and writing as part of normal classroom practice across curriculum subjects, as well as intervention support for students in need.

The Government's **Best Start** initiative is designed to identify the literacy and numeracy learning that children bring to school and to use this information to plan and deliver quality literacy and numeracy teaching in the early years of schooling. This initiative has the potential to dramatically improve educational outcomes for young Aboriginal learners through its ability to identify, intervene where necessary, and support their individual learning needs.

The Department's **Penpal Program**, which began in 2004, supports improved literacy levels of students in rural and remote schools with a high Aboriginal population. Goodooga and Lightning Ridge Central Schools were the first two schools involved in the program. In 2008 there are approximately 12 rural or remote schools, and a total of 280 students involved in the program.

The program enables staff in various Sydney law firms to support young children with their literacy. Twice a term, writing sessions are conducted at either lunchtime or after work in law firms with an education officer from the Department of Education and Training running the sessions. The letters from lawyers are then collected, checked and posted to the schools, usually with an accompanying book.

The **Literacy On Track** program is offered to school teams of executives and K-4 classroom teachers and is designed to support them to effectively assess, plan and teach literacy.

The **Literacy In The Middle Years** program is offered to geographical school clusters of primary and secondary schools and is aimed at improving literacy outcomes for students in the middle years of schooling.

The **Reading Recovery** program is an intervention for students experiencing reading and writing difficulties after their first year of school (Year 1 students).

**Numeracy programs** implemented in NSW include the *Count Me In Too* and *Counting On* pedagogies, particularly *Count Me In Too Indigenous* and *Counting On Teaching Strategies for Speakers of Aboriginal English*. Training has been provided to In-class Tuition tutors in the *Count Me In Too* program to enable tutors to access the language of mathematics and talk about the numeracy learning of students with reference to the Learning Framework in Number program.

The learning frameworks used in *Count Me In Too* bring the latest in research on how children learn mathematics into practice in the classroom. They provide a basis for observing and understanding children's numeracy strategies. The *Count Me In Too Indigenous* program incorporates a specific focus on community involvement in supporting students' numeracy learning. Through this program, Aboriginal community members, Aboriginal workers within the school and members of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, work together with classroom teachers to develop culturally appropriate resources and teaching activities that are appropriate for producing solutions to identified student learning needs.

The **Counting On** numeracy program develops the professional knowledge of teachers in supporting middle years students (Years 5–8) to achieve significant mathematics outcomes. The program specifically focuses on identifying and responding to the needs of students experiencing difficulties in numeracy in the middle years.

The majority of literacy and numeracy programs referred to above have been particularly targeted towards low-socio-economic communities, in both urban and regional/remote locations. A range of key factors influence the success of these programs with Aboriginal children, including:

- strong involvement of the Aboriginal community and effective relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators
- engagement of the Aboriginal community in planning and implementation
- explicit linking between literacy and numeracy learning and Aboriginal culture through the development of relevant and culturally appropriate activities that provide a sense of belonging and meaning for Aboriginal students
- effective leadership in the school, continuity of staff and a focus on professional learning that is sustained and builds capacity at the local level.

## Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Enrolments by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in TAFE Delivered Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses across the state have been steadily increasing over recent years.

A majority of these enrolments represent students located in rural and remote areas, for example, in the New England, Riverina and Western Institutes of TAFE.

In 2007, just under fifty per cent of Department of Education and Training Aboriginal students in NSW who completed their Higher School Certificate, were enrolled in TAFE Delivered Vocational Education and Training as part of their studies.

Included in the suite of TAFE Delivered Vocational Education and Training Courses are those which have been developed specifically for Aboriginal students. These Courses include:

- Certificate II in Government Services (8516)
- Certificate II in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Cultural Arts (19102)
- Certificate II in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care (1809).

Given the higher levels of Aboriginal involvement with the criminal and juvenile justice systems throughout the state but particularly in regional and remote areas, the NSW Department of Education and Training is working to improve post release VET pathways for Aboriginal inmates and detainees.

*The Aboriginal Offenders Action Plan for TAFE NSW Provision and Post Release Pathways 2008-2012* builds upon some of the key achievements of the *TAFE NSW Provision for Aboriginal Offenders Implementation Plan 2004 -2005*. *The Aboriginal*

*Offenders Action Plan for TAFE NSW Provision and Post Release Pathways 2008-2012* has been developed within the framework of the TAFE NSW Department of Corrective Services Memorandum of Understanding 2005 – 2008 which outlines the arrangements for all TAFE NSW provision in NSW correctional centres. Within this agreement, provision for Aboriginal offenders is a key priority.

The plan, jointly developed by the Department of Education and Training, TAFE NSW and the Department of Corrective Services, Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute and the Aboriginal Support and Planning Unit, reflects the ongoing commitment by both departments to work together to ensure quality programs, educational services and pre and post release educational pathways for Aboriginal offenders in NSW.

## The NSW Government Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities 2006-2011

NSW is replicating the Council of Australian Government (COAG) model of identifying communities at risk by extending services into a number of rural and remote areas of NSW to address issues of violence and sexual assault, particularly in relation to Aboriginal children and young people.

The *NSW Government Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities 2006-2011* is relevant to a number of NSW agencies including the Department of Education and Training. It was endorsed by Cabinet in December 2006. The Plan was prompted by concerns about child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities and is the NSW Government's response to the *Breaking the Silence, Creating the Future* report of the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce.

The Plan provides a suite of proposals around four strategic directions:

- law enforcement
- child protection
- early intervention and prevention
- community leadership and support.

Strategies include strong justice interventions, lead by the NSW Police Force. These are balanced with comprehensive early intervention and prevention services to support families at risk of violence and child abuse and measures to build community capacity and leadership in ways that are culturally meaningful.

The Ministerial Advisory Panel – Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities met throughout 2008 with the Chief Executive Officers of agencies that have responsibilities for actions under the plan.

The NSW Department of Education and Training has a role in contributing to key goals in child protection, early intervention and prevention strategies. School and childcare staff are the highest group of reporters of child sexual assault of all reporters.

Of the 88 actions identified in the Interagency Plan, the NSW Department of Education and Training takes the lead role in nine and is a partner agency for another 11 actions.

As well as immediate state-wide actions the Interagency Plan includes location specific actions to be rolled out in targeted Aboriginal communities. These will remain nameless in this submission in the interest of honouring commitments to implement discrete targeting of communities. Communities in both urban and regional areas are being targeted.

Actions under the NSW Department of Education and Training's state-wide approach to improving Aboriginal education and training form an important part of initiatives in focus communities. While not the intended outcome for these actions, improved Aboriginal education and training may contribute indirectly, and in the long term, to reducing the incidence of child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities.

The NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has overall responsibility for oversight of the Interagency Plan and a Senior Officers Group plays a key role in its implementation. This Group meets bi-monthly, reports on progress and provides advice and feedback on the development of program measures and performance indicators. The NSW Department of Education and Training's representative on the Group is the General Manager, Access and Equity.

#### Training for staff in schools in relation to child protection in all schools and in priority locations

Training for all departmental staff, both teaching and non-teaching, in child protection is a priority for the NSW Department of Education and Training with a focus on cumulative professional learning and currency of knowledge and skills. The Department requires all staff in schools to participate in annual child protection training. In addition all staff must participate in a child protection briefing when they enter employment with the Department. Registers must be kept of this training. Annual update training material is regularly provided to schools. An online version of a child protection briefing session is available to staff on the Department's website.

All staff in discretely targeted locations have been trained in child protection and mandatory reporting policy and procedures. This training is revisited on an annual basis for all staff and is also provided to all new staff commencing at schools.

#### Other actions that have occurred in schools in the discretely targeted priority locations

- Implementation of the *Schools in Partnership Initiative* and *Targeted School Initiative* (referred to earlier) in selected sites
- training for staff in the Aboriginal Cultural Awareness accredited course
- development of support materials aimed at supporting and enhancing student attendance and retention and promoting the implementation of quality teaching practices
- development and implementation of Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal students

- provision of School-Link training to school counsellors which includes supporting Aboriginal students with depression and other related disorders
- identification of culturally appropriate resources to be used by teachers when teaching the child protection curriculum
- development of specific attendance plans, with a focus on supporting the attendance of Aboriginal students.

The NSW Department of Education and Training continues to work strategically with other agencies in meeting the agreed milestones of the interagency plan.

The Department of Education and Training has also implemented the *Targeted Aboriginal Students Strategy* (referred to earlier) in eight NSW schools, and will extend the Strategy to four additional discretely targeted schools in 2009.

Improved educational outcomes are the focus of the Schools in Partnership and related initiatives. While this may contribute indirectly, or in the long term, to reduced incidence of child sexual assault, this is not the primary intended outcome of these initiatives.

#### Parental/carer responsibility for the school non-attendance of their children

Recent activity around child protection systems has highlighted the need for the NSW Department of Education and Training to take prompt action when the attendance and enrolment of particular students becomes an issue for concern. It is an offence for parents, under the Education Act, if their children fail to meet school attendance obligations unless parents can show they have a defence (for example, illness or accident).

The Department now initiates legal action promptly when it is apparent that reasonable avenues have not secured parents' compliance with the Act.

An important feature of the new approach is the development of an attendance improvement plan by home school liaison officers to assist in resolving issues of poor attendance. The attendance improvement plan identifies barriers to the student attending school, strategies and responsibilities for the family, the school, and the home school liaison officer in order to resolve non-attendance.

Across the state, 84 Home School Liaison officers work with students, schools and families to improve school attendance. In addition, 11 Aboriginal student liaison officers focus specifically on supporting Aboriginal students, their schools and communities to improve attendance.

NSW schools with below average rates of attendance are required to have Attendance Action Plans that outline resources, strategies and targets for reducing absences. Regions are required to have a Regional Attendance Action Plan to coordinate the school plans and the use of regional resources to address priorities.

These plans include strategies and targets to encourage school attendance for Aboriginal students with patterns of attendance that are of concern.

Truancy reduction strategies (e.g. joint anti-truancy initiatives with NSW Police Force) are a part of these plans. Where truancy reduction strategies have been qualitatively evaluated locally in regional locations, outcomes include:

- increased parent awareness of their responsibilities regarding their children's attendance at school
- increased community awareness of the importance of school attendance
- increased cooperation between NSW Police and the Department of Education and Training
- improved communications between school personnel and the community; and schools systems.

### The Department's school counsellor/student support workforce

The Department's approach to building its school counsellor/student support workforce involves equipping school counsellors to respond more appropriately and effectively to the needs of Aboriginal students by increasing their skills with information and training.

Increasing the number of Aboriginal school counsellors is a long term strategy and while the Department encourages and welcomes applications for school counsellor training from Aboriginal people, the pool of Aboriginal teachers who also have a degree or post graduate diploma in psychology as part of their training is not large. Hence, the number of applications received from eligible Aboriginal people is small.

In order to redress this situation, the Department is implementing a more effective and longer term strategy in the promotion of teaching as a career for Aboriginal people (for example, by teacher education scholarships for Aboriginal people to train as primary and secondary teachers). Then, as well as encouraging Aboriginal teachers to train as school counsellors, the Department will also encourage more Aboriginal teachers to take up executive student support roles, for example, Year Advisors. The increase of Aboriginal staff in these positions will more likely enhance the student support workforce to meet the needs of Aboriginal students.



While the NSW Department of Education and Training is primarily concerned with education and training imperatives and addressing the education and training needs of Aboriginal students, their families and communities in NSW, this work cannot be done without consideration of issues affecting other key service delivery areas such as health, housing, juvenile justice, employment and economic development.

(The following information is taken from: *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education, 2004.*)

There are well-documented links between investment in education and training and improved returns for individuals and society in terms of economic, health and other social benefits.

Investments in education for Aboriginal people are particularly important as they impact directly or indirectly on key areas of disadvantage: unemployment, incomes, health and crime.

Interrelationships between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes are also generally acknowledged in international literature.

Improvements in education reduce the risk of poverty and its associated negative impacts on health, social status and crime.

Improving economic circumstances through education also improves intergenerational outcomes through the impacts of increasing socioeconomic status on children's education.

The association between education levels and health is well observed in the literature and was summarised by Professor Tony Vinson in his report (2002)<sup>12</sup> on public education in New South Wales.

There is a close relationship between health and education outcomes for Aboriginal Australian children. Improvements in education outcomes appear to result in improved health outcomes and the converse also applies.

The most significant and undisputed finding of *health transitions* research is that the education levels of parents, and in particular of mothers, appears to have a powerful effect on reducing infant and child mortality.

There is agreement in the literature that poor health hinders many Aboriginal children's school attendance and restricts their ability to learn. Two health issues are identified in the literature as having the most detrimental effect on the education of Aboriginal children. These are otitis media (inflammation or infection of the middle ear) and poor nutrition.

There is clear evidence of a link between low levels of education and the probability of being involved in crime. Higher levels of education make a person less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours such as crime (partially by increasing income and reducing the incentive to commit crime).

Australian and international evidence shows the links between education and crime. Research by Chapman et al (2002) and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research<sup>13</sup> shows a very strong positive relationship between criminal activity and the extent of male youth long-term unemployment. They also produce evidence of a negative association between criminal activity and high school completions, and positive associations between criminal activity and unsuccessful senior high school participation.

It is clear that improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students would be of significant personal and societal benefit.

---

<sup>12</sup> Vinson, Tony. (2002). *Public Education in NSW: Report of the "Vinson Inquiry"*, NSW Teachers Federation and Pluto Press, Melbourne.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman, B., Weatherburn, D. et al (2002). "Unemployed Duration, Schooling and Property Crime", *Crime and Justice Bulletin*, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research No. 74, December 2002, p. 10.



## Aboriginal Education and Training Case Studies

- ***The Gwydir Learning Model*** underway in the Moree area, and more specifically the Gwydir Learning Region at Warialda, was reported on in an independent evaluation report of the Gwydir Learning Model produced in May 2006. It is a highly successful model of partnership, established in 2000, between local government, education, business and community stakeholders in the northwest area of New South Wales within the Gwydir Shire Council focused on improving educational, social and economic outcomes for residents of the local community. The evaluation report states: “From the point of view of education, the Gwydir Learning Region represents new levels of cooperation between schools and TAFE and ACE, new ways of relating learning to local businesses and communities and new ways of implementing personalised learning – an approach to learning which involves the provision of targeted attention for each student.”
- ***Menindee Central School Case Study***  
Menindee is located in the far west of New South Wales, on the Darling River, 110kms East South East of Broken Hill and approximately 1,000kms west of Sydney. In 2007, there were 116 students in attendance at Menindee Central School, 78 identifying as Aboriginal.

Menindee Central School is one of the schools involved in the “Schools in Partnership” (SiP) initiative. This initiative assists schools with significant Aboriginal student populations to build their capacity and strengthen partnerships with communities and other agencies. It focuses on improving the literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes of all students.

Menindee Central School has a commitment to embracing its local Aboriginal community, culture and student identity in a Quality Teaching environment which is being developed throughout the school. A number of teachers are undertaking study in quality teaching through the University of Newcastle and are supported by a university mentor who visits the school.

A comprehensive school and community commitment to raising students’, parents’ and teachers’ expectations about schooling is at the heart of ensuring improved student outcomes throughout the school. The development of Personalised Learning Plans for all students from Kindergarten to Year 10 has played an important role in this.

Menindee’s school advisory committee is committed to supporting school and community partnerships and has held a number of community meetings to engage the whole town in the initiative. Community dinners have been a successful strategy for getting everyone together and providing information. A noticeable improvement in student engagement is evident, particularly in the secondary years, with higher attendance rates and higher Year 11 retention rates for Aboriginal students being reported in 2007.

- ***Interactive Distance Learning Case Study***

The Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) Project has provided opportunities for people in remote communities to access vocational education and training. The project, a joint venture between TAFE NSW, Optus Singtel and the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, has enabled the establishment of infrastructure in NSW to deliver interactive distance learning via satellite to remote Aboriginal communities and homesteads involving over 300 enrolments.

Studio facilities have been established at the New England Institute Tamworth TAFE Campus and Western Institute Dubbo TAFE Campus. In addition, remote Aboriginal communities have been provided with computer and satellite technology.

IDL utilises interactive software called One Touch which allows students to see and hear their teacher, hear each other and be heard by the teacher back in the TAFE Campus studio. A number of innovative approaches utilising a combination of software and the use of video conferencing facilities combined with face to face delivery have overcome the initial limitations of stand alone studio delivery.

To support the IDL delivery over 20 community facilitators from remote Aboriginal communities were trained to assist on location. Aboriginal communities participating in the IDL project include Enngonia, Goodooga, Ivanhoe, Menindee, Peak Hill, Tibooburra, Walgett, Wanaarring, Weilmoringle, Warren Walhollow, Tabulum, Mungindi, Toomelah, Collarenebri and Boggabilla.

Following an initial course in *Introduction to IDL Technology*, Aboriginal students have studied a variety of courses such as Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practice, Study Skills, Welding, Power Point, Certificate IV in Business (Governance), Child Care, Animal First Aid, Aboriginal Literacy Tutoring and First Aid.

Aboriginal communities have provided enthusiastic feedback on IDL and its importance in terms of reaching remote Aboriginal communities and building the capacity and resilience of communities. Much of the success of the project has stemmed from the innovative use of technology coupled with involvement of Aboriginal staff and the training and mentoring provided by local Aboriginal community facilitators.

- ***The Girri Girri Sports Academy for Indigenous Students Case Study***

The innovative Girri Girri Sports Academy for Indigenous Students which commenced in 2007 is delivered across seven schools in Western NSW region. Over 120 students in Years 8, 9 & 10 are enrolled in the academy across the following schools:-

Brewarrina Central School, Bourke High School, Cowra High School, Condobolin High School, Canobolas Rural Technology High School and Denison College of Secondary Education – Bathurst and Kelso Campuses.

The school based sports academy was established to improve attendance, retention, literacy and engagement of Aboriginal students. The academy offers students a varied curriculum based on local needs. Coordinators meet face to

face with academy members two periods per week. During these periods, the curriculum includes vocational education, career education, information technology, literacy and work with the community and primary partner schools. For four periods a week the coordinator meets with individuals or provides in-class tutorial support.

The development of the academy with its underpinning philosophy has given students in Western Region a sporting chance with their future life choices and opportunities. The academy's positive youth development program focuses on students' talents, strengths, interests and future potential. Young members of the academy are supported to develop a positive self-concept and a positive outlook toward school and community.

#### What the academy has achieved:

- The development of positive relationships
- Fostering of competencies across a number of domains – emotional, cognitive and behavioural
- Encouragement of self determination and responsibility
- Nurturing in members clear and positive identities
- Fostering members to have a belief in their future
- Providing a supportive and positive environment
- Providing opportunity for social involvement.
- In relation to attendance data:
  - The attendance rate for students attending the academy is between 85 and 100 per cent. This rate has been consistently maintained.
- In relation to retention data:
  - The retention of students has been well maintained throughout the year and the academy's mobility policy has allowed students to stay enrolled in Girri Girri Sports Academy at another site if they transfer to another school involved in the academy.

In general, students attending the academy have a positive self-concept about their physical abilities and emotional stability and they also have high global self-esteem. Academy members' feelings of self worth and their self perception as effective and valued individuals empower them in the classroom. Access to technology, such as regular video conferencing, use of emailing facilities and the academy's website [www.girrigirrisportsacademy.org.au](http://www.girrigirrisportsacademy.org.au) has helped in this process.

Students attending the academy have established networks across the region and the future for strong, proud, active academy members looks very positive.

- ***Get Smart Case Study***

The Get Smart operation, a joint attendance initiative between DET and NSW Police, took place once per term throughout 2007 in the Dubbo region. This operation targets students whose school attendance is poor (more than 15 days unexplained absence per term).

In week 3 of each term, teams of police and DET personnel visited families of children with poor school attendance, encouraging them to maintain regular attendance.

Outcomes of the operation across Dubbo City in 2007 indicated:

- increased parent awareness of their responsibilities re their children's attendance at school
- increased community awareness of the importance of school attendance
- increased co-operation between police and DET
- families appreciated the contact and discussion around the importance of attending school and the need to inform the school of any absences
- improved contact and communications between school personnel and the community
- systems in schools have improved.

The operation is continuing in 2008 given its potential to impact positively on student attendance rates.

In conjunction with the operation, other initiatives used to develop a positive relationship between the police and school students in the Dubbo area include:

▪ **Readit**

Police officers are trained by Department of Education and Training personnel in strategies to assist students in reading and basic literacy skills.

Police officers are assigned and introduced to a school.

Police officers make arrangements to spend approximately one hour per week in schools assisting with literacy and reading to students.

Officers also assist students by helping with bike maintenance, by playing handball, and by doing anything that assists in developing positive relationship with students that lead to genuine and positive engagement.

▪ **Get Smart Wristbands**

Wristbands are given to students who have engaged positively with police or attendance team members. They are well received by students and community.

▪ **Aunty Doris' Top 10 tips for Getting Children to School**

An Aboriginal Education Officer and community Elder, Doris Shillingsworth, wrote the Top 10 tips for parents. Fridge magnets with the tips were produced and were delivered with letter drops about Get Smart.

- **Calendars** have also been developed. These clearly show the school terms and have tear off notes to explain student absences.

- ***The Bemel-Gardoo Project (Sydney Region) Case Study***

The power, focus and challenges of the Bemel-Gardoo project are spoken to in the meaning of its (Dharawal) name: 'where the salt water meets the land' – reflecting its central concept of *multiple ways of knowing*.

The project began in 2005 as 'Rich Tasks with Aboriginal Cross-curriculum Content', across subject areas. The focus was narrowed to Science and Technology in 2006-2007 with the successful application for a supporting Commonwealth Australian School Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics (ASISTM) Project grant for the now, more aptly named, Bemel-Gardoo Project.

The 2005 project brought together teachers and Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) (previously called Aboriginal Education Assistants) from six schools (K-12), expanding to nine in 2006, to collaborate in addressing the stated intention of the Aboriginal & Indigenous cross-curriculum content statements in all Year 7-10 subject areas and the implications of these statements for the K-12 continuum. Each school's pairing of teacher and Aboriginal Education Officer developed units of work and related assessment tasks embedding Aboriginal & Indigenous content, in both broad and localised contexts (with support from regional consultants in both Aboriginal Education and curriculum, academic partner support and in consultation with Aboriginal communities).

The 2008 project sees nine new project schools embarking on their own Bemel-Gardoo journey.

The project's focus can be seen to be a response to both the Aboriginal Education Policy recommendations and the Aboriginal & Indigenous Cross-curriculum Content statements in the suite of new Year 7-10 NSW Syllabuses, moving beyond '*perspectives*' to the more explicit demand for '*content*'.

The questions and challenges raised by the various Aboriginal & Indigenous Content statements include:

- what content? (local, regional, national, global, traditional, transitional, contemporary?)
- whose content? (and, therefore, 'who can speak for the content?')
- who needs to know? (all schools, all students, all schools' communities?)

The search for answers to these questions is complex and challenging, centrally drawing on several elements of the NSW Quality Teaching model: Cultural Knowledge; Problematic Knowledge and Inclusivity (while also clarifying Deep Knowledge [what do you want students to learn? - what key concepts will be central to a unit or task?]) and Deep Understanding [what will students do or produce to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and their relationship?]).

The power of the project lies in its focus on collaboration between school executive, teachers, Aboriginal Education Officers, Aboriginal community members and organisations (such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group) and regional support personnel from Aboriginal Education and Curriculum teams, along with support from the project's academic partner, Lyn Riley-Mundine, and several of her students from the Aboriginal Studies program at Sydney University as Teacher Associates.

The purpose of the project is addressed broadly by the Aboriginal Education Policy's twin aims:

- *To promote educational achievements of Aboriginal students and*
- *To educate all students about Aboriginal Australia.*

The collective challenge is to then turn these aims into action at a regional and school level, recognising local knowledges and their relationship to regional, national and international initiatives in addressing Aboriginal syllabus content. The need for the continued involvement of Aboriginal communities in this process is paramount.

The role of the various participants in relation to these aims is also crucial. Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) are central to the process of building links with community. Consultants, Aboriginal Education and other regional curriculum consultants have a role in ensuring content is appropriately and collaboratively developed. Aboriginal workers in schools (Aboriginal Education Officers, Aboriginal Education Workers, etc.) can support both the development and implementation of such content, in collaboration with community, teachers and school executive.

As reported in *Side by Side* (May 2008), Alexandria Park Community School won the Indigenous prize at the NSW Maritime 2008 Sydney Harbour Week Awards for a traditional Eora canoe it made as part of the Sydney region Bemel-Gardoo project. The canoe was constructed in collaboration with the school's Aboriginal community, sourcing cultural knowledge to build a canoe of a design which hadn't been seen for more than 100 years. The canoe was launched on January 26, 2008 in Cockle Bay to a large audience.

The most powerful outcomes of Bemel-Gardoo have perhaps been the hardest to quantify, although centrally reflecting the spirit of the NSW Values statements. These 'complementary' outcomes include the building of sustained relationships based on trust and integrity, enhanced communication and collaboration between schools and their communities, in both curriculum development and in supporting student learning and the building of common goals and purpose.

It is paramount to the project that Aboriginal & Indigenous content not be seen as additional or 'bolted-on', but rather as the spine of central content for a unit or task. The Explicit Quality Criteria for student demonstration of understanding of such content may also best be developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities in conjunction with the content.

The enthusiasm and collective focus of all stakeholders in the Bemel-Gardoo project over the past four years has resulted in profound outcomes for all participants and for the students of the schools involved throughout.

The courage and commitment of all participants has been demonstrated through their willingness to engage with the complexities of crucial cultural protocols, to recognise the problematic nature of knowledge, to confront challenges to their

own paradigms and to embrace the need for continued and purposeful collaboration and dialogue with schools' Aboriginal communities.

- ***Engaging Aboriginal Parents in the Work of Western NSW Region Schools***  
Western NSW region received *Parent School Partnership Initiatives* funding from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to implement a project to assist Aboriginal students in achieving Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy skills through increasing Aboriginal parents' and caregivers' knowledge of, and skills, in Interactive Whiteboards and digital technologies.

The 12 month project provided funding for an Interactive Whiteboard trained teacher to deliver training in the use of digital technologies and Interactive Whiteboards in the classroom to:

- parents and caregivers of Aboriginal students;
- Aboriginal Education Officers; and
- In-Class Tuition tutors.

A generic training package (using SMART notebook) was provided to schools. In Term 2, 2007 41 schools held up to eight workshops for Aboriginal Education Officers and parents and caregivers of Aboriginal students in classes using Interactive Whiteboard technology. In Term 3, 2007 In-Class Tuition tutors were offered training in Interactive Whiteboards in a number of schools.

Outcomes of the project include:

- engaging with Aboriginal parents and community members around digital technologies in a supportive environment;
- enhancing parent capacity and confidence to support students through SMART package training;
- developing digital curriculum resources with Aboriginal perspectives;
- increasing the capacity of Aboriginal Education Officers and tutors to support teachers and Aboriginal students in digital technologies; and
- increasing school focus on student Information and Communication Technology competencies and measurement.

The project has collected data on the following to report back to schools and communities:

- Aboriginal student achievement in Information and Communication Technology Literacy skills based on national benchmarks;
- Aboriginal parent and community engagement in schools; and
- Parent and community knowledge and understanding of digital technologies and their use in the classroom.

The project was expected to be completed in December 2008.

- ***The Goonellabah Transition Program (Early Childhood Learning)***  
The Goonellabah Transition Program (GTP) was established in 2005 in the North Coast DET region with funding from the former Federal Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) 'Invest To Grow' initiative.

The program has operated since 2005 and has now received continuing Federal funding until 2011.

The GTP has been developed around national and international evidence and provides support for children and families needing intensive support with the transition from home and pre-school settings to kindergarten. The first priority for placement in the GTP is given to Aboriginal children who have made up over seventy-five per cent of placements in the program. Goonellabah Transition Program staff work in partnership with families and workers from other sectors to identify health, educational and behavioural factors impacting on each child's ability to learn and interact socially. Individualised support programs for children are developed and implemented and continually reviewed in terms of the children's progress against them.

This GTP approach has resulted in a flexible, strengths-based, family-friendly and culturally-sensitive program which is grounded in strong developmental, health, linguistic and social frameworks. Children (aged 3½-5 years) attend two days per week during school terms (for one school year) and families receive fortnightly home visits. Children are also strongly encouraged to attend mainstream preschools or day-care services during the remaining three days per week.

The GTP has been independently evaluated by Associate Professor Anne Graham and Dr Sallie Newell of the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University. The interim report was submitted to FaCSIA in September 2007.

Outcomes for children participating in the program have been outstanding and demonstrate improved access to support services and very significant improvements in behaviour and learning. The preliminary results from the GTP developmental assessments are also very encouraging, with children appearing to have made substantial progress across a number of key domains critical to their future success in the education system.

The attendance level of participating children has been consistently very high. This is particularly significant when the circumstances of many of the families involved with the program are taken into account. Feedback from parents and carers has been extremely positive and parents have been actively advocating for the continuation of the program. The program has successfully involved previously disengaged families in their children's health, education and preparation for school.

A similar transition to school program operates at Coraki Public School and has been jointly funded by the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and NSW Department of Education and Training (DET).

- ***Homework Centre at Chatham High School***

In the North Coast DET region, school attendance is addressed through specific programs and also through the range of Quality Teaching and other curriculum, student welfare, leadership and equity initiatives. One such initiative is the Homework Centre program operating at Chatham High School. Funding for the



centre is provided through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Australian Sports Commission.

The Homework Centre has been operating successfully for three and a half years and the engagement of the students is remarkable. Students utilising the Homework Centre have all established sound organisational skills. They have developed skills which help them: prioritise their school work; maintain awareness of time frames for the completion of school work; understand the need to meet goals and complete work.

The number of students using the Homework Centre has increased to an average of 38 students per session, with a maximum of 54 students using the centre at one time.

The feedback from parents and teachers at each participating site (Chatham and Manning Gardens Primary Schools and Chatham High School) is extremely positive and it is obvious the students are enjoying their achievements given their consistent attendance. Some secondary students have continued to use the centre after first being introduced to its support services as Year 5 students.

The response from the secondary students was slow at first, but usage of the Homework Centre by secondary students has markedly increased over the years. Students are very comfortable using the reference books or internet for research and are producing work of a higher standard than that produced prior to commencing at the centre.

The centre offers activity programs as well as a nutrition program which provides students with nutritious foods as well as messages about the importance of making good food choices in order to have and maintain optimum health.

The tutors are very positive about the continuance of the centre and are committed to its longevity. Their relationships with the students are based on empathy, mutual trust and respect.

The centre also welcomes volunteers who assist with food preparation and aid students with their reading. An Elder, Uncle Dave Russell, drives the centre's bus, a service provided to ensure that students arrive home safely after attending the centre. Uncle Dave has praised the Homework Centre as a positive strategy for the students.

The tutors will be trained this year in the implementation of the Multilit Program to assist students improve their literacy skills. The centre also envisages offering the training in numeracy programs as well.

The centre also provides an effective Year 6 Transition Program for students from Chatham Public and Manning Gardens Public Schools transitioning into Chatham High School.

## **CONCLUSION**

The NSW Department of Education and Training is committed to eliminating the educational achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In doing so the Department has priority actions which aim to increase the school attendance and retention rates of Aboriginal students. The Department is also implementing a range of programs to support Aboriginal students to take up and complete further education and training opportunities.

The Department recognises that a 'one-size' approach is not the most effective way in which to address the diversity of issues confronting all schools in working to eliminate the educational achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Examining and developing localised strategies to respond to issues such as improving literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal students are priorities for the Department, as is the issue of parental and community engagement in the school environment which will ultimately lead to greater participation by Aboriginal students in all aspects of school life. This is an issue for schools in urban settings as it is an issue for schools in regional and remote communities.

The Department of Education and Training will continue to provide targeted programs and initiatives to schools in urban, regional and remote locations that support actively focus on developing and implementing initiatives that are rigorous and intellectually stimulating for students whilst at the same time ensuring that they are culturally inclusive and maximises the opportunities for improving outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, whether they be in urban, regional and rural areas.