

A DESCRIPTION OF NON-GOVERNMENT DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

This study describes non-government distance education (NGDE) in Australia. It provides an overall picture of the elements of NGDE as practiced in various non-government schools in four Australian states.

The study, the first of its kind in Australia, gives a brief historical background of distance education in Australia, providing a socio-cultural context for NGDE. It defines and describes NGDE, indicating its distinctives. The problematic issue of low Commonwealth recurrent funding of NGDE and its impact on NGDE, provides the setting and reason for the study. This issue is described in detail, in the light of government policy, social justice issues, educational equity and the current review of school funding in Australia.

A mixed methods research approach delivered findings, which demonstrate NGDE to be a bona fide pedagogy, despite its under resourcing. The findings describe NGDE across Australia, in general terms including: a description of NGDE students, varieties of NGDE pedagogies, its teachers, administration and an array of educational outcomes.

A discussion of the impact of the Commonwealth's underfunding of NGDE leads to the conclusion that this educational inequity requires immediate short term and considered long term redress.

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NSW

Australian Christian College – Marsden Park
Northern Beaches Christian School

Queensland

Australian Christian College – Moreton
Groves Christian College
Hinchinbrook Christian School
Jubilee Christian College

Tasmania

Community Christian Academy
Geneva Christian College
Seabrook Christian School

Western Australia

Australian Christian College – Southlands
Swan Christian College

Abbreviations

DE	Distance Education
DS	Day School – where traditional face-to-face classroom schooling is practiced on a school campus
GDE	Government distance education
GDS	Government day schooling
NGDE	Non-government distance education
NGDES	Non-government distance education school
NGDS	Non-government day school

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - INCLUDING THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This is an executive summary of the study (*A Description of Non-Government Distance Education in Australia*), which describes the educational practices of non-government distance education (NGDE) in Australia. It highlights NGDE's problematic extreme under resourcing, which has resulted from Commonwealth legislation and policy.

The Problem

Commonwealth legislation requires that schools providing NGDE receive recurrent funding at the lowest possible rate of 13.7% of the Average Government Schools Recurrent Cost (AGSRC). This legislated, recurrent funding level is cited in sections 57 and 58, in Division 7 of The *Schools Assistance Act 2008* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). This level of funding has made NGDE to be the lowest funded form of schooling in Australia. Such underfunding has precluded NGDE schools from providing adequate numbers of teachers for their students.

NGDE is excluded from the normal SES funding determinants. This legislated exclusion amounts to educational injustice, deprivation and inequity, all of which are contrary to stated government policy such as the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and political rhetoric.

NGDE Funding Not Mentioned in Gonski Documents

Further, NGDE has been overlooked in the four commissioned reports (ACER, 2011; Allen, 2011; Deloitte Access Economics, 2011; MGSE, NILS & NOUS Group, 2011), which were to inform the Review of Funding for Schooling in Australia. Similarly, NGDE was not mentioned in the Review's Final Report (Gonski, 2011), which has been submitted to the Minister, for consideration and response.

The Study

This study presents a description of NGDE in the light of the Commonwealth's minimalist recurrent funding. It demonstrated that NGDE schools comply with all State and Commonwealth educational and administrative requirements for their regular on-campus day schools, as well as the additional requirements of NGDE. These schools must produce maximum schooling output, with minimum funding input.

The study was informed by both quantitative and qualitative data from 11 of the 13 non-government schools that provide NGDE in Australia. These schools are in the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Comparing NGDE Funding with the Rest of Australian Schooling

The study compared the 2009 funding of one of the largest providers of NGDE (known as NGDES 3, in the study), with various groups in Australian schooling. Below are comparisons between this school's averaged per-student NGDE recurrent funding and the averaged per-student recurrent funding of the rest of Australia's school students.

Comparing NGDE Student Funding with On-Campus Peers in the Same School

- NGDES 3 Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is 23% of the Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding, allocated to on-campus students enrolled in the same school.
- NGDES 3 State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is 39% of the State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding, allocated to on-campus students enrolled in the same school.

Comparing NGDE Student Funding with Other School Sectors

- NGDES 3 State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is 27% of the per-student recurrent funding, allocated to government schools.
- NGDES 3 State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is 31% of the per-student recurrent funding, allocated to Catholic schools.
- NGDES 3 State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is 22% of the per-student recurrent funding, allocated to independent schools.
- NGDES 3 State and Commonwealth per-student recurrent funding is between 11% and 23 % of the funding allocated to government schools of distance education in the same state.

Sources: Gonski, 2011, My School Website and NGDES 3 financial figures.

These comparisons demonstrate the extreme inequity of the funding allocated to NGDE students, when compared to the rest of Australian school students.

Conclusion

NGDE students, staff and parents are unique learning communities, which have developed in several states of Australia. Despite NGDE's uniqueness, its students achieve the same goals, as do all other Australian school students, i.e. they achieve their state's educational syllabus requirements. The study unequivocally demonstrates that NGDE is underfunded due to Commonwealth legislation and policy. It defines this as social injustice, and educational deprivation and inequity. This underfunding prescribes under resourcing to NGDE, in particular, it precludes NGDE from adequate staffing.

Key recommendations

Because of the current serious nature of this under resourcing, both an immediate and a long-term solution are required. Thus, it is recommended that:

1. NGDE students are immediately allocated the same SES status as their school's NGDS SES status. This would fund NGDE and day school students equally.
2. For the long-term, NGDE recurrent funding policy should be adjusted to reflect the distinctives and the needs of this emerging pedagogy, as has been done for the government sector's distance education schools. If the SRS is implemented, this would mean establishing a DE loading in addition to the SRS base amount. NGDE should be in full receipt of this per-student funding allocation.

A change of legislation is required to give effect to either solution.

Findings from the study's (1) literature review and from (2) the data are cited below.

A Summary Of The Findings Of The Study

Findings from the Study's Literature Review

Finding 1. Distance Education has distinct features, different to traditional schooling

Distance education pedagogy carries implicit, distinctive characteristics, which differ markedly from traditional on-campus day schooling. These include differences in staff/student locations; the design, development and delivery of the curriculum; construction of a school-based, at-distance learning environment; educational infrastructure and staff to student transactions

Finding 2. Reasons why parents choose NGDE

Parents choose NGDE for a variety of reasons, including: academic reasons, the quality of the student's learning environment, socialisation reasons, physical and psychological safety reasons, family-based reasons and religious and philosophical reasons.

Finding 3. NGDE is significantly underfunded compared to the rest of Australian schooling

NGDE students are funded at the lowest level of recurrent funding possible for non-government schooling. They are allocated around 23% of the funding, which other students in non-government schooling receive. Commonwealth legislation and policy excludes NGDE students from the normal non-government school funding determinants, such as found in the SES model.

Finding 4. Underfunding Australian school students is contrary to sound educational policy

The Commonwealth's practice of underfunding NGDE students contradicts stated government educational policy. Further, it presents these students with a social injustice, which promotes educational exclusion, deprivation and inequity.

Finding 5. The Review of Funding for Schooling has ignored NGDE

The Commonwealth's Review of Funding for Schooling has not mentioned NGDE's funding dilemma. Both the four commissioned reports, which were to inform the review's panel and the panel's final report, do not mention NGDE's critical funding allocation.

Findings from the Study's Data

Finding 6. NGDE provides full-time education P-12

NGDE provides full time education for a small but significant minority of school students spread evenly across the early childhood years to Year 12 in the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Finding 7. Part-time NGDE provides a key service to students from other schools

NGDE provides particular courses for students from non-government and government schools, which their own schools do not provide. This is especially important to high school students, enabling them to remain at their own school, whilst studying these extra courses, externally.

Finding 8. Part-time NGDE provides a key service to other schools

NGDE provides key assistance to non-government and government schools that want to enable their students to access particular courses, which they do not provide, or to schools that are seeking assistance to expand their high school departments to the senior school level.

Finding 9. NGDE student location – Population regions

Full time NGDE students mostly reside in metropolitan and provincial regions. NGDE is not limited to students who are geographically isolated.

Finding 10. NGDE student location - By state education regions

NGDE students reside in most state educational regions across the four Australian states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Finding 11. NGDE and indigenous students

NGDE caters for indigenous students. 2.7% of NGDE students are indigenous. This number of NGDE indigenous students is reflective of the number of indigenous students in the independent schooling sector.

Finding 12. Indigenous NGDE students are denied an indigenous educational funding benefit

Indigenous NGDE students are not eligible for the Indigenous Supplementary Assistance benefit, whereas indigenous day school students are eligible for this educational benefit.

Finding 13. NGDE and students with special needs

NGDE provides students who have special educational needs, with the flexibility and the opportunities that allow their education to be tailored to meet their personalised requirements. NGDE can assist special needs students including: (1) academically gifted students, (2) academically challenged students, (3) students with elite extracurricular talents, (4) students with physical disabilities, (5) students with psychological or well-being problems and (6) students who are disengaged from schooling.

Finding 14. Reasons why parents choose NGDE for their children

Parents choose NGDE for many reasons including: (1) academic reasons, (2) wanting an environment conducive to learning and personal safety, (3) socialisation reasons (4) physical disability issues, (5) psychological problems, (6) religious reasons and (7) family-based reasons.

Finding 15. NGDE-specific school policies

NGDE providers develop policies and procedures, which cater for and are distinct to NGDE, in addition to their compliance with relevant, regular school registration regimes.

Finding 16. NGDE pedagogical modes

NGDE educational programs implement traditional paper-based resources, as well as various ICT hardware, software and web-based educational resources.

Finding 17. NGDE is bona fide education

NGDE is Bona Fide Education. NGDE educational programs engage students in the eight key learning areas in Australian schooling. Because NGDE is compliant with state syllabus and registration requirements, NGDE students achieve the same educational goals, as do students in traditional, on-campus, classroom schooling.

Finding 18. NGDE students are deprived of appropriate numbers of teachers

NGDE students need more teachers. No NGDE school has the same level of funding for its NGDE students, as it does for its on-campus students. Thus, staffing for their NGDE students is minimal. Commonwealth underfunding of NGDE students is reflected in the fewer number of teachers allocated to NGDE. All schools stated that their NGDE departments needed to be staffed to similar levels, as their on-campus day school departments.

Finding 19. NGDE is labour intensive, requiring the same number of teachers as there are in day schooling

Teaching in NGDE is labour intensive, as there are many varied ways in which NGDE teachers must communicate and interact with their students and their work. Each of these communication methods enables the school to establish relationship and rapport between teacher and student and between the school and the family. Modern ICT enables human contact to reach beyond the “tyranny of distance” and the challenges of separation between student and teacher.

Finding 20. NGDE teachers require higher-level communication training and additional skills, beyond that of traditional teacher training.

NGDE teachers have to master higher-level communication strategies and many ICT skills, in addition to their regular teaching skills, in order to communicate effectively with their students, at distance. Because most teacher training courses do not provide this training, NGDE schools provide this extra professional development, internally.

Finding 21. NGDE teachers relate to students in different contexts

NGDE teachers and administrative staff categorise NGDE students in different ways such as by department, subject, year level, geographical region and family. Identifying students in these ways assists the facilitation of the school’s academic program and as well as the efficient administrative management of students and families.

Finding 22. NGDE teachers can re-engage disengaged students and assist students with special needs

NGDE teachers work to provide educational opportunities for disengaged learners and special needs students. The inherent flexibility of NGDE provides an educational environment, which allows for disengaged learners to reengage with their education and which allows students with special educational needs to have an individualised education program, tailored to cater for their special needs.

Finding 23. NGDE teachers and students with physical disabilities

NGDE teachers provide for the needs of students with physical disabilities. NGDE’s inherent flexibility provides an educational environment, which allows for students with physical disabilities to have an individualised education program, tailored to cater for their special needs.

Finding 24. Home visits

Home visits are few and infrequent for NGDE schools. Whilst all NGDE schools mentioned the value of home visits and many carried out some home visits, all schools indicated that they were not happy with their inability to make home visits, as and when they deemed visits to be appropriate. Schools wanted to be resourced for a more comprehensive visitation program.

Finding 25. Assessment and reporting

NGDE students are assessed using standard assessment and reporting methods, developed by teachers and suited to the distance education mode.

Finding 26. Assistance with post-schooling study pathways

NGDE schools provide students with preparation, guidance, liaison and advocacy in their pursuit of career pathways and tertiary education entrance. Appropriate funding would enable these schools to better assist their graduates in their post-schooling study pathways.

Finding 27. NGDE Students and admission to tertiary courses

NGDE Year 12 graduate students are able to access all levels of tertiary studies including: university, TAFE, various colleges and vocational study courses.

Finding 28. NGDE requires parent supervision

NGDE requires one parent or a designated, trained adult to be permanently on-site, with the student, who is being educated. Thus, NGDE schools forge a vital relationship with their students' parents. This relationship involves the parents' induction and training, in order to support the school's ongoing educational and administrative processes. Without parent-supervisors NGDE cannot operate. The commencement and maintenance of this relationship is labour intensive and requires significant training processes and administrative resources.

Finding 29. NGDE incurs additional operational costs compared to NGDS

NGDE incurs additional operational and administration costs compared to on-campus day schooling. These expenses are distance education-specific costs necessary to the optimal provision of NGDE.

Finding 30. Part time NGDE requires appropriate funding

There is no clear funding method applicable to NGDE schools, which provide individual courses by distance education, to students who are enrolled in other schools.

Finding 31. Costs of educating a NGDE student

All NGDE schools agree that it costs more to educate a NGDE student, than the funding which is provided for this purpose. Whilst distance education does not incur the significant capital costs of large campuses and buildings and their ongoing maintenance, it does incur standard recurrent costs, common to all schools, as well as recurrent costs, which are specific to distance education pedagogy.

Finding 32. NGDE Attendance at school - defined

Student attendance in distance education means that a student is enrolled in a school's distance education program and participates in the program by completing and returning the assigned work for the program.

Finding 33. Indicators that NGDE is a good educational program

NGDE schools include national and international testing results, state education curriculum outcomes, the satisfaction and retention of their professional teaching staff, student engagement and feedback, parent satisfaction culminating in student retention, post-schooling tertiary entrance of their graduates and post-schooling employment pathways as demonstrative of the effectiveness of their educational programs.

Finding 34. NGDE staff retention indicates satisfaction with the NGDE program

NGDE schools reported that despite being underresourced when compared with traditional classroom schooling; their staff indicated that they were satisfied with their schools' educational program. This satisfaction was demonstrated by various ways, common to the teaching profession; however, strong staff retention figures particularly indicated a high level of staff satisfaction with their school's NGDE program.

Finding 35. Advantages and disadvantages of NGDE

In the eyes of teachers, who are practitioners of NGDE, NGDE presents both advantages and disadvantages.

Finding 36. Regional offices

Commonwealth policy requires NGDE staff to be located at the school campus. Schools are not permitted to establish regional offices. All schools indicated that they would like to establish regional offices, to better implement their programs.

Finding 37. NGDE students receive less Commonwealth recurrent funding than their fellow students in the same school

NGDE students are allocated around 23% of the Commonwealth recurrent funding which on-campus, day school students, enrolled in the same school, are allocated.

Finding 38. NGDE students receive less funding than all other Australian students

NGDE students receive significantly less recurrent funding than their fellow school students in all sectors of Australian schooling. It appears that they are the lowest funded students in Australian schooling.

Finding 39. Australian Governments recognise that DE requires adequate funding in the government sector

Australian governments fund government distance education to an appropriate level. This funding may often exceed the level of funding for government on-campus day schooling. This recognition strongly suggests that adequate funding for distance education in the non-government sector, should be at least equivalent to, if not greater than, the recurrent funding allocated to day school education, in that sector. What is true for the government sector is probably also true for the non-government sector.

Finding 40. Commonwealth NGDE funding policy reduces state NGDE funding

Because the needs component of state funding for non-government schools, in Queensland, is linked to the SES model, and because the state had increased the needs component in its funding formula, state funding for NGDE students in Queensland has been effectively and increasingly reduced, since 2009.

Finding 41. NGDE can reduce traditional educational costs

NGDE can provide education for students without the usual costs of acquiring and maintaining large tracts of land and many buildings in population centres, as is the normal practice for traditional schooling.

A DESCRIPTION OF NON-GOVERNMENT DISTANCE EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

1 Introduction to the report

1.1 The purpose and target audience of the project

The purpose of this document is to create a response to a request from the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, seeking data, which describes non-government distance education.

The ministerial request was generated as a result of the author's approach to the Minister, seeking an adjustment to the Commonwealth Government's recurrent funding policy for non-government distance education (NGDE) students in Australia.

This report has been derived from the findings of a research study conducted by the author during 2011 and 2012, which looked at distance education as practiced in non-government schools throughout Australia.

The key target audience of this report includes the Minister and policy makers. However, it is envisaged that this report will be informative to a broad spectrum of educators, including the government and non-government distance education communities as well as to the wider community, in general.

1.1.1 Context and background to the project

Distance education has been established in the government school sector since before World War I. However, non-government distance education (NGDE) has only recently emerged onto the Australian educational landscape, at the end of the 20th century, when four non-government schools provided full time education for their enrolled school-aged students, by distance education. Currently, there are thirteen non-government schools in the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia, which provide either full time or part time distance education for their enrolled students.

1.1.2 Purpose of the project

The purpose of this project is to provide the education community with a description of NGDE. Because NGDE is a relatively new mode of schooling in Australia, it is important to provide a current description of this emerging pedagogy, which coincides with the rapid expansion of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in education. The late Emeritus Professor, Headley Beare (2010), recognised as one of Australia's great educators, foresaw the inevitability of significant changes to the delivery methods of schooling, resulting from the impact of new technologies and pedagogies.

The development of technology has now taken off exponentially, transforming the way schools and universities present and teach their curricula, the way teachers teach and the way students learn. It allows school sites to be interactive and to interact, not least with other schools and sites. Multi-campus courses, and teaching on-line are now such regular

occurrences that they are spelling the end of the stand-alone, self-contained school.
(Beare, 2010, p. 15)

NGDE is part of this transformation in the development of education in Australian schooling. Despite the most tolerant of intentions, introducing new pedagogy to a well-established educational landscape can be challenging, as the new is often juxtaposed with the old, rather than the new being included as another option. Marsden (1996) highlighted this difficulty in the field of distance education, noting that those uninitiated to distance education could often undervalue it. He stated:

“Within the community of distance educators there is a robust self image based on the positive characteristics of access, student-centredness and quality course materials. There is, however, a lingering tendency pervasive among the uninitiated, to regard distance education as, in the words of Black (1992), ‘second-best to classroom, face-to-face instruction’ (p.7)” (Marsden, 1996, p.222).

Thus, given that NGDE is a newly emerging distance education pedagogy and that it can be misunderstood, this research project provides a window of opportunity to inform the established educational community.

1.1.3 Aims of the project

The aim of this project is to provide both a quantitative and qualitative description of non-government education, inclusive of:

- a brief historical description of non-government distance education;
- a description of the Commonwealth’s recurrent funding policy for NGDE;
- relevant descriptions of NGDE schools, staff, students and families;
- a description of various distance education methodologies implemented in NGDE;
- a description of educational resources implemented in NGDE;
- a description of the key needs of schools and
- teacher and parent views of NGDE.

1.2 History and background of non-government distance education

1.2.1 Historical background

Distance education was initially developed in Australia, in the government educational sector, in the early twentieth century, as various state education authorities sought to meet the educational needs of isolated students. Late in the twentieth century, the non-government sector commenced the provision of distance education.

1.2.2 Government distance education in various states

In 1916, Steven Smith, Inspector of Continuation Schools in New South Wales, prepared and posted handwritten lessons for a student named James Brittingham of the Wee Waa district, the first student of “the Correspondence School” in New South Wales. The early years of distance education in New South Wales saw rapid growth, which culminated in the amalgamation of four correspondence schools into one Correspondence School at the Blackfriars Teachers College in Sydney, in June 1924. Since those early years, distance education has continued to be a growing part of school-based education in New South Wales. (Sydney Distance Education High School, 2003).

In Queensland, a similar institution was initiated in 1922, known as the “Primary Correspondence School”. Relying heavily on a newly updated postal system, this school addressed the educational needs of isolated students in Queensland (Queensland Government, 2005).

Distance education was originally established in Victoria, in 1909 (Evans, 1995), in the form of a distance education teacher training college. By 1911, 600 enrolled student teachers were being trained, at distance, in what is now known as the Distance Education Centre Victoria. In 1914, this institution commenced the provision of education for school students by catering for two children who were unable to attend school due to constraints of distance. By 1922, the school had 212 enrolled school-aged students, including four from the Northern Territory. In 1932 it was formally named the Correspondence School, catering for both primary and secondary students (Distance Education Centre Victoria, (2011).

Similar developments occurred in the South Australian Correspondence School and in Tasmania. (South Australian Government, 2008; Tasmanian eSchool, 2011)

1.2.3 Modern distance education

The development of modern distance education in Australia has expanded beyond merely meeting the needs of the geographically isolated. In the 21st century, distance education now includes students residing in urban, suburban and regional centres, as well as those in remote areas or who travel within or outside of Australia. The key development in distance education in this century has been the formal recognition of NGDE in this field.

1.2.4 Non-government distance education

In recent times the non-government educational sector has commenced the provision of distance education. In the late 20th century some independent schools provided either individual academic subjects or a full educational program by distance education to school-aged students. In 2000, the

States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) provided a legislative foundation for the Commonwealth Government's financial support of NGDE, thus providing formal recognition of NGDE in Australia. The financial support incorporated into this formal recognition of NGDE, however, was minimal and will be dealt with, in greater detail, in Chapters 2 and 5 of this report.

1.2.5 Providers of NGDE in Australia

Non-government schools, which provide NGDE are accredited by their state's education authority and are part of their state's independent school sector. Currently, there are 13 schools, which are accredited to provide NGDE in the four Australian states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. They are:

NSW

Australian Christian College – Marsden Park
Northern Beaches Christian School
Online Education Centre - Lismore Diocese

Queensland

Australian Christian College – Moreton
Groves Christian College
Hinchinbrook Christian School
Jubilee Christian College
Riverside Christian College

Tasmania

Community Christian Academy
Geneva Christian College
Seabrook Christian School

Western Australia

Australian Christian College – Southlands
Swan Christian College

NGDE students in NSW

Educational legislative and policy changes in New South Wales, earlier this decade, enabled non-government schools to deliver distance education. The Board of Studies NSW registers non-government schools for the provision of NGDE. One school delivers full-time NGDE in that state, for children ranging from K to year 10, whilst two schools deliver individual subjects to high school students who attend other schools around the state. These students are part-time NGDE students.

NGDE students in QLD

In the 1990s two schools delivered NGDE to their students, who lived remotely. In 2003 legislative changes in Queensland allowed for the official delivery of NGDE, without geographical restrictions. The Non-State Schools Accreditation Board registers non-government schools for the delivery of NGDE. Currently, five non-government schools deliver NGDE to

their students in that state. NGDE in Queensland has attracted significant numbers of students ranging from Prep to Year 12. Part time NGDE is not supported in Queensland.

NGDE students in Tasmania

Non-government schools have been providing NGDE in Tasmania since 1995. The Tasmanian Schools Registration Board oversees the registration of non-government schools, which provide NGDE. Three non-government schools in Tasmania deliver NGDE to their students. Part time NGDE is permitted in Tasmania.

NGDE students in WA

In Western Australia NGDE is provided by two schools. The Department of Education Services oversees the registration of non-government schools, which provide NGDE. As in Queensland, NGDE has had a significant uptake by students in Western Australia.

Other students

Schools providing NGDE also, may at times, cater for the educational needs of other student groups. These groups include Australian students who are travelling domestically or overseas, as well as students residing in other states or overseas and in some cases, small numbers of adult students. Generally these students are not funded by either state or commonwealth governments. They are usually treated as fee paying, home schooled students. It is important to note that home schooled students are not distance education students.

In summary, this chapter has introduced the purpose of this study and its report. It has stated that the reason for the study is to assist with a request to the Commonwealth Minister for Education for an adjustment of the Commonwealth's funding policy of NGDE. It has outlined a brief history of distance education in Australia, including the recent emergence of NGDE in four Australian states. The next chapter will present a review of the literature, which is relevant to the study.

2 Literature Review

This chapter presents both a definition and brief description of distance education. It looks at reasons why parents choose NGDE. It then explores the Commonwealth's per-student recurrent funding policy for NGDE, in the light of stated government educational policy and social justice and equity issues. The chapter concludes by referencing the Commonwealth's Review of Funding for Schooling, highlighting the Review's failure to mention NGDE, which may imply that the Funding Review Panel has overlooked NGDE.

2.1 Defining distance education

Distance education is a method of education conducted by a registered school, which is responsible for the education of its enrolled distance education students. What distinguishes distance education from traditional on-campus schooling is that these students participate in the school's educational program whilst usually located away from the school campus. The principal site of learning is usually the student's home.

The pedagogy of distance education is thus sourced from the registered school, in compliance with the state syllabus requirements. The school's teachers conduct the students' education, the students engage in the school's educational program, and the students' parents act in the role of on-site supervisors, usually in the family home.

In the case of part-time distance education, the pedagogy is usually conducted in a school different to the school that provides the distance education subject(s). Part-time distance education students are usually high school students, enrolled in one or two subjects by distance education and who are studying the majority of their courses, at the campus of their local school.

Associate Professor Som Naidu of Charles Sturt University, is the executive editor of the peer-reviewed international journal *Distance Education*. Naidu (2010) cites Keegan's (1980) definition of distance education as still valid, with the admission that online technologies provide a greater, but by no means exhaustive, contribution to teaching-learning transactions, than in the past. These attributes of distance education are:

- (1) "The separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing;
- (2) The influence of an educational organization which distinguishes it from private study;
- (3) The use of technical media, usually print, to unite teacher and learner and carry the education content;
- (4) The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue;
- (5) The possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes; and
- (6) The participation in an industrialised form of education which, if accepted, contains the genus of radical separation of distance education from other forms." (p.33)

Various Australian states' education acts define the key features of distance education. These features are:

1. Distance education is provided by a registered school (*Education Act 1990* [NSW]; *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* [Qld]; *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* [Vic]; *Education Act 1994* [Tas.]).
2. Distance education is education provided to school-aged children where the students and teachers are not regularly in the presence of each other but communicate with each other by writing, print, electronic or like means. (*Education Act 1990* [NSW]; *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* [Qld]; *Education Act 1994* [Tas]).
3. Attendance or participation for a child enrolled in a school of distance education is taken to mean that the child completes and returns the assigned work for the school's educational program. (*Education Act 1990* [NSW]; *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* [Qld]; *School Education Act 1999* [WA])

2.2 Describing distance education

Bell (1990) observed that there has always been distance between the source of knowledge and the learner, whether it is the distance between a teacher and pupil in a classroom, an author and a reader or between a TV production and viewer. The difference is the medium through which learning takes place, as knowledge passes across distances, between people.

Bell (1990) notes that formal distance education is composed of several elements. They are “a desire to learn; the existence of someone, or some organisation, able and willing to teach; the availability of materials which have been prepared for this teaching and learning; the means of delivery of such materials; the assessment, guidance and encouragement of the learner; and a quantifiable method of measuring achievement as the learning progresses” (Bell, 1990, p196).

With common access to the personal computer and the internet, technology-assisted distance education makes synchronous interactivity between teacher and learner possible, enabling pedagogic discourse between the two, in a geographically distributed classroom.

2.2.1 Pedagogical distinctives of distance education

As implied in the legislated definitions of distance education above, NGDE includes the following attributes:

- Formal education which achieves the outcomes of the state syllabus;
- The education program is provided by a school registered and or accredited by the state;
- The education program is taught and facilitated by the school's teachers; administrative and ancillary staff;
- The education program is experienced by the student mostly at home as well as elsewhere and
- A parent or other significant adult, in a role known in various states as home tutor, supervisor, support person or parent, assists the student.

It is clear that the nature of distance education is quite different to the traditional educational delivery occurring in brick and mortar schooling (McFarlane, 2011). Such distinctions include the location of participants; curriculum design, development and delivery; educational

infrastructure and staff to student transactions. It is self-evident that these distinctions require appropriate resourcing and development in a manner, which is different to traditional schooling.

Benson and Samarawickrema (2009) highlighted this difference, indicating that distance education is “where learners have little or no common exposure to the campus context and all (or nearly all) learning takes place in the learner’s own context” (p.3). Freeman (2010) noted that distance education involves the instructor and students being separated by time, location or both, and that it can be either synchronous or asynchronous, using a variety of distribution methods, including technology. The *Education Act 1990* in New South Wales defined distance education, again indicating it to be a distinct pedagogy, different from traditional on-campus schooling. The Act states:

“distance education means a form of education in which students and teachers are not regularly in the presence of each other but communicate with each other in writing, by print or by electronic or like means” (NSW Government, 1990).

Whilst it is not the aim of this report to provide a detailed description of the various dimensions of distance education, it is within its scope to briefly mention key characteristics, which distinguish it from traditional schooling and thus justify its appropriate funding.

2.2.2 Curriculum and infrastructure

Distance education requires different curriculum materials, curriculum design and lesson presentation in comparison to traditional face-to-face schooling (Bennett, Agostinho, Lockyer & Harper, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). In addition to paper-based resources, curriculum features required to meet the specific needs of distance education students may include the development of information and communications technologies. Russell and Russell (1999) described the ICT dimension of distance education as “a cognitive space accessed by computer, which allows users in educational contexts to interact with texts, avatars and virtual reality” (p.8).

Whether paper-based, ICT or a hybrid combination of both, distance education requires the construction of an at-distance learning environment, as opposed to the face-to-face learning environment of traditional schooling. Whilst paper-based curriculum still features highly in distance education, this pedagogy may also include a virtual learning environment and thus a totally different infrastructure inclusive of a suite of new processes to action, such an alternate pedagogical delivery. McFarlane (2011) noted that such processes include: curriculum mapping, student tracking, online support for the teacher and student, electronic communication and Internet links to outside curriculum sources. Benson and Samarawickrema (2009) highlighted the differences between distance education and classroom pedagogy in their discussion of transactional distance theory. They stated that distance education curriculum design must take into account distinctives of process, systems, outcomes and delivery. Thus, whether paper-based, web-based or a hybridised combination of both, instructional design and curriculum development remain an integral and distinct requirement of distance education, quite different to the needs of traditional on-campus day schooling.

2.2.3 Staff – student transactions

Oliver, Osborne and Brady (2009) researched the expectations that secondary school distance education students, in online learning environments, have of their teachers. They found that these

students have high expectations of schooling by distance education, including: “detailed and interactive content, peer-to-peer collaborative activities and speedy feedback” (p.42). Further, this research demonstrated that distance education school students expect their teachers to be knowledgeable of course content, trained and prepared to teach online, able to use an appropriate range of tools, able to provide timely feedback, that they teach rather than just moderate courses and that they provide individualised instruction. The students expected the content of their courses to be accurate, up-to-date, regularly revised, containing interesting resources, activities, study guides and quizzes. They wanted their content-related experiences to be embedded with interactive features such as games and simulations which illustrate relevance and connection to the working world, utilizing real world, authentic projects. The development of such pedagogy requires adequate DE-specific resourcing, which is, to date, denied to NGDE communities, in Australia.

Finding 1. Distance Education has distinct features, different to traditional schooling

Distance education pedagogy carries implicit, distinctive characteristics, which differ markedly from traditional on-campus day schooling. These include differences in staff/student locations; the design, development and delivery of the curriculum; construction of a school-based, at-distance learning environment; educational infrastructure and staff to student transactions

2.3 Reasons why parents choose NGDE

It is evident that there is a need for NGDE. Harding’s (2011a) study of the reasons why parents chose NGDE in New South Wales is the only research-based evidence, which explores the motives of parents who choose this pedagogy for their children.

In summary, Harding (2011a) found that parents chose NGDE for the following categories of reasons:

1. Academic reasons - Where students were not succeeding academically in traditional schooling, or where specific educational needs were not being met for either gifted and talented or special needs students, parents believed that NGDE provided a satisfactory solution to those needs.
2. The quality of the student’s learning environment - Where parents believed that the classroom environments in some schools were not conducive to their children’s learning, parents believed that their home provided an environment, conducive to learning.
3. Social and safety reasons - Where students had become victims of bullying and negative peer influences, parents believed that NGDE provided a safe and more socially acceptable environment for their children’s physical and psychological well being.
4. Family-based reasons - Where parents sought an education for their children which was consistent with their values, more contextualised in the real world and enabled greater parental input, parents believed that NGDE allowed for those features.

This research (Harding, 2011a) indicated that parents of NGDE students in New South Wales, have chosen NGDE in order to facilitate their child’s educational advancement, in an environment conducive to learning and which is also physically and psychologically safe, with a view to ensuring that their family values and religious views are included in their child’s education.

Further, all NGDE in Australia is currently provided by faith-based schools. Typically, these include:

- Non-Denominational Christian School Communities
- Catholic School Communities

Thus NGDE parents see the need for a form of distance education that is not limited to a secular philosophical position, but which is consistent with their religious commitments and in the context of state academic standards.

Finding 2. Reasons why parents choose NGDE

Parents choose NGDE for a variety of reasons, including: academic reasons, the quality of the student's learning environment, socialisation reasons, physical and psychological safety reasons, family-based reasons and religious and philosophical reasons.

2.4 NGDE and Commonwealth funding

The purpose of this study, as described in Chapter 1, is to present a description of NGDE in Australia, as part of the process of requesting a review of the Commonwealth's funding policy for NGDE. Thus, it is appropriate to include a brief description of the Commonwealth Government's policy for the funding of NGDE and its historical setting.

The Commonwealth Government's funding of NGDE was formally legislated in 2000. When introducing this legislation, the Education Minister, the Hon. David Kemp, stated in his second reading speech: "For the first time it (the bill) provides recurrent funding for distance education students in the non-government sector receiving that education from non-government schools" (Kemp, 2000). The *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) provided a legislative foundation for the Commonwealth Government's financial support of NGDE in all Australian states and territories.

Whilst this Act formally recognised NGDE and committed Commonwealth funding to NGDE students, it did not treat them in the same way as other non-government school students. The Act prescribed that NGDE students should be resourced at the lowest possible funding level for non-government school students. Rather than allowing NGDE students to be assessed in the needs-based socioeconomic status (SES) system for the allocation of recurrent funding to non-government schools, the Act automatically assigned NGDE to the highest SES rank of 130. This rank automatically prescribed the lowest level of Commonwealth funding in the SES system to NGDE students. The SES rank of 130 prescribes funding to a school at the rate of 13.7% of the Average Government School Recurrent Cost (AGSRC). This funding level is similar to the low funding levels allocated to Australia's most elite and well resourced, private schools. NGDE's low recurrent funding level remains the same today, as it was in 2001-2004 funding quadrennium and is reiterated legislatively in the *Schools Assistance Act 2008* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a).

One unusual aspect of this allocation of the highest SES rank to NGDE is that the AGSRC percentage figure for NGDE is written into Commonwealth legislation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a). The *Schools Assistance Act 2008* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a) states

in “Division 7 – Distance education funding”, in section 57, that for primary school students in NGDE, the

“assistance amount per student, for a program year, means the amount worked out using the formula: $13.7\% \times \text{AGSRC}$ for primary education for the program year”

Similarly, Section 58 of “Division 7 – Distance education funding”, states that for secondary school students in NGDE, the

“assistance amount per student, for a program year, means the amount worked out using the formula: $13.7\% \times \text{AGSRC}$ for secondary education for the program year”
(Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a, sections 57 & 58)

The insertion of the actual AGSRC percentage figure for NGDE into the legislation is not usual practice for the allocation of Commonwealth funding to non-government schools. Apart from NGDE, no other mode of schooling in Australia has been allocated an AGSRC percentage in the Act. Rather, SES ranks and percentage figures for most non-government schools are to be found in an established funding schedule. Because the recurrent funding level of NGDE is set in legislation, if there is to be any change to NGDE funding in future, such a change would require a change to legislation.

Thus, unlike any other schools in the independent education sector, schools that provide NGDE have two distinct SES rankings. The first SES ranking accounts for the school’s on-campus day school students. It is determined by the needs-based SES criteria, which takes into account the socioeconomic needs of families in the geographical region around the school. The second SES ranking is for the school’s distance education students. It is the predetermined, legislated rank of 130. It makes no reference to the needs of NGDE families or NGDE schools. In effect, this practice of citing the AGSRC percentage figure in legislation, has excluded NGDE students and their families from the needs-based SES funding determinants, used to appropriately resource non-government school students throughout Australia.

2.4.1 NGDE is excluded from SES funding determinants

The Commonwealth Government is the primary source of public funding to non-government schools in Australia. The state and territory governments are a supplementary source of their funding. Thus, Commonwealth funding is critical to the operation of non-government schooling. The Commonwealth’s legislated prescription of the lowest possible level of funding to NGDE students, denies them adequate recurrent funding, which as a consequence, underresources their education. On average it allocates to NGDE students about 23% of the funding which on-campus day school students receive, in the independent sector.

The needs-based SES funding model is the means by which appropriate recurrent funding of non-government schools is determined. The SES model features three economically determined, family-focused, needs-based dimensions. These are: (1) occupation, (2) education and (3) income (DEST, 1998; Commonwealth of Australia, 2008b). NGDE is excluded from these needs-based assessment criteria, which interrogate socioeconomic status, as it is legislatively allocated the fixed rank of 130 in the SES schedule. The Commonwealth presents no rationale justifying this SES ranking for NGDE. This exclusion of NGDE from the economic safety net

within the SES model has resulted in the gross underfunding of NGDE and has severely disadvantaged it in terms of resourcing, when compared to the rest of schooling in Australia.

Finding 3. NGDE is significantly underfunded compared to the rest of Australian schooling
NGDE students are funded at the lowest level of recurrent funding possible for non-government schooling. They are allocated around 23% of the funding, which other students in non-government schooling receive. Commonwealth legislation and policy excludes NGDE students from the normal non-government school funding determinants, such as found in the SES model.

2.5 Government education policy – Adequately resourcing Australian schooling

It is accepted and expected in Australian society that all Australian governments should adequately fund Australian schools and their students. The clearest and most recent demonstration of this community expectation is where all Australian governments, including the Commonwealth, the states and the territorial governments are signatories to the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008).

2.5.1 The Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians

The Melbourne Declaration describes the intent of all Australian governments to support Australia's schools and their students' education appropriately, in the 21st century. The declaration states that

“All Australian governments and all school sectors must:

- ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes; and
- promote a culture of excellence in all schools, by supporting them to provide challenging, and stimulating learning experiences and opportunities that enable all students to explore and build on their gifts and talents”. (p.7)

Further, the Declaration indicates that all signatory governments are committed to share both the costs and benefits of providing education for all Australian school students, stating:

“all governments will share the costs and benefits of reforms to give every young Australian a real chance of becoming a successful learner, a confident and creative individual and an active and informed citizen.” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 18)

Given that all governments have pledged themselves, throughout this Declaration, to “A Commitment to Action” (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 10, 12, 14, & 16) to support the education of young Australians, in particular, those who are disadvantaged, the Commonwealth's NGDE funding policy is markedly inconsistent with the Melbourne Declaration.

The Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) specifically cites two clear goals for young Australians. They are that all governments are committed to (1) high quality schooling and to (2) the support of the education of all Australian school students. The Commonwealth's NGDE funding policy conflicts with both of these goals. Underfunding means that NGDE schooling has limited access to resources for the task of meeting state educational compliance requirements, curriculum development and educational delivery. With respect to NGDE students, the policy implies that they are to be educated with fewer teachers and resources than the rest of Australian

school students. Thus, rather than ensuring that “socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes” (MCEETYA, 2008, p.7), the Commonwealth’s policy creates a targeted, resource-poor, group of schools and an associated cohort of underresourced students.

2.5.2 Prime Ministerial statements on education

The Commonwealth’s policy on NGDE funding contradicts the Commonwealth Government’s stated position on inclusivity of opportunity, when it comes to education. Reiterating the intention of the Melbourne Declaration, the current Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard, has indicated the Commonwealth’s commitment to ensuring that all Australian school students are provided with a fair opportunity to obtain a good education, with statements such as: “It is my intention ... to do even more to make sure that every child gets a fair go in life and a great education” (Gillard, 2010a) and that “every kid gets a fair chance to a great education” (Christenson, 2010). NGDE is excluded from this “fair opportunity” when it comes to Commonwealth recurrent funding. This lack of educational inclusivity prompts the exploration of social inclusion and exclusion theory as a means of understanding and discussing the social justice implications of the Commonwealth’s NGDE funding policy.

2.6 Social justice and educational equity

This next section explores recent discourse in social justice and equity theory, and posits the view that these two fields may significantly inform the resourcing inequities imposed by the Commonwealth’s recurrent funding policies of NGDE.

2.6.1 NGDE and social exclusion/inclusion theory

Social exclusion is a recently developed concept, which emerged in France, to describe those who were excluded from the welfare system (Hayes and Gray, 2008). In applying the term to Australia, sociologists, Hayes, Gray, & Edwards (2008) stated that social exclusion is “the restriction of access to opportunities and [a] limitation of the capabilities to capitalise on these [opportunities]” (p.6). In tandem with social exclusion, social inclusion theory has been adopted as an organising principle for social policy development in many countries, including Australia (Gillard, 2008). Hayes, Gray and Edwards (2008) stated that social inclusion and social exclusion are closely related, describing them as “two ends of a single dimension” (p.1). Social inclusion and exclusion theory informs the conceptualising of the educational disadvantage faced by NGDE communities, as it provides appropriate discourse by which to address the exclusion of NGDE from access to appropriate educational resourcing, which is normally deemed to be essential in our society.

Principles from the social inclusion conceptual framework relative to the disadvantaging of NGDE schools and their students include the aspirations of:

- (1) reducing disadvantage,
- (2) increasing social, civic and economic participation and
- (3) providing a greater voice to those excluded from what is deemed to be essential in society (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2008).

The Commonwealth’s underfunding of NGDE has institutionalised educational exclusion for one group in society by

- (1) prescribing educational disadvantage to this schooling sector, by disallowing equal resources;
- (2) decreasing the opportunity for social, civic and economic participation of NGDE staff and students, in processes which are normally expected of distance education providers in Australia and
- (3) ignoring to date, requests (since 2003), to redress its non-inclusive policy.

Thus, a social inclusion conceptual framework (Hayes & Gray, 2008; McDonald, 2011) would define this Commonwealth policy as social exclusion in an educational context. Remediation of such exclusion would require a reduction of disadvantage, increased participation in relevant practices and a social voice. In this sense, NGDE school communities are excluded from many educational opportunities, normally expected of schooling; educational norms, which would be expected, for example, in government distance education school communities. In summary, NGDE can be viewed as being socially excluded from such opportunities.

Given that this exclusion is enforced by legislation, the educational disadvantage of NGDE would be seen in sociological terms, as extending beyond social exclusion - it would be deemed to be a form of deprivation. Hayes, Gray, & Edwards (2008) and Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths (2007) agree that an enforced lack of what society considers to be a necessity, is a form of social deprivation. Saunders et. al. (2007) adopted British sociologists, Mack and Lansley's (1985) definition of deprivation as "an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities (or essentials) ... It involves going without because of a lack of resources" (p.10). Where society expects that governments should appropriately resource all Australian school students, and that support is legislatively denied to a specific group of schools, such as NGDE, that group would be deemed to be subjected to educational deprivation. This state of deprivation is currently the norm for NGDE on the Australian educational landscape, yet it is reminiscent of the pre-Karmel, minimalist funding conditions endured by some schools prior to 1973.

The findings of the Karmel Report (Karmel, 1973), established the basis for the Commonwealth's funding of school education, on the principle of need. Since then, Australian society has held the expectation that governments would adequately resource all Australian schooling. In promoting the "equality of outcomes", the report (Karmel, 1973) recommended that the Commonwealth make the "overall circumstances of children's education as nearly equal as possible" (p.139). The Commonwealth's current NGDE funding arrangements compel NGDE to survive and operate in the 21st century, under near-1970's resourcing conditions. Thus, unlike the rest of modern schooling, NGDE is still focused to the Karmelian mantra of equal inputs for all, being consigned to an early Karmelesque-like level of inappropriate Commonwealth support. Such a disregard for funding equity requires redress in terms of social justice.

2.6.1.1 A framework for social justice

Because the Australian community views the government funding of schooling as an expected norm, the allocation of appropriate funding to registered schools is viewed as social justice in the educational context and the denial of equity of funding as a social injustice, which promotes educational disadvantage. In discussing social justice in a democratic, educational context, Gilbert, Keddle, Lingard, Mills and Renshaw (2011) stated that:

“citizens in a democracy hold high expectations of access to and achievement in education, and large quantities of resources are devoted to satisfying them. It follows that, as a universal human need and want, education is subject to the democratic imperatives surrounding equity, equality and social justice” (p.1).

Having traced the development of the concepts of social justice and equity as it applies to education in Australia, Gilbert et al. (2011) direct their focus to sociologist, Nancy Fraser’s (2008 & 2009) theoretical framework surrounding injustice, as a key to understanding equity in education.

Fraser (2008) identified three dimensions of injustice, which, can in turn, elicit three remediating processes in an affected community. These are:

- the socioeconomic dimension which induces redistributive processes;
- the cultural dimension giving rise to recognitive processes and
- the political dimension associated with representative processes.

Social injustices can be understood within the scope of these three dimensions. Fraser (2008) argued that redress of social injustices could be actioned by the processes of redistribution, recognition and representation. In terms of education, redistribution applies to wherever structures of society have generated maldistribution of educational resources to social actors; recognition applies to where institutionalised or hierarchical patterns of value have generated misrecognition or status inequality of particular educational groups and representation applies to where particular social actors are not given an equal voice about justice claims in education.

Fraser (2008) posited that the first process when addressing an injustice is that of redistribution. The redistributive aspect arises from a moral recognition of an injustice. It is economic in nature, as it advocates a redistribution of resources to where there is a lack. Fraser (2008) noted that the maldistribution of resources is an indicator of class inequality and that “casting maldistribution is the quintessential injustice” (p.10).

Secondly, injustice arises from improper recognition of social actors and thus varies the scope of justice. The recognition process of remedying injustice exposes a lack of a shared understanding of the “who” of justice; it is the defining of who counts as a subject of justice in a given matter. The recognition process asks whose interests deserve consideration and thus, who belongs to the circle of those entitled to equal concern.

The third process critical to a justice claim is that of representation. Representation seeks fair terms of political representation and often distils to the simple point that the subjects of justice are given an equal voice when contesting hegemonic institutions and frames. The dimension of representation is a matter of inclusive processes, distilling to the “how” of achieving justice. Being procedural, it provides an agency of redress to the subjects of injustice, seeking to correct misrepresentation or political voicelessness.

Fraser (2008) argued that in remedying social injustice, the “principle of parity of participation” (p.16), should overarch these three processes as a norm. The principle of parity of participation permits all those who are subject to the governance structures regulating the relevant matter of justice/injustice, to participate as peers in social life, as necessary. However, when one examines

the Commonwealth's NGDE funding policy through a social justice lens, its injustice becomes starkly apparent, rendering Karmel's (1973) historic recommendations, current government commitments in the Melbourne Declaration and the supportive rhetoric of politicians, to be of little value to NGDE schools and their students.

2.6.1.2 Equity

Gilbert et al. (2011) combine Fraser's (2008, 2009) view of social justice with that of equity. They cite the United Kingdom's Equalities Review (2007) in describing an equal society.

"An equal society protects and promotes equal real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be." (p.6).

With respect to NGDE, it is evident that current funding policy does not recognise the different needs of NGDE schools and their students and that it does not remove barriers which limit what students and teachers can do, rather it creates problems for these learning communities. In terms of the Equalities Review (2007), NGDE funding policy promotes inequality.

Prasser (2012) in critiquing Gonski's (2011) view of equity in education juxtaposes Gonski's position, with the OECD's (2012) report on equity in education. The OECD (2012) report notes that equity in education includes systemic funding strategies, which are responsive to needs. It also cites school-related elements to help disadvantaged students such as: supportive school learning environments, quality teachers and effective teaching strategies. The Commonwealth's NGDE funding policy does not promote equity for NGDE, as advocated by the OECD. Rather, it creates learning needs and disadvantaged students. It is unsupportive of NGDE learning environments and denies NGDE learning communities of sufficient teachers. The Commonwealth's policy makes equity in education, an impossibility for NGDE.

Finding 4. Underfunding Australian school students is contrary to sound educational policy
The Commonwealth's practice of underfunding NGDE students contradicts stated government educational policy. Further, it presents these students with a social injustice, which promotes educational exclusion, deprivation and inequity.

2.7 The Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling

2011 saw the submission of the final report of the Commonwealth's Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski, 2011). This represented the findings of the greatest review into the funding of education in Australia, since the Karmel Report (Karmel, 1973).

The Review was informed by submissions, meetings and commissioned reports. NGDE was represented to the Review by written submissions and a meeting with panel members. The Review was also informed by four reports (ACER, 2011; Allen Consulting Group, 2011; Deloitte Access Economics, 2011; MGSE, NILS & NOUS Group, 2011) commissioned by the review panel, to assess Australia's school funding models, the challenges and opportunities in schooling, funding to the disadvantaged and to suggest a new funding model for Australian

schooling. Not one of these reports mentioned NGDE. Furthermore, NGDE was not mentioned in the review's Final Report (Gonski, 2011).

The Deloitte Access Economics (2011) report mentioned the term "distance education" once (Deloitte, 2011, p. 4). However, that mention was to indicate that their assessment of existing funding models of schooling in Australia, would not include distance education funding in its review.

The Allen Consulting Group (2011) report made one mention of distance education as a possible area where further funding loadings could be applied to the base amount of the National Schooling Recurrent Resource Standard (NSRRS). This mention of distance education as an area of extra loading was applicable to government distance education (GDE) but there was no mention of NGDE being included in this suggested loading.

Similarly, the ACER (2011) report mentions GDE (p. 62) with respect to their disadvantaged students. This report also fails to mention NGDE.

Despite the Report's (Gonski, 2011) many references to fairness, equity and the elimination of educational disadvantage, its omission of any mention of NGDE is of concern to NGDE practitioners. The author discussed the Review's failure to mention NGDE, with Dr. Ken Boston, one of the Review Panel members, who stated that NGDE might have been overlooked in the Panel's deliberations, and that this should be brought to the Minister's attention (Boston, 2012). It is envisaged that this report will assist with bringing NGDE to the Minister's attention.

Finding 5. The Review of Funding for Schooling has ignored NGDE

The Commonwealth's Review of Funding for Schooling has not mentioned NGDE's funding dilemma. Both the four commissioned reports, which were to inform the review's panel and the panel's final report, do not mention NGDE's critical resourcing allocation.

In summary, this chapter has set the study within the literature relevant to NGDE and in particular, NGDE's funding problem. The chapter presents a definition and description of distance education and reasons why parents choose NGDE. It outlines the history of the Commonwealth's NGDE funding policy, demonstrating how it allocates such a low level of funding to NGDE schools. The policy is shown to be in contradiction with stated government educational policies, in effect, creating social injustice by legislated educational exclusion and enforced deprivation of educational resources. Such an injustice requires redress through redistribution, recognition and representation for NGDE in Australia. The policy is shown to be inequitable in OECD terms and that this inequity does not appear to be addressed by the Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski, 2011), in Australia.

Having set the problem of NGDE funding within the context of the literature, the next chapter will briefly describe the methodological approach adopted in the study.

3 Methodology

This chapter briefly outlines the research methodology undergirding the study. It posits that a mixed method research approach enabled diverse data sources to inform the study. The transformative aspect of this approach also allowed the study to be viewed through an emancipatory lens, which highlighted the problematic nature of NGDE's funding dilemma, which was the originating reason for the study.

3.1 Introduction

The study researched NGDE in the four states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. This report is a general description of NGDE in those states, without any emphasis focused on a particular school of distance education or a particular method of distance education delivery. Because the study required a broad and general description of NGDE, with a focus on the problematic Commonwealth recurrent funding arrangements surrounding NGDE, a mixed method research (MMR) methodology was chosen to facilitate it.

3.2 Method

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, 2011) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) have documented the development of MMR since the 1950s, indicating its acceptance and implementation by prominent research methodologists and authorities from differing discipline fields. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) defined mixed method research in the following way.

“Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems that either approach alone.” (p.5)

MMR brought a distinct advantage to this study. In particular, it enabled the researcher to access both quantitative and qualitative data from different sources and in different ways through the implementation of differing methods in the data gathering process.

MMR may take on a diversity of applications. In the context of its pragmatic paradigm, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain that MMR can serve a transformative approach to addressing injustice, by viewing a phenomenon through an emancipatory theoretical lens, with the expectation of change.

This study was initiated from a discussion between the author and the Minister for Education, which highlighted problematic concerns about the Commonwealth's funding policy for NGDE. It was intended that the study would describe NGDE in Australia, in the context of the low Commonwealth recurrent funding allocated to NGDE. MMR's transformative and emancipatory aspects enabled the study to both describe NGDE and to present the paucity of its funding regime, with a view to seeking redress of the deficiency.

3.3 Research design

The research project featured initial interviews to gain a context of all schools participating in the project. Following this, data gathering sources included, a survey instrument, collection of data, which described the school or various aspects of the school, interviews with experts in the fields of distance education and research methodology, follow up interviews with various school personnel such as principals, heads of NGDE, teachers and school business managers.

Initial open-ended interviews were conducted with

- DEEWR personnel
- University academics
- A former principal of a Government school of distance education
- Principals and or their delegates of 13 schools providing NGDE

Most of these interviews were done in person, some, however, were done by phone. These interviews provided initial data, which described the contextual settings of each NGDE school. Two schools chose not to participate in the study.

A pilot survey instrument was designed, resultant from these interviews and then trialed in a pilot study, with one school. It sought both quantitative and qualitative data from the school. The instrument was also sent to DEEWR for review and comment. The subsequent feedback assisted with the reshaping of the instrument. The instrument was then sent to all principals of participating NGDE schools for comment and critique, which further informed the shaping of the instrument. The final instrument was then sent to all NGDE leaders for completion.

Interviews with the business managers of four schools provided school-specific financial information critical to the study. Two of these schools had large NGDE student cohorts, and two had smaller NGDE student cohorts. Most schools did not submit their financial details. Nonetheless, the use of four NGDE schools' financial data was sufficient to demonstrate the general pattern of Commonwealth recurrent funding common to all schools providing NGDE.

The researcher collected additional data relevant to the study including:

- interviews with several principals (or their delegates) of NGDE schools,
- interviews with teachers,
- additional data provided by some schools such as teacher surveys, parent surveys and graduate student surveys and
- copies of school prospectuses.

3.4 Participant schools

11 out of the 13 schools providing NGDE in Australia chose to participate in the study. This majority sample of schools delivered a wide range of school size and NGDE student populations. A few schools had less than 10 NGDE students, whereas several schools had more than 500 NGDE students.

Each NGDE department is part of a school, which also has an on-campus day school. In some schools, the NGDE student enrolment was much larger than its non-government day school

(NGDS) student enrolment, in other cases the enrolment numbers for the NGDE and the NGDS were about even, and in other schools the NGDS enrolment numbers were greater than the student enrolments in the NGDE.

The sample of schools also included full time and part time NGDE students. Further, the diversity of the schools' sample enabled the study to include varying methods of NGDE delivery.

3.4.1 School anonymity

Because the goal of the study was to create a description of NGDE as it is practiced across Australia, the study was designed to provide a general description of NGDE, rather than provide case studies or specific information relating to specific schools. Thus, the study did not require reporting on individual schools. This anonymity factor enabled the researcher to guarantee school leaders that there would be no focus upon their school, individually. This guarantee of school anonymity was a critical part of the research design. It encouraged respondent schools to be open about their schools in interview and survey responses and the submission of documents. This aspect of the study also encouraged greater school participation in the study, resulting in a high participation rate of 85% of possible participants. The anonymity factor also influenced the outcome of the study as it facilitated the emergence of a general description or suprastructure of NGDE in Australia, rather than presenting specific examples.

Whilst all data was presented without reference to specific schools, key quotations are referenced anonymously in this report, to enable the researcher to refer to the original data set, if necessary. Thus insightful quotations and statistics from a non-government distance education school would be anonymously referenced in the study, numerically, using the notation, "NGDES 1" etc. One school (NGDES 10) referenced parent quotations by linking them to parent identity codes from its database.

3.4.2 Equivalence of praxis

All data from individual schools were integrated into the general pool of information to form a general description of NGDE. This process emulated a phenomenographic, rather than a phenomenological approach at the data processing stage of the study (Marton, 1986). The value of a phenomenographic approach during this stage of the study was that differences in all schools were attributed equal status, irrespective of the schools' size, number of NGDE students or of the pedagogical methods they implemented. Thus the pedagogy of a small NGDE school was included, rather than being overlooked, nor was it overshadowed by the praxis of the larger schools. Similarly, the praxis of the larger schools providing NGDE was included in the collectivised presentation of this report, with equal status to that of the smaller NGDE providers.

3.4.3 Locations of NGDE students

Most Schools provided the residential addresses of their NGDE students, as requested in the survey instrument. However, one school chose not to provide these addresses, at the direction of its governing body.

These addresses were forwarded to the *Geospatial Intelligence & Support "Espirit Geometrique"* Research Branch of the Social Policy & Economics Strategy Group at the

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Canberra, for geocoding in accordance with the Schools Geographic Location Classification Scheme of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). The returned data was used to demonstrate the residential location of NGDE students in terms of (1) national, (2) state and (3) state educational region presentations, as indicated in Section 4.

3.5 Reliability

The rigour of a MMR study revolves around whether the study can be trusted and the results can be believed. It requires that the findings of the qualitative aspects of the study accurately reflect the phenomenon described and that the quantitative aspects are accurate. Akerlind (2005) drew upon Guba (1981) and Kvale (1996) to define reliability as “reflecting the use of appropriate methodological procedures for insuring quality and consistency in data interpretations” (p. 331). Akerlind (2005) emphasised that research reliability is achieved by the researcher maintaining an attitude of interpretive awareness, throughout the entire process, from design, to data collection, analysis and reporting.

Sandberg (1997) described interpretive awareness as the researcher acknowledging and explicitly dealing with his or her subjectivity, by identifying, controlling and checking the researcher’s personal interpretation of the data, during each stage of a study. Sandberg (1997) argued that the researcher must intentionally commit to be as faithful as possible to the subjects’ presentation of reality in achieving interpretative awareness. Bowden (2005) supports this view, stating that maintaining a constant focus upon the requirements of the study assists in delivering a reliable and trustworthy outcome.

3.6 Validity

The study demonstrates both communicable validity and pragmatic validity as posited by Akerlind (2002, 2005) and Kvale (1996). The validity of a study involves the checking of the quality of the data, the results and the interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Akerlind (2005) noted that research validity is usually demonstrated by the outcomes of a study actually reflecting the phenomenon being studied.

Because the study included both qualitative and quantitative data, which consistently supported the problematic nature of the Commonwealth’s NGDE funding policy, the thesis of the study is easily communicable and defensible, thus achieving communicable validity. Pragmatic validity refers to the usefulness of the research outcomes to both the community researched and the wider community (Akerlind, 2002, 2005; Kvale, 1996). Because the research outcomes of this study may directly affect the deliberations of policy makers and subsequently improve the educational outcomes of the researched community, it is arguable that the study has pragmatic validity.

3.7 Transferability

The diversity of distance education praxis implemented at each respondent NGDE school precludes generalisation of NGDE pedagogy to be applied to individual providers of NGDE. However, there are attributes and distinctive aspects of distance education practices, which are common to all schools. The purpose of this study is to provide a broad description of NGDE in

Australia, in the context of problematic Commonwealth underfunding. This funding problem is common to every provider of NGDE and is thus a relevant phenomenon, applicable to every respondent school. Thus, any comment relevant to NGDE's paucity of funding is transferable and relevant to every respondent school.

3.8 The researcher

At this point it is important that I locate myself, as the researcher, within the context of the study. In brief, I have personal, professional and research experience in NGDE. I have had a connection with schools providing NGDE since 1993. This connection has included:

- having had children studying in NGDE;
- teaching in NGDE;
- assisting with the development of NGDE in the states of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia;
- presenting NGDE submissions on behalf of NGDE schools, to educational authorities;
- conducting research into NGDE, including a doctoral thesis and
- writing various academic papers on the subject
- teaching as a guest lecturer in education, at a university and two colleges re. NGDE.

In order to preserve the integrity of the study, it was imperative that I employed the principle of bracketing as an integral part of the methodology. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) noted that bracketing is essential to achieving the research subjects' views of a phenomenon, rather than that of the researcher.

As the researcher for this study, I sought to bracket my experience and knowledge in the field of NGDE, by identifying it and keeping it separate from the responses of the subjects in the study. I intentionally bracketed personal presuppositions, theories and experiences during the interviews and data processing stages of the study. The aim of bracketing was to clearly obtain the responses of the NGDE schools, rather than to pollute the data and the findings with my experience of NGDE. Put simply, the discipline and attitude of bracketing enabled the data to inform the study, rather than the researcher's experiences.

It is important to note, however, that my experience of NGDE also presented a valuable aspect to the study. Leading qualitative educational researchers (Booth, 1992; Marton & Booth, 1997; Trigwell, 1994, 2000; Uljens, 1996) agree that a sound understanding of the phenomenon studied provides a check as to the relevance of the research findings to the phenomenon being studied. This was arguably the case in this study.

3.9 Limitations

The non-participation of two schools in the study meant that the study is not exhaustive. However, the participation of 11 out of 13 schools ensures that the study presents a broad description of key features of NGDE in Australia.

Additionally, one respondent school did not supply student addresses. Thus the study does not reflect the residential locations of the full cohort of full time and part time NGDE students. Nonetheless, the majority of respondent schools did provide student addresses. Because of a

good participation rate in the student location questions of the survey instrument, by the majority of respondent schools, the student location graphs do not seem to be significantly affected by the absence of a few data sets. The national and state-based findings on the locations of NGDE students appear to be consistent with each other, in that they reflect a similar trend on a state by state basis as well as nationally.

Similarly, the non-participation of two schools, did not significantly impact the presentation of variety of NGDE pedagogy, as the pedagogical variety represented by the 11 participating schools, provided a sufficient pedagogical range, to be representative of NGDE in Australia.

Having briefly described the methodology implemented for the study, the findings of the study will be presented in the following chapter.

4 Findings of the Study

This chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study, as derived from the data. It distils the responses of all of the respondent schools that provide NGDE in Australia, describing the various aspects of NGDE, including: the students, the educational programs, NGDE teachers and their functions, NGDE administration, NGDE parents and their functions, indicators that NGDE is bona fide education, perceived advantages and disadvantages of NGDE and additional needs of NGDE schools.

4.1 NGDE students – A description

Eleven schools responded to the request to participate in the study. These schools reported a total of 3300 students comprising of 1693 primary students and 1607 secondary students across the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

This section briefly describes full time and part time NGDE students, the location of NGDE students, indigenous students in NGDE and how NGDE meets the special needs of some students. It concludes with some information as to why parents choose NGDE for their students.

4.1.1 Full time and part time NGDE

As with any form of schooling in Australia, NGDE caters for students from the early childhood years to Year 12. Students may be enrolled as full time or on a part time basis. Full time NGDE students are engaged in the full educational program of a non-government school. Part time NGDE students are usually enrolled in and attend a non-government or government day school and are enrolled in single distance education subjects provided by a different non-government school.

4.1.1.1 Full time NGDE students

The full time student population is spread evenly across all grades from prep to year 12, with student numbers slightly lower in years 11 and 12.

3,300 full time NGDE students were represented in the survey sample. Because one school with a significant number of NGDE students, declined to participate in the survey, this number is not reflective of the total cohort of the full-time NGDE students and their schools, in Australia. However, it represents the majority of the cohort. Table 1 indicates a relatively even spread of full time NGDE students across all school year levels.

Primary DE Students	NSW	QLD	Tas	WA	Total
Prep	5	121	0	23	149
Year 1	11	165	1	47	224
Year 2	9	188	2	34	233
Year 3	11	208	6	56	281
Year 4	12	190	8	52	262
Year 5	17	168	3	60	248
Year 6	16	200	8	72	296
Total Primary	81	1240	28	344	1693

Secondary DE Students	NSW	QLD	Tas	WA	Total
Year 7	21	184	7	68	280
Year 8	22	234	8	69	333
Year 9	16	257	6	39	318
Year 10	16	168	2	73	259
Year 11	N/A	136	1	56	193
Year 12	N/A	177	0	47	224
Total Secondary	75	1156	24	352	1607
TOTAL ALL STUDENTS	156	2396	52	696	3300

Table 1. Full Time NGDE Students

The data clearly indicate that NGDE is providing an important educational function for many students in various Australian states.

4.1.1.1.1 New South Wales

Full-time NGDE in NSW is characterised in an even spread of students from kindergarten to year 10 and an even distribution of male and females across all year levels. 156 full time NGDE students were recorded in NSW. No school is currently accredited to provide NGDE for Years 11 and 12 students on a full time basis.

4.1.1.1.2 Queensland

In Queensland all NGDE schools provide NGDE from prep to year 12. There is an even distribution of male and female students across all schools. It is interesting to note that in all schools there was slightly greater number of boys than girls in NGDE. Overall there were approximately 2% more boys than girls in NGDE.

4.1.1.1.3 Tasmania

There are fewer full-time enrolments in NGDE schools in Tasmania than other states. There were also fewer numbers of students in the early childhood and senior years of education.

4.1.1.1.4 Western Australia

As in the other states, full-time NGDE enrolments are evenly spread from pre-primary to year 12 and across male and female genders.

4.1.1.2 Summary – Full-time NGDE students

The data indicate an even spread of students across all year levels. This would suggest that NGDE is meeting the needs of students across the whole school age range. Given that NGDE in the states of Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia, provides schooling for the senior years, it is likely that there would be a need for NGDE in the senior schooling years in NSW,

Finding 6. NGDE provides full-time education P-12

NGDE provides full time education for a small but significant minority of school students spread evenly across the early childhood years to Year 12 in the states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

4.1.1.3 Part-time NGDE Students

Part-time NGDE students are significantly fewer in number than full-time NGDE students. In the state of Queensland part-time NGDE students are not recognised by State Government, however they are in Tasmania and Western Australia. The majority of NGDE part-time students are senior secondary students in NSW, who have enrolled in single subjects, which are not provided by their local school. Such students turn to NGDE providers to enable them to study additional subjects not provided by their own school. This system requires a contact teacher who supervises the student at the school in which he or she is enrolled, as well as the teacher of the actual course, located at the school providing NGDE. Thus there is a communication loop between the student, the local contact teacher and the teacher of the course at the NGDE provider. Similar arrangements occur in NGDE in the other states, although far fewer in number than in NSW.

One school (NGDES 2) described its part time provision of NGDE subjects as a service to other schools by providing supplementary subject delivery for schools which:

- wanted to expand into the senior years of educational provision;
- needed supplementary subject delivery because of timetable clashes;
- needed supplementary subject delivery to be able to stay viable;
- sought to continue with senior years accreditation;
- were unable to provide specifically requested subjects due to lack of resources or a specialist teacher;
- needed alternatives for students who would otherwise have a timetable clash.

336 part time NGDE students were represented in the survey sample. This figure mostly represents students studying single subjects in New South Wales, at the senior level of schooling. One school in New South Wales, which provides part time NGDE subjects, did not participate in this study. That school's website indicates that it provides high school subjects to approximately 150 students.

One school providing part time NGDE cited 102 schools, which they were assisting, by providing individual educational subjects for their students. These schools were from a wide range of differing educational communities including:

- Anglican schools
- Catholic schools

- Christian schools
- Grammar schools
- Overseas schools
- Presbyterian schools
- Seventh Day Adventist schools
- State High schools
- State distance education school
- Uniting schools

Figure 1 indicates the percentage breakdown of different school communities which access part time NGDE for their students.

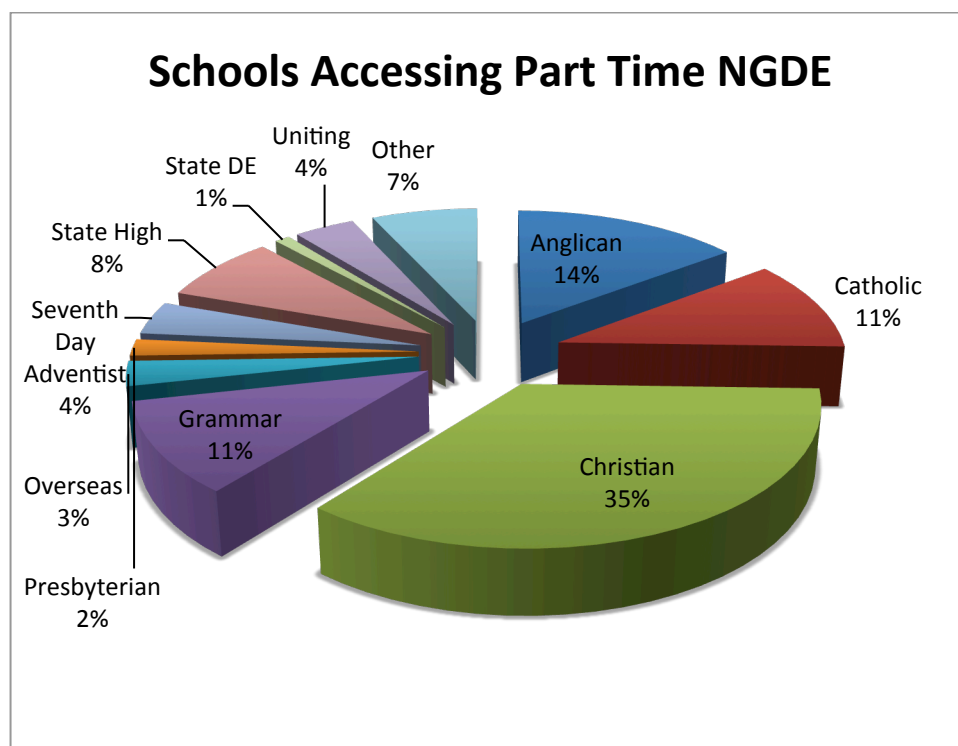


Figure 1. Types of Schools accessing Part Time NGDE

The data clearly indicate that part time NGDE provides an important function to students who seek single subjects not delivered by their own school. Following on from that, not only does part time provision of NGDE assist students, it also assists various schools to enhance or maintain their educational offering. Figure 2 demonstrates the student uptake of part time NGDE, in three states, by year level.

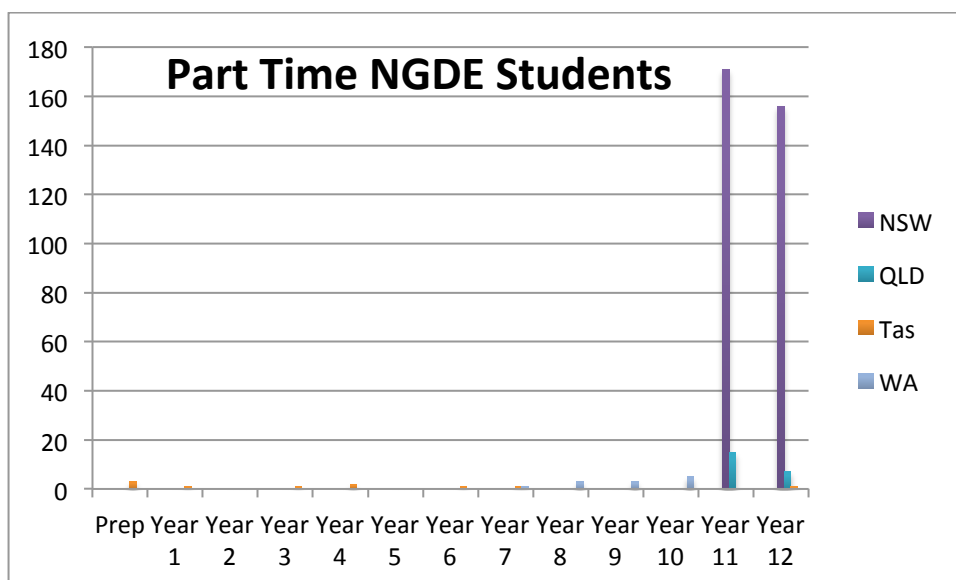


Figure 2. Part Time NGDE Students by Year Level, Nationwide

4.1.1.4 Summary – Part time NGDE Students

NGDE schools, which specialise in part-time NGDE, provide a vital service to their educational communities. In providing various subjects to students who are enrolled in other schools, they enable students to study subjects, which their own schools do not provide. This practice encourages students to stay at school in their localities and to be engaged in academic programs to the point of completing their senior studies. Student retention during (i) high school years and to (ii) the completion of Year 12 is a vital and desired outcome according to the final report of the Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski, 2011). A corollary to this point is that schools are also assisted by part time NGDE, as they are able to offer enhanced educational programs resulting from their partnerships with schools, which offer part time NGDE.

Finding 7. Part-time NGDE provides a key service to students from other schools

NGDE provides particular courses for students from non-government and government schools, which their own schools do not provide. This is especially important to high school students, enabling them to remain at their own school, whilst studying these extra courses, externally.

Finding 8. Part-time NGDE provides a key service to other schools

NGDE provides key assistance to non-government and government schools that want to enable their students to access particular courses, which they do not provide, or to schools that are seeking assistance to expand their high school departments to the senior school level.

Recommendation

If part time NGDE assists non-government and government schools and their students, especially in NSW, it may also be helpful to schools and their students in other states. Part time NGDE should be part of the educational landscape in all Australian states. It is recommended that governments explore ways to include part time NGDE in states where it is not permitted.

4.1.2 NGDE student locations

The My School website (ACARA, 2012) indicates that schools may be geographically located in four possible locations, which are: metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote regions. The locations of schools on this website are determined according to the Schools Geographic Location Classification Scheme of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). For the purposes of this study, this MCEECDYA classification scheme was implemented. However, the data do not pertain to the locations of schools providing NGDE, rather, they pertain to the residential address of each student.

4.1.2.1 National

Figure 3 indicates the residential location of full time NGDE students, nationally, in terms of the MCEECDYA location classifications.

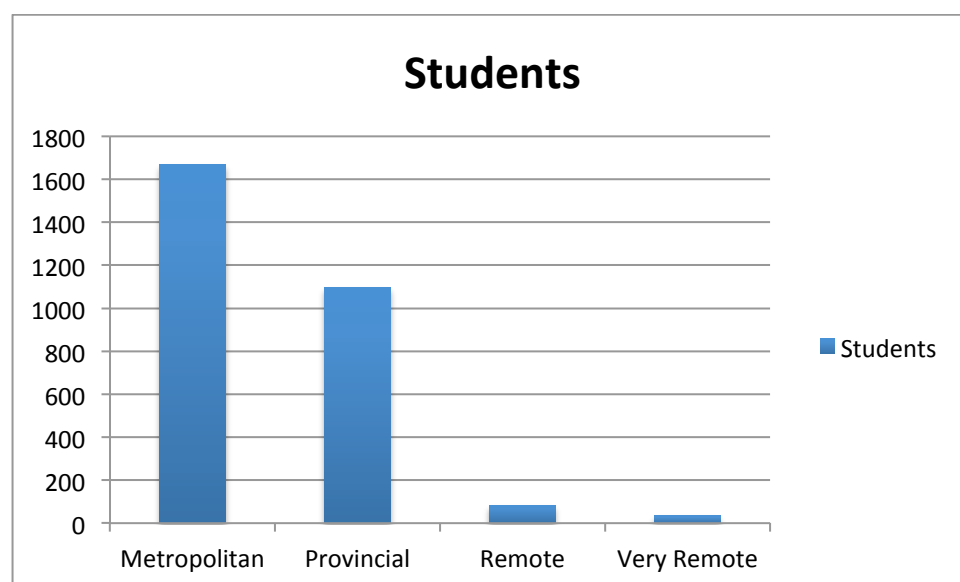


Figure 3. Residential Locations of Full Time NGDE Students, Nationally

Contrary to popular belief that distance education predominantly caters for students in remote locations, the data indicate that NGDE students mostly reside in metropolitan and provincial population zones around Australia. The percentage breakdown of these student locations is:

- Metropolitan zone – 58%
- Provincial zone – 38%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very remote zone – 1%

Further analysis of the metropolitan and provincial zones gives greater light on the location of these students.

- Metropolitan zone – Capital cities – 46%
- Metropolitan zone – Major urban – 12%
- Provincial zone – Inner provincial areas – 15%
- Provincial zone – Outer provincial areas – 13%

- Provincial zone – Provincial city 25,000-49,999 – 5%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 50,000-99,999 – 5%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very Remote zone – 1%

Clearly the data indicate that 96% of NGDE students reside in various urban regions across the four states of NSW, Qld, Tas and WA.

4.1.2.2 New South Wales

Figure 4 indicates the distribution of full time NGDE students, in New South Wales, in terms of the MCEECDYA location classifications.

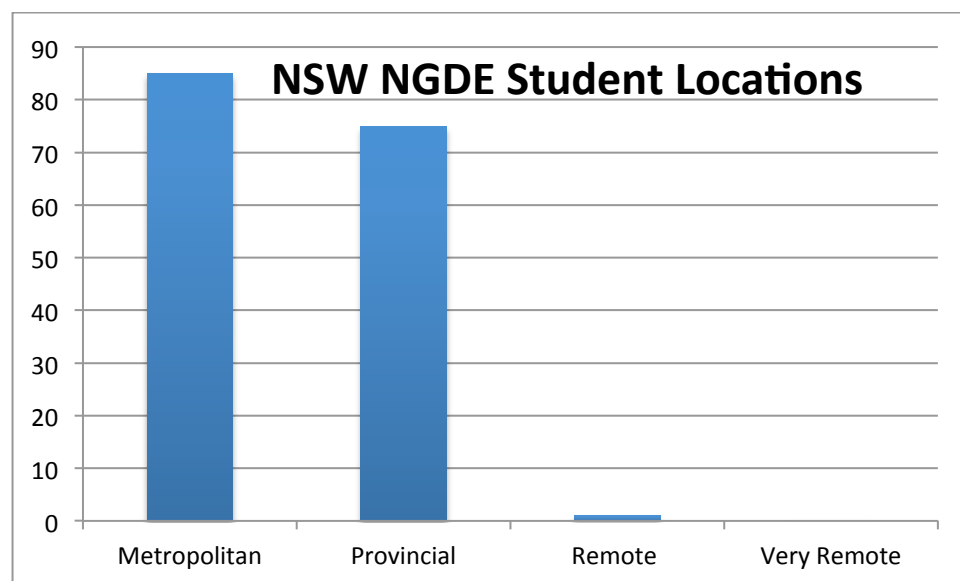


Figure 4. Residential Locations of Full Time NGDE Students in NSW

These student residential locations are populated according to the following percentage figures:

- Metropolitan zone – 53%
- Provincial zone – 46%
- Remote zone – 1%
- Very remote zone – 0%

Further analysis of the metropolitan and provincial zones gives greater light on the location of these students.

- Metropolitan zone – Capital cities – 34%
- Metropolitan zone – Major urban – 19%
- Provincial zone – Inner provincial areas – 19%
- Provincial zone – Outer provincial areas – 23%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 25,000-49,999 – 4%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 50,000-99,999 – 0%
- Remote zone – 1%
- Very Remote zone – 0%

The data indicate that 99% of NGDE students reside in various urban regions across the state of New South Wales.

4.1.2.3 Queensland

Figure 5 indicates the distribution of full time NGDE students, in Queensland, in terms of the MCEECDYA location classifications.

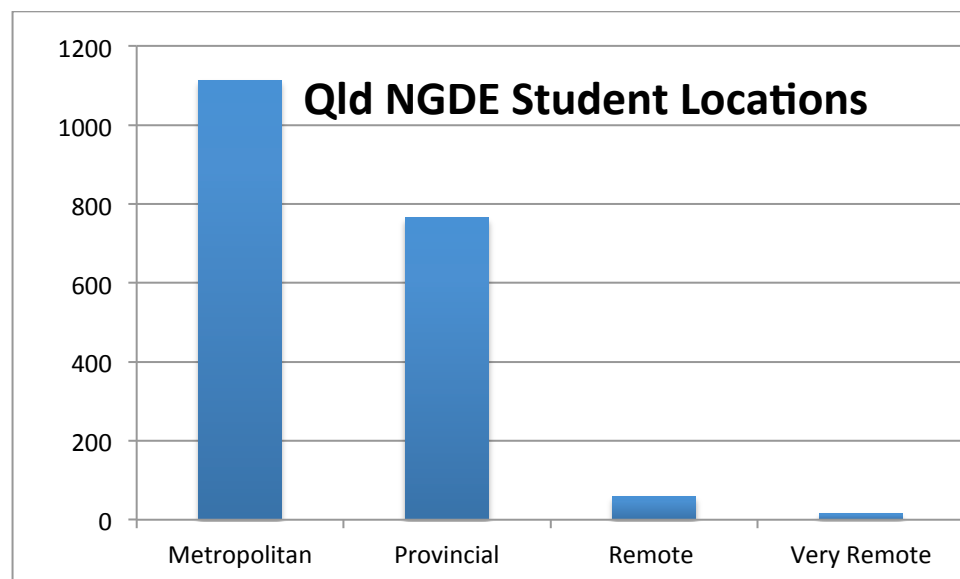


Figure 5. Residential Locations of Full Time NGDE Student in Qld.

These student residential locations are populated according to the following percentage figures:

- Metropolitan zone – 57%
- Provincial zone – 39%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very remote zone – 1%

Further analysis of the metropolitan and provincial zones gives greater light on the location of these students.

- Metropolitan zone – Capital cities – 42%
- Metropolitan zone – Major urban – 15%
- Provincial zone – Inner provincial areas – 18%
- Provincial zone – Outer provincial areas – 13%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 25,000-49,999 – 2%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 50,000-99,999 – 6%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very Remote zone – 1%

The data indicate that 96% of NGDE students reside in various urban regions across the state of Queensland.

4.1.2.4 Tasmania

Figure 6 indicates the distribution of full time NGDE students, in Tasmania, in terms of the MCEECDYA location classifications.

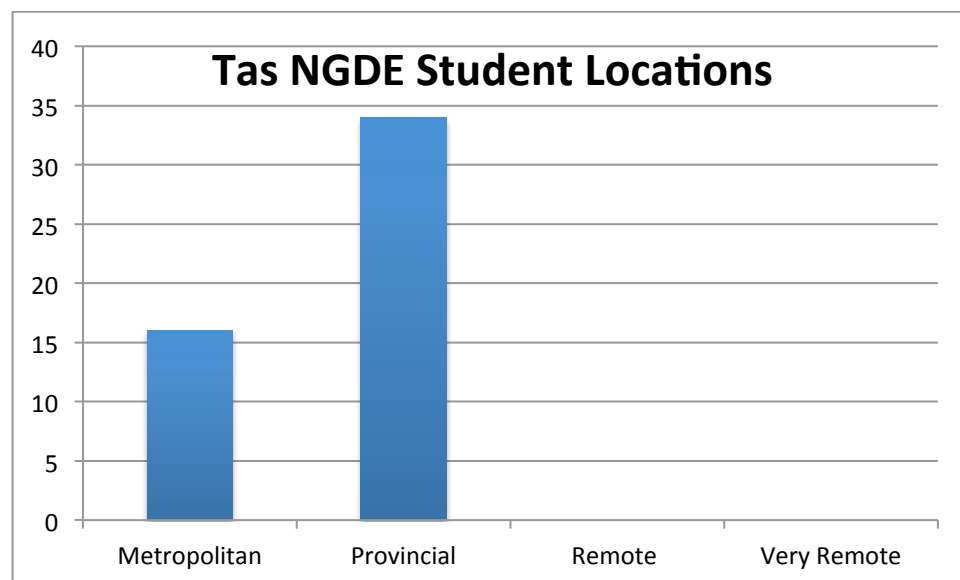


Figure 6. Residential Locations of Full Time NGDE Students in Tasmania

These student residential locations are populated according to the following percentage figures:

- Metropolitan zone – 32%
- Provincial zone – 68%
- Remote zone – 0%
- Very remote zone – 0%

Further analysis of the metropolitan and provincial zones gives greater light on the location of these students.

- Metropolitan zone – Capital cities – 0%
- Metropolitan zone – Major urban – 32%
- Provincial zone – Inner provincial areas – 2%
- Provincial zone – Outer provincial areas – 14%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 25,000-49,999 – 0%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 50,000-99,999 – 52%
- Remote zone – 0%
- Very Remote zone – 0%

The data indicate that 100% of NGDE students reside in various urban regions across the state of Tasmania.

4.1.2.5 Western Australia

Figure 7 indicates the distribution of full time NGDE students, in Western Australia, in terms of the MCEECDYA location classifications.

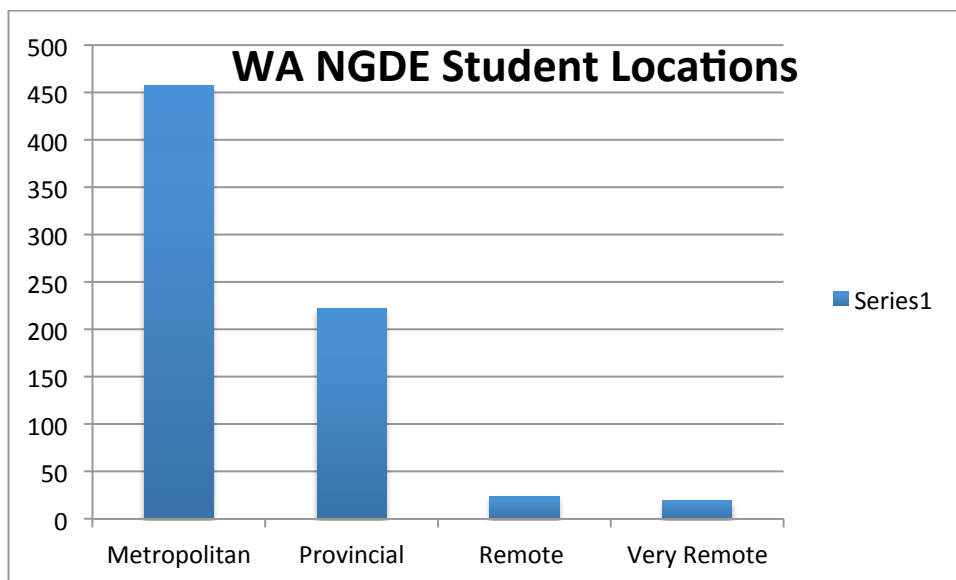


Figure 7. Residential Locations of Full Time NGDE Students in WA.

These student residential locations are populated according to the following percentage figures:

- Metropolitan zone – 63%
- Provincial zone – 31%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very remote zone – 3%

Further analysis of the metropolitan and provincial zones gives greater light on the location of these students.

- Metropolitan zone – Capital cities – 63%
- Metropolitan zone – Major urban – 0%
- Provincial zone – Inner provincial areas – 7%
- Provincial zone – Outer provincial areas – 11%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 25,000-49,999 – 13%
- Provincial zone – Provincial city 50,000-99,999 – 0%
- Remote zone – 3%
- Very Remote zone – 3%

The data indicate that 94% of NGDE students reside in various urban regions across the state of Western Australia.

4.1.3 Summary – Student location with respect to population regions

In contrast to early distance education practices last century, where distance education primarily met the needs of students residing in isolated communities, the current NGDE student cohort is not limited to geographically isolated students. Rather, Figures 3-7 demonstrate that NGDE students mostly reside in metropolitan and provincial regions, in addition to those living in geographically remote regions. This suggests that NGDE is a preferred educational choice of many parents rather than being a necessity, enforced by the tyranny of distance.

Finding 9. NGDE student location – Population regions

Full time NGDE students mostly reside in metropolitan and provincial regions. NGDE is not limited to students who are geographically isolated.

4.1.4 Student location with respect to state educational regions

Location affects educational outcomes. Abbott-Chapman (2011) highlights location as an educational discriminator, with increased distance from Australia's major cities directly proportional to increased educational disadvantage. Figures 8-11 indicate the location of students according to their states' educational regions.

Figure 8 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of locations of full time NGDE students in New South Wales, with respect to the state's educational regions.

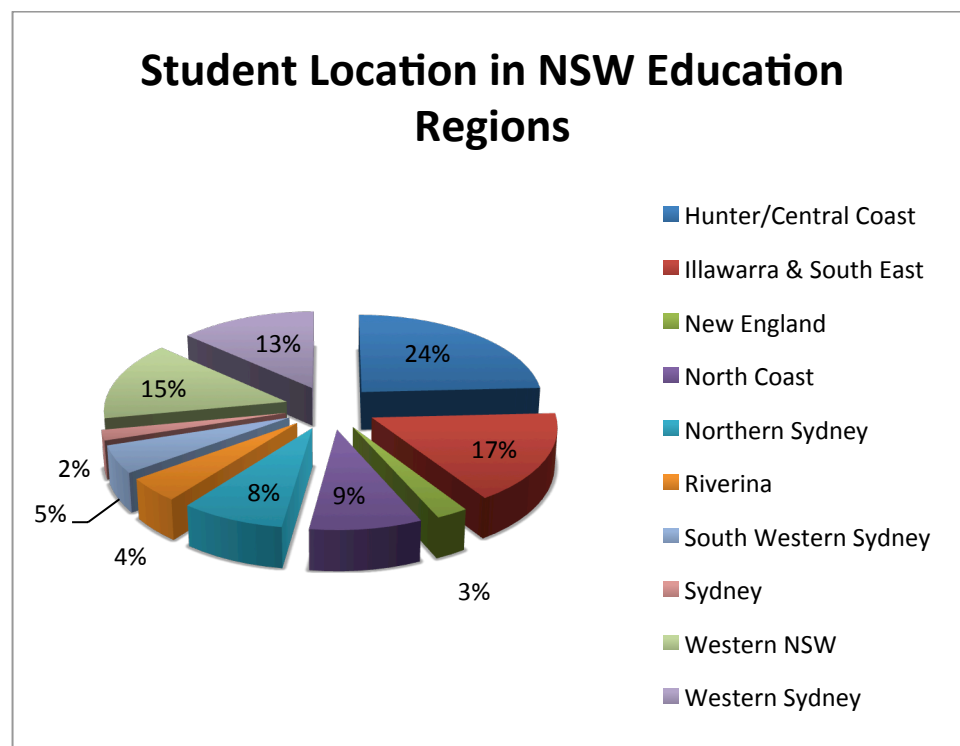


Figure 8. Full Time NGDE Students in NSW Education Regions

Figure 9 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of the locations of full time NGDE students in Queensland, with respect to the state's educational regions.

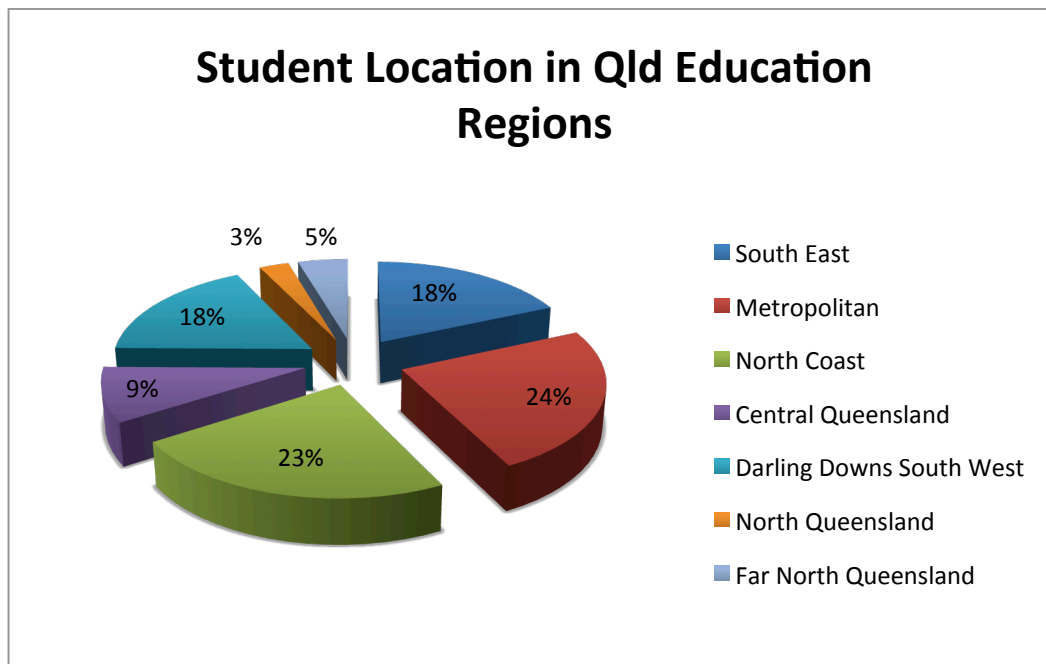


Figure 9. Full Time NGDE Students in Qld Education Regions

Figure 10 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of the locations of full time NGDE students in Tasmania, with respect to the state's educational regions.

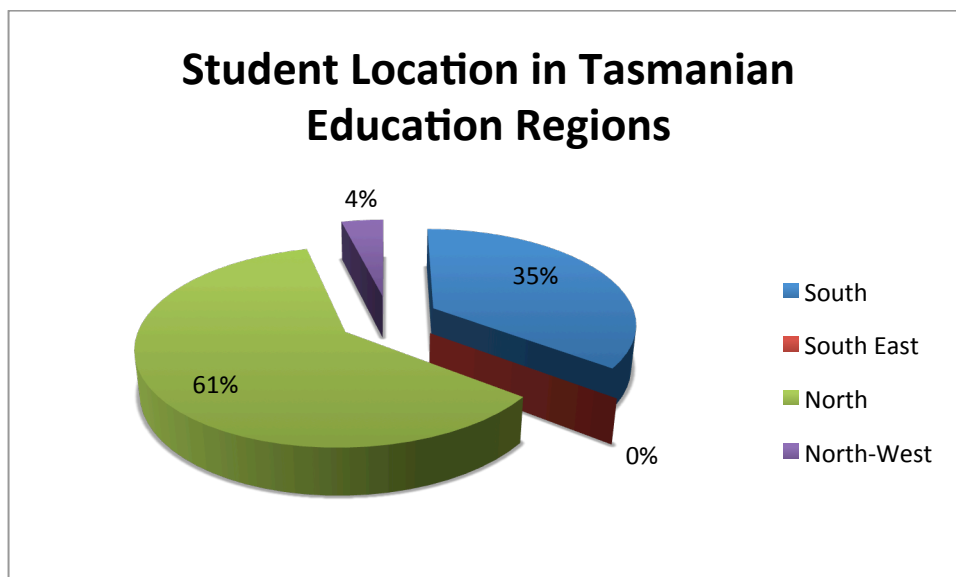


Figure 10. Full Time NGDE Students in Tasmanian Education Regions

Figure 11 demonstrates the percentage breakdown of the locations of full time NGDE students in Western Australia, with respect to the state's educational regions.

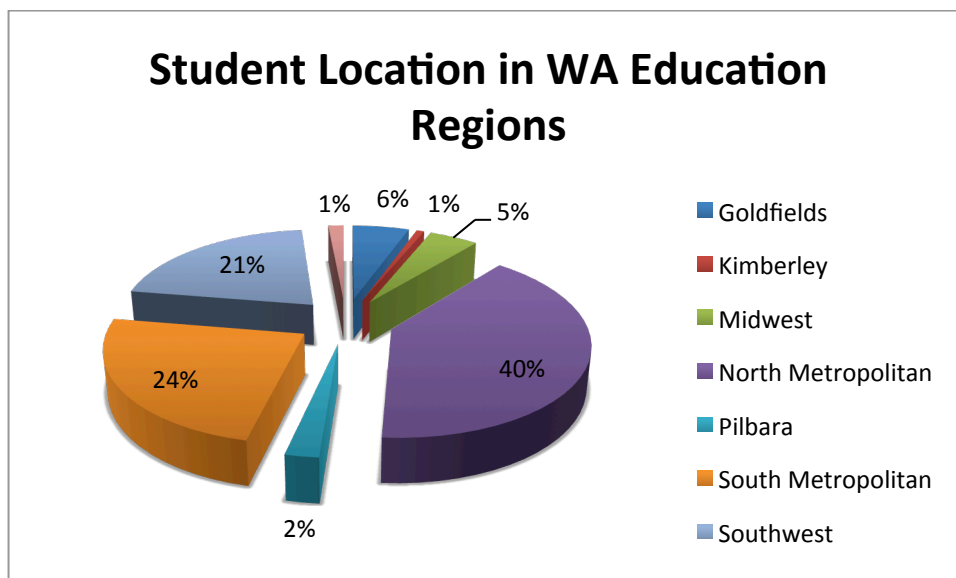


Figure 11. Full Time NGDE Students in WA Education Regions

Finding 10. NGDE student location - By state education regions

NGDE students reside in most state educational regions across the four Australian states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

4.1.5 Indigenous NGDE students

More than half of schools providing NGDE reported having indigenous students. Indigenous NGDE students are enrolled in schools in each of the four states of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. The average indigenous population of these schools' cohorts is 2.7%. One small school of 50 students had 16% indigenous students, which was well above the indigenous student percentage of the larger NGDE providers. This figure was not included in the calculation of 2.7% indigenous students in NGDE. The figure of 2.7% indigenous students is consistent with Gonski's (2011) findings, which indicate that independent schools currently have an indigenous student population of 3%.

NGDES 10 highlighted that indigenous NGDE students are not entitled to the same Commonwealth funding benefits as indigenous on-campus day school students. Indigenous NGDE students are not eligible for Indigenous Supplementary Assistance. The *Schools Assistance Act 2008* Part 4, Division 9, sections 65 & 66 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008a), specifically states that indigenous NGDE students are precluded from this benefit.

Finding 11. NGDE and indigenous students

NGDE caters for indigenous students. 2.7% of NGDE students are indigenous. This number of NGDE indigenous students is reflective of the number of indigenous students in the independent schooling sector.

Finding 12. Indigenous NGDE students are denied an indigenous educational funding benefit

Indigenous NGDE students are not eligible for the Indigenous Supplementary Assistance benefit, whereas indigenous day school students are eligible for this educational benefit.

4.1.6 NGDE and students with special educational needs

Schools reported that their provision of NGDE carries an inherent flexibility, which allows them to cater for students with many diverse special educational needs, such needs which may not fit with, nor be met, in an ordinary school setting. NGDE presents opportunities for such students.

This flexibility in the educational programs of NGDE schools includes the amount of time students spend in academic study, as well as diversity of times spent in study. Respondent schools reported that NGDE enables a student to learn at his or her own learning rate. This flexibility benefits students who have special educational needs. Some examples of the diversity of special educational needs, which are met by NGDE, are listed below, including: (1) academically gifted students, (2) academically challenged students, (3) students with elite extracurricular talents, (4) students with physical disabilities, (5) students with psychological or well-being problems and (6) students who are disengaged from schooling.

4.1.6.1.1 Academically gifted students

A mother of a gifted student highlighted the needs of academically talented students to progress their learning experiences at a rate which allows them to learn at their own pace and to deal with content suited to a gifted learner. She stated that distance education allowed her child to “progress through the grades at her own pace and can concentrate on her academics” (NGDES 1).

4.1.6.1.2 Academically challenged students

Another mother described how her Year 2 daughter, who had been “left behind” in reading, had improved her literacy:

“She is doing well, ... Her teacher and I have been able to come up with a learning schedule for her that has enabled her to almost catch up to her grade level in reading. She has no problems with distractions, as she knows she must complete her work before she is done for the day - whether it takes her 3 or 5 hours. She is a happy, confident child who enjoys her schooling and is thriving” (NGDES 1)

Thus, NGDE enables gifted and talented students to learn at a faster rate and progress in their learning to levels appropriate to their abilities, whilst students with learning difficulties are enabled to learn at a rate suitable to their needs and abilities.

4.1.6.1.3 Students with elite extracurricular talents

In similar vein, students with specified extra curricular talents and established career paths are able to access NGDE to facilitate their normal education whilst pursuing personal goals and careers at an elite level, in fields such as sports or the arts or whilst engaging in vocational

pathways such as VET courses etc. Respondent schools cited examples of their students with elite extracurricular talents. These included students who are national and internationally recognised musicians, media celebrities, as well as rising sports performers.

One mother, whose daughter is a talented tennis player, expressed her gratitude to her daughter's school (NGDES 3) for the academic assistance the school has provided.

“Sarah has won the 16 years and under Australian Hard-court Championships a couple of weeks ago. This earned her a place to compete in the Australian Open Junior against the best 18 years and under from around the world. She is very excited. Thank you again for all the help you have given us.” (NGDES 3)

4.1.6.1.4 Students with physical disabilities

Schools indicated that they were able to provide flexible educational opportunities for students with physical disabilities. One teacher from NGDES 10 provided the following report as an example as to how NGDE provided assistance to students with physical disabilities.

“Alex has a chronic heart condition and low muscle tone. He had difficulty in the school setting due to fatigue and absences due to operations and illness. Alex has thrived in the home setting and has been able to access funding through the school to purchase the manipulative tools he requires, exercise equipment and supplementary activity-based learning programs to complement the school's curriculum. Alex is reading confidently at his year level and learning gaps in Maths and English have been addressed.” (NGDES 10)

NGDES 10 provided a list of students with disabilities enrolled in their school; some who were funded and some who were not funded.

“Please find outlined below, a list of Funded / Not Funded students that are currently enrolled at (NGDES 10), who have learning disabilities.

Funded - (State Independent Schools Inclusive Education Supplementary Grant)

Total 17 students

- ASD (Autism/Aspergers) 6
- Cancer 2
- Cerebral Palsy 1
- Diabetes 2
- Dyspraxia 1
- Ehlers Danlos Syndrome 1
- FAS (Foetal Alcohol Syndrome) 1
- Hearing Impaired 1
- Heart - Medical 1
- Tourette Syndrome 1

Non-funded

Total 41 Students*

- ASD 11
- Bleeding Disorder 2
- Brain Damage 1 (Family funded by a private company)
- CAPD 3

- Cystic Fibrosis 1
- Downs / Autism 1
- Dyslexia 13
- Dyspraxia 1
- Epilepsy 1
- Hearing Impaired 1
- Intellectual Disability 4
- Severe Anxiety 2

The non-funded students either do not have the required documentation or have had funding applications denied. We are not able to apply for funding for some disabilities - Dyslexia, Dyspraxia (since 2010) and CAPD.” (NGDES 10)

4.1.6.1.5 Students with psychological / well-being problems

NGDE is also able to provide assistance to students who have psychological problems. A teacher from NGDES 10 provided the following examples of how students with psychological problems may be assisted by NGDE.

“James is an 11 year old boy with Asperger’s syndrome, dyspraxia, ADHD and juvenile arthritis. James was bullied at school to the point where psychological help was sought. After three months working in the home environment on the school curriculum his mother said, 'I have my boy back again.' James was keen to learn and was no longer suffering anxiety. He is working towards catching up to his year level.” (NGDES 10)

“Lyn (*student’s mother*) is very happy to be able to school Anthony at home as she is able to deal with any issues that arise from his troubled past immediately. She feels that if he were at school, many issues would not be identified and therefore not dealt with.” (NGDES 10)

A mother, whose, highly gifted Year 3 daughter had been subject to “too many incidents (*of verbal and physical abuse*) to list” explained that professional psychologists had advised her to remove her daughter from the “toxic environment” in her local school. She found NGDE to provide an appropriate solution for her troubled daughter.

“What a wonderful gift this program is for our family and many others. When you are advised by professional psychologists to get your child out of a toxic environment being day school what other choice are we left with?” (NGDES 1)

4.1.6.1.6 Disengaged students

NGDE is well equipped to assist students who have not succeeded at traditional schooling. There are many reasons why students find themselves in this position. NGDE provides the environment and the tools to reengage students who have become academically disengaged. NGDE’s focus on (1) meeting the educational needs of individual students, (2) the active involvement of parents and its typical (3) implementation of information communication technologies (ICT) has demonstrated a trend whereby students can rekindle a love of learning. A teacher at NGDES 10 provided this example to illustrate how NGDE allows for the reengagement of academically disengaged students.

“When Phillip joined the school last year he was so far behind, academically with his studies. After a year at NGDE 10, his reading improved dramatically and he started to gain more and more confidence in his reading.” (NGDES 10)

NGDE can enable students who are disengaged in education, to have second chance at receiving a good education, by providing a viable opportunity for success, rather than remaining as students who “fall between the cracks” of educational achievement.

In summary, the data indicate that NGDE providers are currently catering for students with special educational needs such as:

- Gifted and talented learners;
- Travelling students:
 - Intra state;
 - Interstate;
 - Internationally;
- Elite sports participants;
- Students with disabilities;
- Students with learning difficulties;
- Students requiring remedial education
- Students requiring the delivery of specialised subjects because:
 - Their own school does not provide the subject or
 - One of their subject clashes with another on the school timetable;
- Students who suffer from illness and or trauma;
- Students who study the HSC over a longer-than-normal period;
- Former home schoolers;
- Students who have been victimised for their religious beliefs;
- Students who have been psychologically traumatised at schools;
- Students who have become disengaged in regular education as a result of:
 - Bullying in schools
 - Poor academics in schools
 - Lack of general motivation in schools
 - Residing in remote locations
- Isolated students

4.1.6.1.7 Providing extra assistance to students with special needs

It is implicit that, in order for a NGDE school to meet the special educational needs of such a diverse group of school students, professional teachers are a necessary part of this educational process. NGDES 10 described their provision for special needs students in this way:

“We have two special needs teachers who work closely with our families who have children with special needs. Many have modified Individual Learning Programs designed by these teachers. We also try to do home visits with these families where possible, to assist in assessment of the best educational program for the students.” (NGDES 10)

One school described their commitment to provide educational solutions for their students with special needs, in the following way: “providing equitable access to teaching and learning for students who are isolated by distance or disadvantaged by an existing physical or behaviour condition.” (NGDES 1).

Another stated that it was important to creatively utilise their curriculum to meet the flexible needs of their students,

“modified curriculum material is available in a modularized form for any student who has additional needs. ... We endeavour to ensure that the curriculum fits the students rather than the students fitting the curriculum.” (NGDES 11).

Thus, NGDE is able to provide special educational provisions for students with special educational needs.

Finding 13. NGDE and students with special needs

NGDE provides students who have special educational needs, with the flexibility and the opportunities that allow their education to be tailored to meet their personalised requirements. NGDE can assist special needs students including: (1) academically gifted students, (2) academically challenged students, (3) students with elite extracurricular talents, (4) students with physical disabilities, (5) students with psychological or well-being problems and (6) students who are disengaged from schooling.

4.1.7 NGDE students by parent choice - Reasons for choosing NGDE

Schools reported anecdotally, reasons for parents choosing NGDE. Such reasons included dissatisfaction with conditions that their children had experienced in their local schools. Such experiences included physical and psychological bullying and examples of classroom environments, which were not conducive to learning. There were also examples of students, both academically gifted and academically challenged, who were not being assisted academically in their schooling experience. Schools also reported that parents wanted a Christian expression of distance education.

NGDES 10 surveyed its parent body, requesting that they give their reasons for choosing NGDE for their children. 136 families responded to this request. Table 2 demonstrates the reasons these parents gave for choosing NGDE, in categories which were constructed by the staff at NGDES 10.

REASON	Number of Families	%
1. Parents specifically wanted a Christian NGDE program	52	38%
2. Children with learning difficulties	34	25%
3. Transferred from home schooling	29	21%
4. Parents wanted direct involvement in child's education	3	2%
5. Dissatisfied with local schooling	18	13%
TOTAL	136	100%

Table 2. Reasons for choosing NGDE (from One School - NGDES 10)

Figure 12 demonstrates, graphically, the percentage breakdown of these reasons parents gave for choosing NGDE.

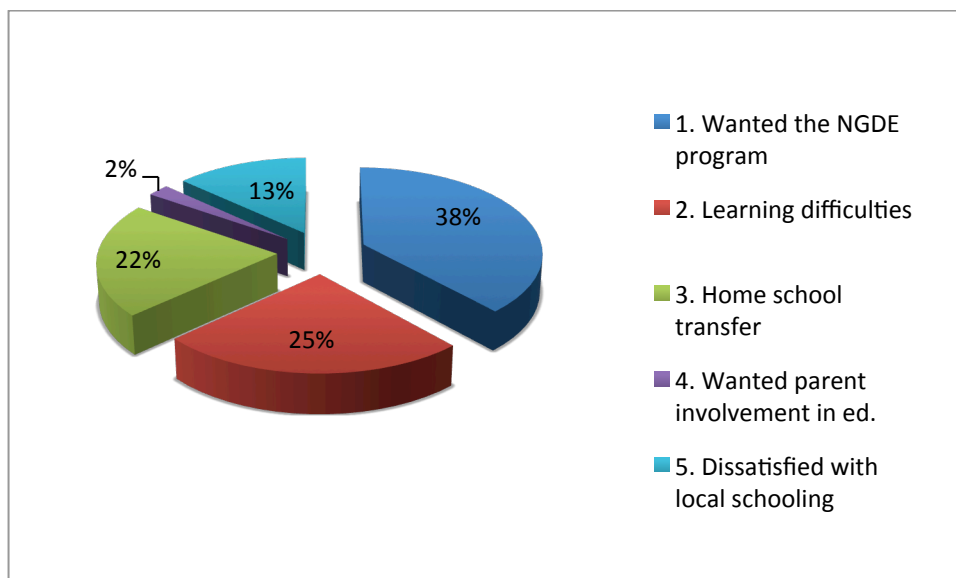


Figure 12. Reasons for Choosing NGDE by % (from One School - NGDES 10)

Whilst some of the categories (i.e. categories 1, 3 and 5) could have been developed to deliver greater clarity in describing the reasons why parents chose NGDE, it is evident that these parents made their choice largely based on pedagogical reasons. The researchers who conducted this survey at the school, made anecdotal references to the finer details for the reasons the parents in this survey chose NGDE. Some of this detail included:

“Families who have been previously doing home education (*home schooling*) are attracted to the structure of our course, where the whole course is planned and there are no educational gaps. They also like the teacher input and the lack of parental lesson planning and programming.

We also have a ministry to families with students who have special needs. 15% of our enrolments are students with special needs who according to parents, are not catered for adequately in the traditional classroom.

There are also families who are looking for a strong Biblical worldview who feel that other Christian schools are not providing the level of Christian teaching that they are looking for. They also mention that even though they were in a Christian school previously, the majority of the students were not Christian. They were concerned how the other students were not having a positive influence on their own children.

We also have an increasing number of enrolments of students aged 13-15 who have become disengaged in their previous schools. There are a number of reasons, including 1. Bullying by staff and 2. other students, 3. poor academic performance, and 4. lack of general motivation. Parents of these students are looking for 5. a few more years of education prior to their child getting an apprenticeship or entering TAFE.” (NGDES 10)

This survey, although confined to one NGDE school, gives insight to some of the reasons why parents choose NGDE for their children. Other studies, such as Harding's (2011) research into the reasons why families have chosen NGDE in NSW, as mentioned in the literature review of this study, give richer and deeper descriptions as to parental motivations for their NGDE educational choice for their children, which include academic, environment, social, religious and family-based reasons.

Finding 14. Reasons why parents choose NGDE for their children

Parents choose NGDE for many reasons including: (1) academic reasons, (2) wanting an environment conducive to learning and personal safety, (3) socialisation reasons (4) physical disability issues, (5) psychological problems, (6) religious reasons and (7) family-based reasons.

The next section looks at the educational programs, which are implemented by schools that provide NGDE.

4.2 NGDE pedagogy – A description

All schools providing NGDE have their education programs approved by their respective state education authorities, in accordance with their state education acts and regulations. NGDE students engage in their school's approved education program.

NGDE students meet state compulsory attendance requirements, although the flexibility allowed by NGDE enables students to engage in their studies in locations outside of school campuses, usually at their residential home, both during and outside of traditional schooling hours.

This section looks at policies and procedures employed by schools, which are specific to NGDE and pedagogical resources and methodologies, which facilitate the functioning of NGDE.

4.2.1 NGDE-specific policies and procedures

The delivery of distance education is markedly different to the delivery of traditional (on-campus) schooling (Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009; McFarlane, 2011). Benson and Samarawickrema (2009) highlighted these differences stating that distance education must take into account distinctive processes, systems, outcomes and delivery methods. Thus, whether paper-based, web-based or a combination of both, the instructional design, curriculum format and educational delivery modes implemented by these schools are distinctly tailored to the delivery of distance education. They are usually quite different to the delivery methods of traditional on-campus day schooling.

For this reason schools delivering distance education have educational policies and procedures appropriate to that pedagogical format. These policies and procedures deal with issues such as pedagogy, staff training, curriculum design, learning management, communications and administration. These policies and procedures are in addition to the educational policies characteristic of the school's on-campus schooling mode.

Respondent schools reported their development of the following distance education-specific policies as part of their registration process:

- Distance education "Statement of Service" policies,
- Enrolment policies,
- Attendance policies,
- Student induction process policies,
- Parent induction process policies,
- Student – teacher interaction policies,
- Parent – teacher interaction policies,
- Indicative study hours policies,
- Educational procedures policies,
- Various accountability requirement policies and
- Third party subject-providers policies.

One school described the development of their NGDE policies in the following manner:

“We have several policies and procedures that are specific to our Distance Education campus. These have been developed from existing day-school policies and procedures to better suit the distance education model. All current policies and procedures have been subject to the state’s registration requirements within the last 12 months.” (NGDES 11)

Finding 15. NGDE-specific school policies

NGDE providers develop policies and procedures, which cater for and are distinct to NGDE, in addition to their compliance with relevant, regular school registration regimes.

4.2.2 NGDE - Educational resources and pedagogy

All schools providing NGDE are registered in their states, by their state’s educational accreditation authority to provide NGDE. Each school’s accreditation is reviewed cyclically.

NGDE schools use many and varied pedagogical resources and methods in order to deliver their educational programs. Several schools implemented mastery learning pedagogies as a key factor of their educational program. Whilst traditional text book and paper delivery is still a prominent pedagogical feature of all respondent schools, information communication technologies (ICT) enables them to establish communications between staff and students, to efficiently manage student learning, to present variety of educational content and variety in educational delivery.

Paper-based educational resources are still vital to the delivery of distance education. These resources include the following:

- Textbooks
- Workbooks
- Unit modules
- Course and time management tools.

Each school implemented a selection from the suite of the processes and resources, listed below, in the design of their educational programs. The selection of resources was suited to the context of each individual school’s educational ethos and in compliance with their state’s registration criteria. Some schools partnered with Third Party Providers in the provision of courses for NGDE students.

The expanding field of ICT has opened a plethora of additional pedagogical methodologies, commonly implemented by NGDE. Because NGDE allows for the communication between teacher and student across both short and vast distances, ICT has become an integral part of its educational delivery. These methods include traditional methods of post and phone; however, they also include more sophisticated ICT, which makes both learning and communication more efficient for both staff and students. Schools delivering NGDE incorporate the following technologies into their educational programs.

- IT learning objects
- Vodcasts

- Podcasts
- Linked websites
- Forums – synchronous
- Forums – asynchronous
- Electronic messaging
- Wikis
- Virtual worlds
- DVD lessons
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) – various delivery technologies.

Whilst NGDE students engage with a normal educational program, compliant with their state syllabus, the method of engagement with curriculum and teachers is very different to traditional schooling. NGDE requires dedicated communication methods between students, teachers, administrators and parents, in dealing with the distance between the student and the school. One school described their implementation of ICT in this way,

“Our online modality allows students to experience real-time community with peers and teachers encouraging creativity and active and informed citizens.” (NGDES 1)

The school also emphasised how its educational program was readily articulated to the state educational syllabus and that its implementation of ICT facilitated a better tracking of the educational outcomes of its distance education students, than that of its on-campus day school students.

“Our learning program is transparent in that you can trace the syllabus outcome through the scope and sequence and teaching program to the student engagement and evidence of learning. The modality allows us to demonstrate compliance on a higher level than a day school because of the strong emphasis on individual engagement and accountability.” (NGDES 1)

4.2.2.1 NGDE – What resources NGDE schools use and what they do

Respondent schools indicated that they used a wide variety of pedagogical activities in their educational delivery. These included paper-based, digital and online resources. Below is a list of educational materials used in the delivery of NGDE with respect to the eight key learning areas.

It is important to note that not all schools implement all of the methodologies listed below. The schools implement the methodologies, which allow them to deliver their educational programs to the satisfaction of the school and the state educational authority. The following lists represent the methodologies and resources cited by all respondent schools in the implementation of their educational programs.

English

- Interaction with teachers
- English workshops
- Teacher-generated group activities
- Teacher-generated individual activities

- Prescribed English text books (literacy, language, grammar, speech, spelling)
- Prescribed English workbooks (literacy, language, writing, grammar, speech, spelling)
- Prescribed literature texts
- Comprehension exercises
- Prescribed media presentations
- Creating multimedia presentations
- DVDs
- CDs
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- On-line assignments
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- On-line reading library
- School-generated vodcasts
- Externally generated vodcasts
- Interactive school resources (e.g. Skwirk)
- Course-recommended web sites
- Online linguistic tools (dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesaurus etc.)
- Wikipedia
- Websites
- Offline activities

Mathematics

- Interaction with teachers
- Mathematics workshops
- School generated activities
- Prescribed Maths texts
- Prescribed Maths workbooks
- DVDs
- CDs
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- School generated activities
- Interactive supplementary learning tools e.g. Mathletics, Math Mentals, Skwirk
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- School-generated vodcasts
- Externally generated vodcasts
- Externally generated podcasts
- Course-recommended web sites
- Wikipedia
- Offline activities

Science

- Interaction with teachers
- School generated activities
- Lab projects – face-to-face, online or multimedia.
- Prescribed Science texts
- Prescribed Science workbooks
- Video workshops
- Creating multimedia presentations
- DVDs
- CDs
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- School generated activities
- On-line science curriculum
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- School-generated vodcasts
- Externally generated vodcasts
- Externally generated podcasts
- On-line encyclopedias
- Wikipedia
- Course-recommended web sites
- Websites
- Offline activities

Humanity and Social Sciences

- Interaction with teachers
- School generated activities
- Prescribed History, Geography, SOSE texts
- Prescribed History, Geography, SOSE workbooks
- Creating multimedia presentations
- DVDs
- CDs
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- On-line projects
- School generated videos on-line
- Vodcasts
- Podcasts
- On-line encyclopedias, atlases
- Wikipedia
- Course-recommended web sites
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- Offline activities

The Arts

- Interaction with teachers
- School generated individual activities (e.g. solo tutoring)
- School generated group activities (e.g. choirs, drama groups, instrumental ensembles)
- Music lessons.
- Prescribed texts
- Prescribed workbooks
- Creating multimedia presentations
- DVDs
- CDs
- Certificate 2 in music is offered on-line
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- Online portfolios
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- Vodcasts
- Podcasts
- Websites
- Hard copy portfolios
- Offline activities

Languages

- Interaction with teachers
- Specialist tutors e.g. AUSLAN
- Workshops
- School generated activities
- Prescribed texts
- Prescribed workbooks
- DVDs
- CD
- On-line courses (e.g. Rosetta Stone)
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- Externally generated vodcasts
- Externally generated podcasts
- Course-recommended web sites
- Offline activities

Health and PE

- Interaction with teachers
- Workshops
- Athletics Days

- Fitness reports
- School generated activities
- Prescribed texts
- Prescribed workbooks
- DVDs
- CDs
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- Online fitness courses
- School generated videos on-line
- School-generated vodcasts
- Externally generated vodcasts
- Course-recommended web sites
- Offline activities

Information and Communication, Technology and Design

- Interaction with teachers
- School generated activities
- Various modular unit-based curriculum
 - International Computer Drivers' License
 - Design and Technology units
 - On-line materials
 - Learning the use of programs e.g. Microsoft suite
 - Using ICT programs e.g. Microsoft suite
- Creating multimedia presentations
- DVDs
- Course web sites
- Learning Management Systems (LMS) activities
- On-line resources and learning objects (internal and external)
- School generated videos on-line
- Vodcasts
- Podcasts
- Auto CAD course
- Websites
- Offline activities

Finding 16. NGDE pedagogical modes

NGDE educational programs implement traditional paper-based resources, as well as various ICT hardware, software and web-based educational resources.

Finding 17. NGDE is bona fide education

NGDE is Bona Fide Education. NGDE educational programs engage students in the eight key learning areas in Australian schooling. Because NGDE is compliant with state syllabus and registration requirements, NGDE students achieve the same educational goals, as do students in traditional, on-campus, classroom schooling.

4.3 Teachers in NGDE

All teachers in NGDE schools are registered with their state's professional teaching bodies, which is a requirement of their school's state registration/accreditation criteria. NGDE teachers are needed to teach their students their school's educational program, in accord with their state's required syllabus, just as students in on-campus day schooling need teachers to facilitate their learning. However, NGDE teachers use very different methods in order to achieve the same goals as their on-campus day school colleagues.

All NGDE schools indicated the need for better funding so that they could engage more teachers. Schools stated that there was a need to have a similar number of teachers in the distance education departments, as they had in their on-campus day school departments.

Schools vary in the way they direct their teaching staff to teaching tasks. Some have directed their NGDE teaching staff to be focused mostly toward distance education. Other schools have sought to divide the teaching roles between distance education and on-campus classes. From the data, it appears that the larger NGDE schools with larger numbers of students tend to have dedicated NGDE teachers, whilst the smaller schools tend toward dividing their staffs' teaching focus between distance education and on-campus classes.

One school argued the case that the use of ICT does not eliminate the need for teachers; rather it creates the need for teachers with special skills.

“Contrary to popular perception on-line learning does not negate the need for a teacher. In fact, an essential ingredient is an effective teacher in a small group or class size. Our teachers interact with each and every student personally. Each enrolled student has equal opportunity for teacher interaction and time, meaning our teachers find the learning process goes beyond the bounds of a traditional class allocation. The on-line classroom does not have the direct benefit of access to all students at once and therefore communication is dynamic and individual.” (NGDES 11)

It is apparent that NGDE schools see the need for teachers to give effect to their educational programs. Should these schools be allocated appropriate funding for distance education, and thus have staffing numbers comparable to on-campus schooling.

Finding 18. NGDE students are deprived of appropriate numbers of teachers

NGDE students need more teachers. No NGDE school has the same level of funding for its NGDE students, as it does for its on-campus students. Thus, staffing for their NGDE students is minimal. Commonwealth underfunding of NGDE students is reflected in the fewer number of teachers allocated to NGDE. All schools stated that their NGDE departments needed to be staffed to similar levels, as their on-campus day school departments.

4.3.1 Teacher – student communication methods

Contact between teachers and their students is critical to the success of NGDE. Teachers communicate with their students both synchronously and asynchronously. Teacher/student contact may be either scheduled or impromptu, as needs arise. The nature of such contact is normally pedagogically related.

Schools providing NGDE cited many varying methods of teacher-to-student and student to teacher communication. The following is a general list of communication methods utilised in NGDE schools:

- Phone tutoring
- Email communications
- Teaching chat rooms
- On-line learning management system
- Skype meetings
- Forum posts
- On-line tutorial groups
- On-line individualised teaching
- Practical applications
- Teacher visits to the student's home
- Parent-mentor visits to the student's home
- Fax
- Blog
- On-line interactive white board
- On-campus individualised teaching
- On-campus activities
- On-campus tutorial groups
- Video conferencing
- Concerts
- Awards presentation nights
- Annual events e.g. field trips and camps
- Excursions
- Workshops
- Group activity days
- Newsletters
- Residential programs
- Student Councils
- Student e-Magazine
- Non-NGDE school contact teacher for part time NGDE students

4.3.2 Teacher – student contact activities

Respondent schools cited the following contact activities between teachers and their students in the implementation of their educational programs. The processes below indicate how the teacher

interacts with the student when the student commences NGDE and later, when the student is operating comfortably in NGDE.

- Interview in person or by phone
- Paper and on-line diagnostic testing
- Student induction into NGDE processes
- Direct instruction
- Review of student work
- Feedback to students
- Score tests
- On-line daily contact
- Phone contact
- Teacher-initiated contact with student
- Student-initiated contact with teacher
- Parent-initiated contact with teacher
- Teachers track student progress
- Teacher supports student
- Teacher available during and or beyond classroom hours
- Face to face on attendance days
- Home visit
- Student visit to campus
- Newsletter, paper or online
- Skype meetings
- Web-based interactive white boards
- LMS processes
- Instant messaging programs
- Online forums
- Faxes
- Online chat

Each of these communication activities and methods enables the school to establish relationship and rapport between teacher and student and between the school and the family. Modern ICT enables human contact to reach beyond the “tyranny of distance”. One school had located its teachers in key regions around its home state, near clusters of students, in order to provide better connectivity between staff and students.

Because of the many varied contact activities and methods, NGDE students are able to relate well to their teachers. Below are some examples of gratitude from some senior students, to their teachers.

“Hi Mr. (teacher name),
I just wanted to say thank you for everything you have done for me this year. I have really enjoyed (subject) and have even used it as a uni preference. Thank you so much!!!!!!”

“Hi Mr. (teacher name),

Just wanted to thank you for all your help over the last two years with this online course. Sam and I are both so grateful and feel confident after our HSC examination. Thanks again.” (NGDES 2)

One school (NGDES 2) mentioned that the provision of online pedagogy is the most labour intensive part of their teachers’ responsibilities, as it requires the development of educational materials, ensuring that they are inclusive of all anticipated instructions. This was juxtaposed with the advantage that classroom teachers have of being physically with students and seeing their different reactions and working from visible cues.

The above descriptions of NGDE education programs indicate a broad diversity in the use of educational resources and methodologies. The creation, development and delivery of such education programs is labour intensive, requiring professional curriculum developers and teachers. It is clear that NGDE requires teachers for the same reason, as does traditional classroom education, that is, the human delivery of education. However, it is also to be noted that NGDE educational delivery, requires different means of preparation and delivery. All schools stated that they have a chronic need for more teaching staff in order to appropriately communicate with their students.

Finding 19. NGDE is labour intensive, requiring the same number of teachers as there are in day schooling

Teaching in NGDE is labour intensive, as there are many varied ways in which NGDE teachers must communicate and interact with their students and their work. Each of these communication methods enables the schools to establish relationship and rapport between the teacher and the student and between the school and the family. Modern ICT enables human contact to reach beyond the “tyranny of distance” and the challenges of separation between student and teacher.

4.3.2.1 NGDE teachers must develop and use new skills

In addition to traditional classroom teaching skills, respondent schools indicated that their teachers had to have skills not ordinarily required of traditional teachers. They must use different resources and teaching methods and must manage their classes and courses in ways characteristic of NGDE, which are distinct from traditional classroom teaching.

NGDE teachers are required to develop communication skills with students they cannot see face-to-face. They communicate electronically by phone or by web-based means, with children who do not know them well. Teachers have to use effective listening and questioning skills, as indeed, does the child. They have to ascertain if the child understands their instruction, usually without visible cues.

Similarly, many NGDE teachers are required to acquire and develop DE-specific ICT skills, beyond that of a classroom teacher. Several schools indicated that this included requiring their teachers to not only develop specific communication skills relative to ICT, but their teachers had learned to create digital curriculum and resources.

Traditional teacher training courses do not prepare teachers for these roles, which are specific to teaching in distance education. Schools stated that it was incumbent upon them to provide in-

house, on-the-job training in these special skills. NGDE schools provide specific distance education teacher training and professional development at their own expense.

Finding 20. NGDE teachers require higher-level communication training and additional skills, beyond that of traditional teacher training.

NGDE teachers have to master higher-level communication strategies and many ICT skills, in addition to their regular teaching skills, in order to communicate effectively with their students, at distance. Because most teacher training courses do not provide this training, NGDE schools provide this extra professional development, internally.

4.3.3 Teachers relating to students

All respondent schools have different ways for their teachers to categorise and deal with their students. These categorisations of students enable different schools to create systems and functions, which facilitate their delivery of education. NGDE teachers relate to students in the following ways:

- By department (primary or secondary)
- By subject (especially for high school students, however, it may also be applicable to primary school students)
- By year level
- By geographical region
- By family.

Some NGDE schools have divided their staff into primary and secondary departments in order to allow primary teachers to relate to their students as generalist all-round teachers as in on-campus education and for secondary teachers to operate as subject specialists. Subject specialisation is as critical to NGDE in the high school and senior school years as it is for traditional on-campus schooling. NGDE schools also have their teachers relate to their students by year level. Some schools use teams of teachers to relate to their students according to their regional location. Finally, NGDE teachers may also relate to their students by families. This is usually done for the purpose of general communications, activity days and social outings etc.

NGDES 3 indicated that its staff deals with students and their families by department level when it comes to specific academic help, thus dividing staff and students into primary and secondary departments and often then it allocates specific subject issues to subject specialists. However, for general contact and pastoral care, it deals with families and does so in geographical regions, wherever possible.

Finding 21. NGDE teachers relate to students in different contexts

NGDE teachers and administrative staff categorise NGDE students in different ways such as by department, subject, year level, geographical region and family. Identifying students in these ways assists the facilitation of the school's academic program and as well as the efficient administrative management of students and families.

4.3.4 Teaching disengaged learners and special needs students

NGDE teachers provide a unique educational service for students who have disengaged from regular school-based learning and for students with special learning needs. These students require specific educational intervention both in the initial diagnosis of their learning level and their capacity for learning, as well as during their ongoing educational experience in NGDE. Such students have to regain the desire and confidence to recommence school-based learning.

At the commencement of their enrolment in NGDE, disengaged learners and special needs students require careful and often specialised academic diagnosis. During the course of their educational experience these students require focused teacher supervision and monitoring. Further, teachers of these students must also instruct and direct the students' parent supervisor in specific pedagogical methodologies and motivational strategies. Thus, when disengaged learners and special needs students enroll in NGDE, teachers find that the students' need of professional educational care is even greater than that of their ordinary students. Such students make greater demands on the resources of the school.

The survey data for this project demonstrated that some NGDE schools attract high numbers of students who have disengaged from general school-based learning or who have special educational needs. Thus NGDE teachers make a special contribution to education in Australia, in that they provide a second chance for students who have been unsuccessful or have "fallen between the cracks" in traditional forms of educational provision. In this sense, NGDE teachers provide remediation and assistance for "at-risk" students. This aspect of NGDE again brings into focus how important the role of the teacher is in working with NGDE students and, by implication, the importance of establishing appropriate staff/student ratios in NGDE.

NGDE Schools cited the following provisions essential to the teaching of students who have become disengaged learners or who have special learning needs:

- Special needs teachers
- Learning support teachers
- A dedicated learning enrichment department
- Offer flexible individualised tailored programs
- Offer differentiated learning programs
- Home visits
- Adjusted work times to suit students
- Negotiated deadlines between teachers and students
- Paraprofessional referrals (Speech pathologists, educational psychologists etc.)
- Parent consultation
- Parent visits school.

One school described their special provisions for these students in the following way:

"We have two special needs teachers who work closely with our families who have children with special needs. Many have a modified Individual Learning Program designed by these teachers." (NGDES 10)

Finding 22. NGDE teachers can re-engage disengaged students and assist students with special needs

NGDE teachers work to provide educational opportunities for disengaged learners and special needs students. The inherent flexibility of NGDE provides an educational environment, which allows for disengaged learners to reengage with their education and which allows students with special educational needs to have an individualised education program, tailored to cater for their special needs.

4.3.5 Teaching provisions for students with physical disabilities

NGDE teachers also provide unique educational opportunities for students with physical disabilities. Such students may be unable to attend on-campus schooling for a variety of health reasons. NGDE teachers assist families to manage the education of students whilst accommodating their physical disabilities.

As with the previous section which deals with special learning needs, students with physical disabilities often require specific educational assistance at the commencement and throughout the duration of their educational experience. Such disabilities may include visual, hearing and speech impairment as well as more apparent physical disabilities. The NGDE school may be required to provide specialist ICT, ergonomic or other facilities to enable the student to have an enjoyable and successful learning experience. NGDE schools cited the following educational services provided by their teachers, which are important to their delivery of education for students with physical disabilities.

- Providing a dedicated learning enrichment department
- Individualised education delivery
- Consultation re. the student's office setup at home
- Specialised teachers who develop Education Adjustment Programs for students with identified special physical needs
- Sight impaired students are provided with a larger screen laptop
- Collaboration plan with parents to support students with physical disabilities e.g. on activity days
- Curriculum is modified to cater for specific needs
- Differentiated learning.

NGDE teachers seek to take advantage of NGDE's flexible pedagogies in order to tailor educational programs to meet the needs of their students with physical disabilities.

Teachers from different schools described their operations in the following manner:

“We adapt our program to individual needs” (NGDES 9)

“All curriculum is modifiable to cater for any specific needs that may be apparent due to physical disability. We endeavour to ensure that the curriculum fits the students rather than the students fit the curriculum” (NGDES 11)

Finding 23. NGDE teachers and students with physical disabilities

NGDE teachers provide for the needs of students with physical disabilities. NGDE's inherent flexibility provides an educational environment, which allows for students with physical disabilities to have an individualised education program, tailored to cater for their special needs.

4.3.6 Home visits

Most NGDE schools conducted home visits to their students throughout the year, where possible. In particular some schools expressed the importance of at least having a home visit at the commencement of distance education, to better assess the student and to assist the family in creating a learning environment, conducive to effective pedagogy.

One school was unable to conduct any home visits and still maintain its on-campus and its distance education program. This was because it could not afford to hire staff to cover all of the relevant duties. Others conducted visits wherever possible, another school conducted visits as requested by the students' parents. Two schools sought to visit the homes once per year, whilst one school, with very few NGDE students, was able to visit homes each term.

All NGDE schools indicated that visiting the homes of students was restricted to a minimal service, due to the lack of staff available to be released for such practices. It was explained that if staff are released for travel to do home visits, there was always a teaching shortfall to be compensated for, by other staff, who remained at the school and who had to deal with the increased workload. Thus, despite the response from all schools that they wanted to increase this service to students, it is currently impossible to action, due to the lack of available staff. NGDES 10 described its inability to conduct as many home visits as it would have liked, due to the underfunding and resulting high staff / student ratio, in the following way:

"We believe that home visits are a highly beneficial aspect of our program, however, due to the vast distances involved and limited resources we have been only averaging around 60-70% of home visits each year. With more funding we would like to visit nearly all our families at least once per year. ... We have found that home visits are often the highlight of the year for our families." (NGDES 10)

Another school (NGDES 1) stated that home visits were "limited by request due to lack of funding".

Finding 24. Home visits

Home visits are few and infrequent for NGDE schools. Whilst all NGDE schools mentioned the value of home visits and many carried out some home visits, all schools indicated that they were not happy with their inability to make home visits, as and when they deemed visits to be appropriate. Schools wanted to be resourced for a more comprehensive visitation program.

4.4 Assessment of students

The schools reported many varying methods for assessing the educational outcomes of their students. These included:

- On-line tracking allowing continuous teacher review
- Teacher contact
- Workshop contact
- Self Assessment
- Teacher marking with feedback
- Daily monitoring by parent supervisor
- Diagnostic tests
- Short written quizzes
- Compositions, essays assessed
- Projects evaluated
- Oral tests
- Oral responses to problems
- Formative tests
- Unit summative tests
- 40 – 60 assessment tests annually
- NAPLAN tests
- National competitions
- SAT I
- All subjects are mapped to the standards of QSA
- QSA Essential Learnings “Ways of Working and Learning and Assessment Focus”
- Essential Learnings – working towards National Standards (Prep to year 9)
- Registered work programs through QSA for authority subjects
- Assessment tasks: e.g. written work such as paragraphs, compositions, essays.
- Oral reports
- Science experiments reports
- Interviews
- Presentations
- Home tutor records
- Parental evaluations
- Mastery learning methodology criteria referenced-report
- Student Convention – State & national competitions
- Work samples
- Practical components
- Weekly assignments
- State assessment
- On-line quizzes
- Web quests
- Internal school awards including
 - Life skills awards

- Scripture memorization awards
- Academic excellence awards
- Encouragement awards
- Learning to Read Certificate
- Literature awards.

Schools indicated that their NGDE students were able to sit for the NAPLAN tests, however, there was very low uptake on that opportunity for various reasons, including:

- students were unwilling to attend a local school to take the test.
- the unwillingness of testing authorities to allow parents to be the test invigilator and
- lack of administrative staff available to compile statistics for NGDE students,

Most schools did not submit their NGDE students' NAPLAN results, for inclusion in this study. NAPLAN results do not differentiate between a school's day school students and distance education students. Thus the schools that did submit NAPLAN results included both day school and distance education student results together. These results were not relevant to this study because distance education results were polluted with day school students' results.

4.4.1 Reporting

Schools indicated varying methods of reporting student achievement and educational outcomes. These included:

- Term reports
- On-line tracking allowing continuous parental review
- Semester reports K to 10
- Term summaries 7 to 10
- Annual report state/commonwealth compliant
- Website for achievements and sporting results
- On-line grade book
- Written reports following a home visit
- Student self assessment
- A to E reporting twice per year
- Informal ongoing feedback to students and parents.

Finding 25. Assessment and reporting

NGDE students are assessed using standard assessment and reporting methods, developed by teachers and suited to the distance education mode.

4.5 Student outcomes

NGDE students in various states pursue educational outcomes in accordance with their state's syllabus requirements and curriculum frameworks, across all learning areas. Schools stated that evidence which demonstrates that their NGDE students achieve these syllabus outcomes include:

- School's compliance with state syllabus outcomes
- School's compliance with national requirements
- Student assessment in accordance with state curriculum frameworks
- Annotations
- Observations
- Formative tests
- Summative tests
- Assignments
- Work samples are submitted
- Reports
- Presentations
- Oral assessments
- Extended pieces of work
- ICAS (voluntary)
- Certificates for completion of all year levels
- Special recognition for the completion of Years 10 & 12.

4.6 Student retention

Student retention varied among schools. All schools saw a steady maintenance of full time student numbers. However, most of the larger schools reported between a 15% - 27% turnover per year. Thus, whilst student numbers hold steadily or trend to growth, the turnover of students demonstrates an interesting phenomenon of minority turnover, which bears some exploration.

Principals (NGDES 3 & 10) indicated that parents choose NGDE for many various reasons. Some parents see NGDE as a complete educational offering for their children, and are committed to be engaged in NGDE for the duration of the child's formal schooling. Other parents view NGDE as meeting a temporary need, such as remediating academic or health problems or allowing the student to maintain a good education whilst the family is temporarily relocated or in the process of travelling e.g. those in the military. These parents approach NGDE with the expectation of returning the student to mainstream schooling at a later date. Some parents find that NGDE is not suited to their child and also return their child to mainstream schooling. This is a contributing explanation of student turnover.

4.7 Post-schooling career and study pathways

Schools were asked to describe how they supported students who were hopeful of following employment, career and tertiary pathways after graduating from NGDE.

4.7.1 Career and work education support

Toward the end of a student's time at school, good career and work education is vital. Respondent schools indicated that this is just as true of NGDE students, as it is of on-campus day school students. NGDE schools stated how they were meeting the career and work education needs of their students. These included:

- Providing a dedicated career advisor
- Engaging students in work experience
- Providing structured work place learning where appropriate
- Providing career-counseling resources on-line
- Providing on-line questionnaires identifying student proficiencies
- Career counseling available on campus
- Providing pathways to allow students to take a reduced load to complete Years 11 & 12 over a longer period than normal (NGDES 2)
- Individual support for students in years seven to ten
- Providing work education as a subject in the senior years
- Providing access to Certificate 1 and Certificate 2 courses
- Providing school-based traineeships
- Providing access to state-based Certificates of Education
- Liaising between student/employer/school/RTO and JobNet
- Staff preparation of the "Student Education and Training" (SET) plan for year 11 and 12 as required by the state government.
- Staff supports students to acquire skills to transition to work through the SET planning process.
- Providing student access to prevocational courses through TAFE and traineeships
- Provision of VET services
- Advocacy on behalf of students

NGDES 10 highlighted that low funding of NGDE resulted in their school's limited ability to appropriately service students in terms of career and work education support.

"We do have a careers advisor but are not in a position to offer work placements or work experience for our students. Work placements and work experience requires on-site visits by a supervisor which is beyond our resources at this point of time."
(NGDES 10)

Despite the disadvantages of underfunding, some schools were still able to provide NGDE students with careers servicing. NGDES 11 stated:

"Students are able to participate in work experience and structured workplace learning where appropriate. Career counseling is made available through online and day campus structures." (NGDES 11)

4.7.2 Assistance to gain tertiary entrance

Many senior NGDE students aspire to tertiary education. Again, on the topic of post-schooling study pathways, NGDE schools stated their need for more teachers who are able to give dedicated time to assisting students with exploring tertiary options and ultimately to gaining entrance into tertiary institutions. As in traditional on-campus schooling, assistance with post-schooling study pathways is vital for student transition from school to higher education. However, the uniqueness of NGDE often requires teacher advocacy for students seeking tertiary education, as these students often enter tertiary institutions by alternate or non-standard means such as presenting tertiary admissions authorities with a non-standard Year 12 certificate or its equivalent in combination with an International SAT I or an Australian STAT score. This assistance and advocacy is labour intensive and time consuming and thus requires dedicated staff attention.

NGDE schools cited the following services they provide for their students who seek admission to tertiary education institutions.

- Academic preparation of senior students for pre-tertiary entrance achievement tests such as the International SAT I or the STAT, e.g. workshops, tuition, providing specialised preparatory curriculum
- Providing access to various state-based Certificates of Education
- Providing a pre-tertiary certificate for alternative tertiary entrance
- Interviews with parents and students to determine pre-tertiary pathways
- Assisting students administratively, for pre-tertiary entrance achievement tests
- Making their school a testing centre for the International SAT
- Making their school a testing centre for their state's external exams
- Providing advice re. tertiary institutions and tertiary entrance requirements
- Teacher advocacy with tertiary entrance applications
- Liaising between the school and university to access early entry programs
- Providing prerequisite subjects necessary for entrance to specific tertiary courses
- Tertiary courses and tertiary entrance advice to students and parents
- Arranging interviews with tertiary entrance authorities
- Liaising with tertiary educational institutions on behalf of students
- Assisting students in communicating with tertiary educational institutions
- On-line support
- On-campus support.

In similar vein to the issues surrounding careers support staffing, NGDES 10 highlighted the school's problem that underfunding and the subsequent high staff/student ratio presents to the level of post-schooling study pathways assistance that the school can provide.

“At present we provide career advice and we act as advocates for our students when they seek entrance to tertiary institutions. ... we are limited in how we can assist these students.” (NGDES 10)

NGDES 11 dealt with the matter of tertiary entrance support in the following way, accessing the resources of the on campus day school.

“Students are provided subject counselling at the middle school level and ongoing support during Year 10 to assist with the selection of courses in Year 11 and 12 with a view towards tertiary enrolment. This support is made available through the online and day campus structures.” (NGDES 11)

The data provides evidence that the underfunding of NGDE also reduces the efficiency of a school’s support of its graduate students, in their pursuit of post-schooling study pathways.

Finding 26. Assistance with post-schooling study pathways

NGDE schools provide students with preparation, guidance, liaison and advocacy in their pursuit of career pathways and tertiary education entrance. Appropriate funding would enable these schools to better assist their graduates in their post-schooling study pathways.

4.7.2.1 Post-schooling study pathways

Several schools indicated, anecdotally, that they assisted their students in making their way from NGDE into post-schooling study pathways. These study pathways included entrance into university, TAFE and various colleges. Most schools did not provide statistics of their graduates’ post-schooling study pathways.

However, one school (NGDE 3) provided a statistical indication of the post-schooling study pathways of its NGDE Year 12 graduates. This was an analysis of 468 NGDE graduates of the school, from 2003 – 2011. These graduates had responded to the school’s request for information as to their post-schooling study pathways. The school stated that the number of respondents to this study was not exhaustive of all its Year 12 graduates, as not all graduates were able to be contacted or were willing to respond to the school’s survey. Table 3 presents how these 468 NGDE graduates reported their entrance into various types of tertiary courses.

Post-Schooling Study Pathway	Number of Students
Bachelor Degree	178
Diploma	76
Certificate course	154
Apprenticeship	26
Traineeship	7
Other	21

Table 3. Post-Schooling Study Pathways of One School’s 468 NGDE Graduates (NGDES 3)

Figure 13 presents these post-schooling study pathway figures for the 468 NGDE graduates from the school (NGDE 3) as a percentage breakdown.

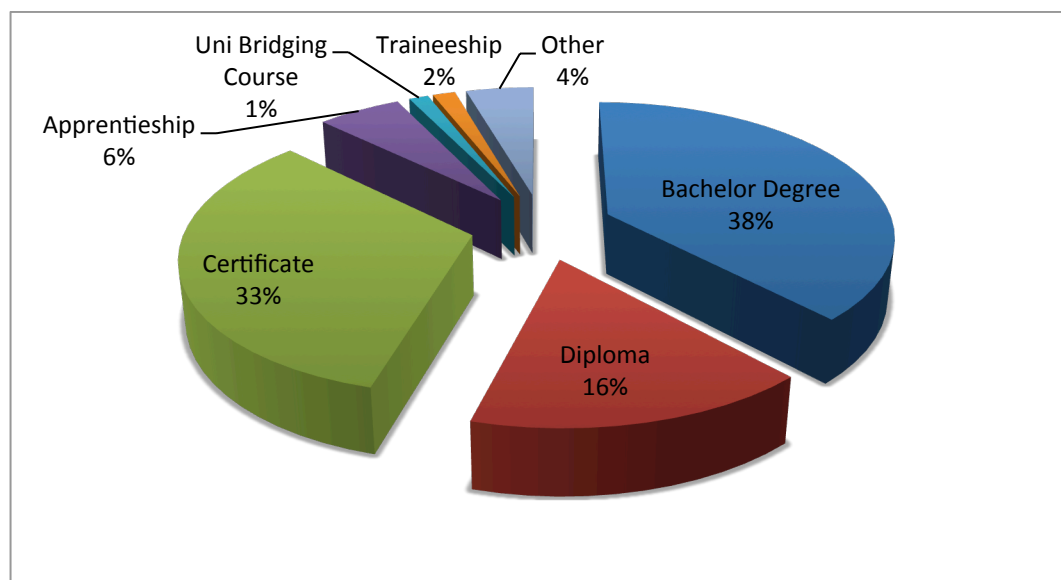


Figure 13. Percentage Breakdown of 468 Students' Post-Schooling Study Pathways (NGDES 3)

Whilst this survey is limited to the results of only one NGDE school, it does demonstrate that NGDE can prepare students for tertiary studies. It would be helpful to have a more exhaustive study of all of this school's graduates and to also have a similar study from all NGDE schools that provide schooling for senior students.

One mother wrote to her children's former school (NGDES 3) to update the school on her children's post schooling study pathways.

"Just a note to update you on our children's studies. John has accepted an offer to study Chiropractic Science at Macquarie University. Jacquie has now completed two years of her four in Exercise Science and Rehabilitation. ... Thank you again for all the help you have given us." (NGDES 3)

NGDES 6 provided similar, but limited information, about some of their recent graduates, indicating their entrance into various post-schooling study pathways, including four bachelor degrees, six diploma courses and 3 certificate courses.

Some schools (NGDES 5, 6, 7 & 8) issued their own senior studies certificates and had success with their students' tertiary entrance. These students made application for entrance into tertiary institutions as non-standard tertiary applicants. This was acceptable both to tertiary admission authorities and to various universities cited. These schools indicated that their graduates were admitted to, or were currently studying for certificate, diploma, bachelor, masters and doctoral qualifications. NGDES 9 stated that their graduate students "are regularly given entrance into apprenticeships/TAFE and university."

Finding 27. NGDE Students and admission to tertiary courses

NGDE Year 12 graduate students are able to access all levels of tertiary studies including: university, TAFE, various colleges and vocational study courses.

4.8 Parent-supervisors in NGDE

For NGDE the teaching takes place between the professional teacher and the student. However, NGDE utilises the students' parents or guardians as a parent-supervisor to monitor the student's progress. Different schools use the following titles when referring to parents such as "Supervisor" and "Home Tutor". Several schools merely use the term "parent" to describe the parent-supervisor in their official documents. NGDES 8 noted that the on-site success of NGDE depended on the attitude of the students' parents.

Where a school provided part time distance education, that is, single subjects by distance education to students enrolled in other schools, there was no need to refer to a parent in the pedagogical process. Instead, the supervisor of the student's progress in these cases is a teacher in the local school in which the student is enrolled. This teacher is formally known as a "Contact Teacher".

4.8.1 Induction processes for new parents

Because of the integral nature of parental participation in full time NGDE, schools found that training parents in the school's distance education processes was critical to including them in NGDE. Schools operated their NGDE parent induction processes in various ways such as:

- Compulsory parent training course (10 to 15 hours), with assessment and certification
- Parent training (Over 1 to 2 weeks)
 - Procedures and responsibilities
 - Philosophical basis for the education program
- Parent mentor / Regional Coordinator visit to new parents, face to face or by Skype
- Teaching staff allocated increased contact time with new parents ensuring procedural compliance
- Parent orientation workshop (3 to 5 hours)
- Parent handbook
- Interview and orientation process with a regional coordinator
- Extra instructional training if necessitated by student needs
- Home visit where possible
- Parents spend half day in a class room where possible
- Training in the use of LMS (1.5 to 3 hours)
- DVD explaining and demonstrating NGDE requirements

- Where the “Contact Teacher” facilitates learning (in part time NGDE), the parents sign off on school expectations and liaise with student set-up and continuing support
- Ongoing phone support.

NGDES 10 indicated that dedicated contact time with parents was necessary in providing quality education to the student, saying: “Our DE teaching staff also allocate increased contact time with new parents to ensure that they are following all necessary procedures.” (NGDES 10)

One mother wrote to her child’s school (NGDES 3), stating that she had appreciated the induction and training that the school had provided, so as to equip her to become a NGDE parent-supervisor.

“We love the curriculum and find it easy to work with. I must say that the tools that have been given for ordering and record keeping are invaluable. I also appreciated all the training that was given as I started out as a distance education parent. Everything was made so easy for me and answered all my questions and concerns.” (NGDES 3)

4.8.2 Requirements of the NGDE parent-supervisor

Once parents have been trained, schools required them to adhere to school policies and procedures, which would facilitate their learning program. The parent’s function is to facilitate and supervise the school’s educational program. The parent is not the professional teacher. NGDE schools cited the following requirements of NGDE parents:

- A parent or other designated adult is to supervise the student
- Parent commits to supervision of students at all times during school hours
- Parent must be contactable during school hours
- Parent must abide by all school policies
- Parent completes the school’s NGDE induction training
- Parent supports the ethos of the school and statement of faith.
- Parent is required to read all documentation from the school
- Parent records school activities in addition to the school’s records
- Parent maintains the student attendance record
- Parent is in accord with the NGDE teachers and promotes high standards in the children’s work
- Parent refers the student to the teacher if work is not understood
- Parent ensures that the completed work is the student’s own work
- Parent supervises all lessons
- Parent ensures that the specified work is completed
- Parent ensures that completed work is returned to the school in the required time frame
- Parent signs off written tasks
- Parent reviews material with student

- Parent secures all academic material including tests
- Parent ensures that testing is done in a controlled environment with no unwarranted aid
- Parent files student work and tests and returns the work to the school as prescribed
- A face to face meeting between the parent and the student's teacher(s) is desirable whenever possible

4.8.3 Methods of staff contact with parent-supervisors

All schooling requires appropriate contact between the school and the parents of students. NGDE however, requires greater contact than any other pedagogy, as parents form an integral part of the educational team. The NGDE educational team comprises of professional teachers, school administrative staff and parents as the at-home supervisors. Thus effective communication methods with parents are vital and extensive for NGDE. NGDE schools reported their use of the following in-person, paper-based and electronic methods for their teachers and administrative staff to communicate with parents.

- Email
- Phone
- Chat
- Forums
- On-line interactive methods
- Face to face interviews
- Newsletter
- Activity days
- LMS
- Skype
- Instant messaging
- Faxes
- Parent sends student work for review
- Workshops
- Weekly phone call
- Student reports
- Study diary
- Post
- Residential Program
- Initial enrolment process
- Parent copied in on communications to student
- Parent has access to student reports of progress on-line any time.
- Support groups
- Parent training

One school highlighted the importance of the parent's presence and adherence to school policies during the student's learning process.

“Students (sic) to be supervised at all times during school hours. One parent must be contactable during school hours and must abide by all school policies.” (NGDES 1)

The data clearly demonstrates that the relationship between the school and the parent is extensive and is thus labour intensive for NGDE schools. Adequate resourcing is vital in order to appropriately facilitate this aspect of NGDE.

Finding 28. NGDE requires parent supervision

NGDE requires one parent or a designated, trained adult to be permanently on-site, with the student, who is being educated. Thus, NGDE schools forge a vital relationship with their students’ parents. This relationship involves the parents’ induction and training, in order to support the school’s ongoing educational and administrative processes. Without parent-supervisors NGDE cannot operate. The commencement and maintenance of this relationship is labour intensive and requires significant training processes and administrative resources.

4.9 Administration

4.9.1 Managing NGDE

The management of staff, students and student records are key factors in the smooth operation of NGDE. Schools reported on their administrative practices in the management of staff and students. Different schools managed staff and students in different ways.

With regard to the administration of students, all schools reported the implementation of both hard copy and digital student files. Various databases and learning management systems such as SchoolPro, FileMakerPro and school-customised learning management systems (LMS) are used in order to keep records securely and to be fully compliant with state and commonwealth regulations, in much the same manner as is done for on-campus students. Student records included:

- Student attendance
- Student progress in the school's education program
- Records of assessment
- Education results
- Teacher to student communications / interactions
- Student to teacher communications / interactions
- Teacher to parent-supervisor communications
- School administration to parent communications

4.9.2 Administrative operations

Administrative operations for NGDE included:

1. Administration tasks relevant to students commencing NGDE in the following areas:
 - Student enrolment processes
 - Student academic diagnosis procedures
 - Parent induction course implementation
2. Administration tasks relevant to students' ongoing operation in the school's educational program in the following areas:
 - Attendance
 - Fee payments
 - Monitoring of records
 - Assessment
 - Reporting
 - Methodology
 - Curriculum materials
 - Contact with students
 - Contact with parents
 - Special needs students
 - Careers guidance
 - VET

- Post schooling study pathways
- Out of home activities (Activity/Residential Days, other events)
- Pastoral support

4.9.3 Operational costs

As is the case for all schools, schools providing NGDE incur operational costs, which are characteristic to the operation of any traditional on-campus day school. In addition to these typical costs, NGDE schools also incur costs that are specific to NGDE. NGDE schools cited these operational costs incurred, which were specific to their NGDE operations, which include:

- Loan repayments
- Interest
- Lease payments
 - Photocopiers and printers
 - Motor vehicles
 - Cameras, video and lighting equipment
- General administration
 - Office expenses
 - Telephone
 - Printing
 - Stationery
- ICT
 - Broadband
 - PC protection
 - Provision of the LMS and associated ICT services
 - Digital data storage costs
 - Provision of technology required to connect with students at distance
- Curriculum development
 - Purchase of curriculum resources specific to asynchronous presentations
 - Developing engaging course work. This is a major cost due to the ongoing curriculum changes required by ACARA. Curriculum development includes:
 - Preparation of work programs and relevant curriculum documents
 - Creation of content
 - Extensive revision of content
 - Design and redesign of delivery models
- Vehicles
- Accommodation and travel
- Regional Activity Day expenses
- Casual staff
- Professional development of staff
- Extra liaison required to keep quality contact with students
- Marketing

The pedagogical distinctives of distance education require greater input from professional teachers, administrative staff and DE-specific resourcing, than the ordinary inputs of on-campus day schooling. Expense items such as curriculum development, ICT, postage, print, vehicle expenses, travel and accommodation for distance education, greatly exceed those same expense items, which exist in traditional on-campus schooling.

One school (NGDES 2) stated that its average cost of education per student was “significantly more than (it was being) funded” and that it was “supplemented by (the) face to face school”. This school cited the following expenses as being resource-heavy:

- the development of the LMS;
- developing solid coursework with 21st century pedagogy;
- the enhancement, facilitation and tracking of student learning;
- a significantly greater amount of administration work than classroom pedagogy and
- a significant amount of time spent in developing staff communication skills.

NGDES 11 also described course design as one of its major cost burdens.

“The most significant costs after staffing are course development, marketing and part-time students. Course development is a major cost. Curriculum changes (e.g. Australian Curriculum) result in the need for extensive revision of content and redesign of delivery models. This in turn creates a major cost.” (NGDES 11)

Another school (NGDES 6) presented its current breakdown of expenses in the following way:

- Salaries and Superannuation - 70% of the budget
- Curriculum resources for distribution to students - 12% of the budget
- Travelling and vehicle expenses - 5% of the budget
- Camps, excursion and activity days - 3% of the budget
- Postage, freight and telecommunications - 2% of the budget
- General operations - 8% of the budget

Figure 14 presents this school’s budget breakdown in a percentage format.

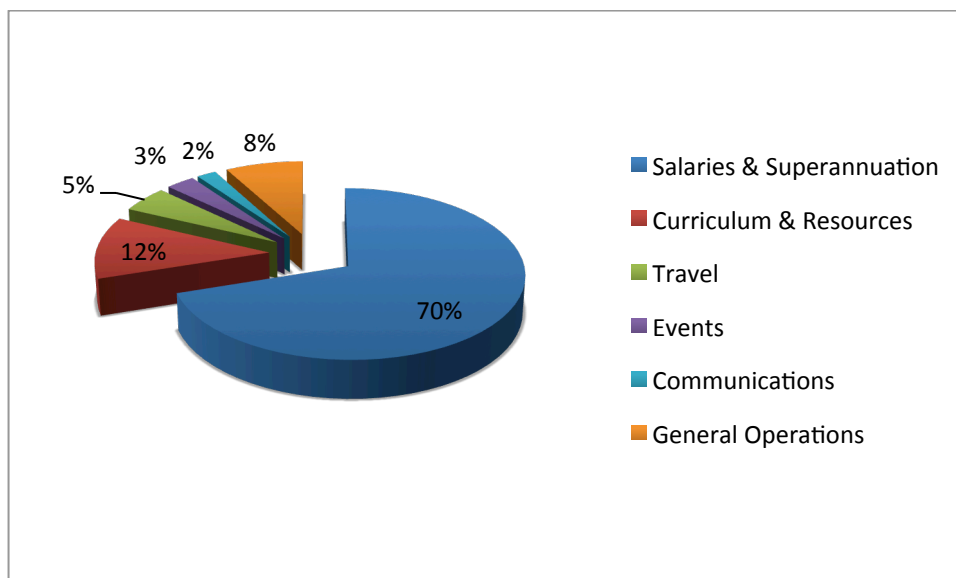


Figure 14. Percentage Breakdown of One NGDES Budget (NGDES 6)

4.9.4 Extra services

Schools sought to provide extra services to their students, where possible, given budgetary constraints. Some schools provided laptop computers and software to their high school students. Others provided student accident insurance. Some schools maintained a resource library from which students could borrow educational materials.

Finding 29. NGDE incurs additional operational costs compared to NGDS

NGDE incurs additional operational and administration costs compared to on-campus day schooling. These expenses are distance education-specific costs necessary to the optimal provision of NGDE.

4.10 Part-time NGDE funding concern

Schools which offer part time NGDE by providing single subjects to students enrolled in other schools, do not receive any funding for those students. The school providing NGDE to such students must rely upon private fees only, as recompense for their courses and labour.

In the case of part time NGDE, sometimes a school which partners with a NGDE provider, does not pass on a fee for the part time NGDE courses, which it accesses from the NGDE school. This causes unnecessary expense to the NGDE school and thus a significant diminishing of its own resources. Nonetheless, schools providing this vital service see its necessity in terms of supporting smaller less well-resourced schools. One school described this provision in the following way:

“DE is an important solution for those who don’t have resources in their local school and are disadvantaged by being out of the cities” (NGDES 2)

It is evident that a funding strategy for part time NGDE is needed.

Finding 30. Part time NGDE requires appropriate funding

There is no clear funding method applicable to NGDE schools, which provide individual courses by distance education, to students who are enrolled in other schools.

4.11 Average cost of education per student

Schools were asked to suggest an average cost of educating a full time NGDE student. Most schools were reluctant to provide dollar figures. Only a few schools responding to this question, and several of those responses were not specific. The responding schools indicated that the cost to educate distance education students is significantly greater than the funding received, and that the education of NGDE students was supplemented by other means beyond that of NGDE funding. One school summarised it this way: “we cut the cloth to fit the means” (NGDE 4). NGDES 8 estimated that an overall, real, per student cost of NGDE would be approximately \$9,000, whilst NGDES 11, located in another state, estimated the cost at \$16,000.

It is important to note that the average cost per student in NGDE is very difficult to determine as a generalisation. The reason for this is that all non-government schools have different financial conditions. Each school’s financial condition determines the average cost of educating a student. The variations of financial conditions across non-government schools are determined by many factors. Some of the key differentiating factors include:

- The differing levels of debt incurred by different schools
- The differing levels of salaries paid to staff in the schools
- The different fee structures of each school

It is evident that these schools and their governing bodies are committed to the provision of both part time and full time distance education. This is demonstrated by their willingness to subsidise NGDE by other means apart from low Commonwealth funding.

4.11.1 Specific NGDE school resourcing - Distinctive features of NGDE

Some common educational distinctives of NGDE are mentioned briefly below. They do require specific resourcing. This is acknowledged in the government sector, which has produced reports on GDE. One recent report reviewing distance education in New South Wales (DET, 2008), recommended that supplementary funding be supplied for the purposes of carrying out the distinctive practices of distance education in the government sector. Further, GDE charges NGDS students significant fees to access its school subjects. Built into the cost of these subjects is the recognition that distance education incurs expense when implemented well. For example Brisbane school of Distance Education (BSDE, 2012) charges NGDS students, who study their courses, a minimum of \$1092.50 per subject. This recognition of the distinctive costs attributed to distance education, should be acknowledged by the Commonwealth's funding policy of NGDE in the non-government sector.

Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to provide a detailed description of the costs of providing NGDE pedagogy, it is however, appropriate to mention the cost centres surrounding NGDE, which require appropriate funding. These cost centres will be looked at in the framework of DEEWR's School Administration Guidelines (DEEWR, 2008), which specify four categories for the use of recurrent funding. These four categories are:

- Teaching and ancillary staff salaries
- Professional development of teachers
- Curriculum development and
- Maintenance and general operations (DEEWR, 2008, p.17).

4.11.1.1 Teaching and ancillary staff salaries

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Commonwealth's current NGDE funding policy precludes NGDE from having appropriate funds to hire appropriate numbers of staff in order to deal adequately with the distinct needs of NGDE. The data from this study clearly indicate that NGDE requires teachers and administrative staff to function; just as on-campus day schooling requires teachers and administrative staff.

4.11.1.2 Professional development of teachers

NGDE not only requires normal teacher induction and ongoing development. NGDE has a specific overlay of further professional development (PD) relevant to distance education. This is over and above the norms of traditional classroom-based teacher PD and requires specific additional and higher level skills.

There is no institution, which adequately prepares teachers for teaching in schools of distance education. Distance education teachers require traditional teacher training and education and in addition, they require those skills to be enhanced for the distance education context. Furthermore, distance education teachers implement extra skills beyond traditional teaching practices. These skills include:

- enhanced awareness and communication skills when dealing with students who cannot be seen;
- personal social skills when dealing with students who cannot be seen;
- subject knowledge and skills;

- high level ICT functionality and
- instructional design skills.

Because there is no dedicated teacher training and preparation for this specialist field of education, the PD requirements are imposed upon the school. This has both its advantages and disadvantages. However, the need to train teachers is a further resourcing requirement of NGDE and thus deserves funding for professional training. In the NGDE environment, PD places a further strain upon a school's limited resources.

4.11.1.3 Curriculum development

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the development of curriculum and the learning environment is a significant cost centre for NGDE. Schools pointed out that their course development processes includes costs around:

- Hard Copy
- Online Material
- Specialist developers
- Development tools

Both hard copy and online material have different development and upgrading costs.

4.11.1.4 Maintenance and general operations

In addition to the general operations of traditional schooling (corporate services, finances, facility etc.) NGDE incurs specific ongoing costs, which include:

4.11.1.4.1 NGDE delivery

- Learning Management System
- NGDE Teacher work stations
- Adequate work environment
- Studios and video equipment
- Regional offices

4.11.1.4.2 Total communications systems

- Post
- Phone
- Internet
- Print

4.11.1.4.3 ICT

ICT is a vital component of all schooling. However, for distance education ICT is essential to the functioning of the entire operation, it is not optional.

Hardware

- Management
- Maintenance
- Teacher training
- Administration

- Students
- Software
- Management
 - Teacher training
 - Administration
 - Students

4.11.1.4.4 Staff travel and accommodation

- Face to face connection of teachers and students, if and as may be deemed necessary by the school.

Finding 31. Costs of educating a NGDE student

All NGDE schools agree that it costs more to educate a NGDE student, than the funding which is provided for this purpose. Whilst distance education does not incur the significant capital costs of large campuses and buildings and their ongoing maintenance, it does incur standard recurrent costs, common to all schools, as well as recurrent costs, which are specific to distance education pedagogy.

4.12 Attendance defined for distance education

For distance education, the daily attendance requirement of students is fulfilled by the student being enrolled in the school and by the student's participation in the school's educational program. Participation is demonstrated by the completion and return of the assigned work for that program. This description of attendance is defined in the education acts of New South Wales (*Education Act 1990*), Queensland (*Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*) and Western Australia (*School Education Act 1999*).

As an example, the Queensland *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* defines attendance for distance education students in Section 177 "What is Attendance"

(2) (a) a child enrolled in a program of distance education is taken to attend the school of distance education offering the program by completing and returning the assigned work for the program;"

4.12.1 Recording student attendance

The recording of student attendance is legally required by all state education jurisdictions. All NGDE schools reported their compliance with their various state requirements and keep daily attendance records of NGDE students.

In addition to the return of prescribed work, NGDE school staff checks the progress of NGDE students by means of personal interaction with the students. In some schools this is done via their learning management system, which enables NGDE teachers to closely track student engagement so that school staff even know the exact times when students are engaged in their educational program. Other schools keep communication with their students by other means such as

electronic communication and post. Attendance at workshops, residential schools, activity days, camps and other events is also recorded in attendance records. NGDE schools indicated the following methods of recording student attendance.

- Record of daily attendance (including workshops etc.)
- Student work returned
- Participation in courses and their content
- Progress checks providing a measure of time spent engaged in the program
- Administration staff monitor student daily attendance via LMS or
- Administration staff contact individual families for failure to log on to the LMS

Finding 32. NGDE Attendance at school - defined

Student attendance in distance education means that a student is enrolled in a school's distance education program and participates in the program by completing and returning the assigned work for the program.

4.13 Signs that it is a good education program

The Allen Consulting Group report (2011), which was commissioned to inform the Review of Funding of Schooling (Gonski, 2011), stated that establishing outcome measures of educational programs in Australia is currently done poorly. It is generally agreed that measuring outcomes is not an easy task (Gonski, 2011). Parents have indicated that their expectations of schooling include both academic outcomes and broader outcomes (Gonski, 2011). The Allen Consulting Group (2011) report refers to “measurable elements” (p.34) of outcomes prescribed in the Melbourne Declaration as well as “broader measures” of the desired traits, which are much more difficult to specify. The Allen Consulting Group (2011) refers to such measures as:

- Parent school satisfaction surveys
- Teacher satisfaction surveys
- Student surveys
- Post-school destinations
- Student progress against year or age benchmarks or learning outcomes (Allen Consulting Group, 2011).

NGDE schools submitted various indicators, which demonstrate to them and to their learning communities the satisfactory nature of their educational programs. These indicators include:

- Their educational programs are approved by their state educational authorities
- Students meet syllabus outcome expectations
- Students are given introductory diagnostic testing ensuring accurate grade level placement with respect to
 - the student's ability and
 - the school's educational program
- Regular ongoing assessment tasks
- Regular ongoing unit tests

- Measuring students' academic progress over time. This is done in two ways, firstly by issuing a diagnostic test as students commence enrolment and then by comparing these results to the standard of the student's work later in the year. Secondly, the school gauged student progress by determining the amount of successfully completed units of work in one year. This school stated:

"As all students do diagnostic testing when they join, we are able to compare their progress over time. We are also able to gauge their progress based on our expected number of workbooks per year". (NGDES 10)

- Student positive engagement and progress in the school's educational program.
- Comparison of NGDE student results with day school student results. NGDES 5 described this process:

"We give them the same testing schedule in each subject area as the day students have and we analyze these results to determine their success in each subject area."

- NAPLAN results
- High student retention rates
- Student retention during the year and reasons for withdrawal. NGDES 2 reported 92% complete their senior units and only 3% withdraw, mostly due to on-line learning being unsuitable for those students
- Student testimonies expressing their satisfaction with the school's educational program. One student offered the following remarks about the distance education experience:

"I started distance education in grade 10 and made a goal for myself to finish both grades 11 and 12 in 2010. I knew it was going to be hard, but I've always liked a challenge. The work was hard sometimes but I stuck in and got it done. After I finished I decided to head off to Thailand and Cambodia on a missions trip, which changed my life. I will now be studying a Bachelor of Law and Journalism at QUT this year. I can't express how blessed I feel to have done distance education - it was the best time of my life - thank you." (NGDES 3)

- Independent market research survey – It indicated that students felt that on-line had improved them as students in the areas of independent learning, time management, lateral thinking and leadership. (NGDES 2)
- Parent surveys (see Appendices 1, 2 & 4)
- Anecdotal comments from NGDE teachers (see Appendix 3)
- Positive feedback from parents
- Many schools indicated their assessment included "Ongoing review based on responses from students, parents and staff". One school described this form of assessment in the following way:

"The best demonstration of how we "do it well" would be looking into the ongoing meaningful relationship that our teaching staff have with students and the actual teaching and learning that is occurring." (NGDES 1)

- Where the senior students achieve their aspirations
- HSC results - NGDES 2 reported “Some of our top results have been through on-line: even more successful than face to face.”
- Student post-schooling outcomes
- Graduate surveys
- Student entrance to university
- Successful completion of university studies

Finding 33. Indicators that NGDE is a good educational program

NGDE schools include national and international testing results, state education curriculum outcomes, the satisfaction and retention of their professional teaching staff, student engagement and feedback, parent satisfaction culminating in student retention, post-schooling tertiary entrance of their graduates and post-schooling employment pathways, as demonstrative of the effectiveness of their educational programs.

4.13.1 Measuring staff satisfaction with their DE program

NGDE Schools reported the following ways they used to ascertain that their staff members were happy with their educational programs:

- Staff appraisal of school’s educational program (Ongoing and annual)
- Market research study
- Periodic surveys sent to randomly generated samples of NGDE parents, responses are collated and reviewed
- Student retention
- Annual staff member feedback reviewed with the Principal
- Staff retention (NGDE 5 reported “Supervisor has been doing this job happily for 13 years”)
- Staff commitment to the educational program
- Morale in weekly staff meetings
- Discussion and feedback
- Feedback from head of campus
- Staff surveys
- Staff anecdotal records (see Appendix 3)

NGDE 3 stated that because much of their new NGDE enrolments came from word of mouth referrals from former or currently enrolled families, that this was a strong indicator of market satisfaction with their school’s educational program. The school wrote:

“tracking of marketing sources obtained when new families enroll, has shown that referrals from either past or currently enrolled families is the most common marketing source, which is a high indicator of market satisfaction.”

4.13.1.1 Staff retention.

Table 4 indicates the level of staff retention by most schools in the study, for the years 2009 and 2010.

School	Year	Retention
NGDES 1	2010	100%
NGDES 2	2009	90%
NGDES 2	2010	90%
NGDES 3	2009	96%
NGDES 3	2010	100%
NGDES 4	2010	1 resignation
NGDES 5	2009	100%
NGDES 5	2010	100%
NGDES 7	2009	100%
NGDES 7	2010	100%
NGDES 8	2009	100%
NGDES 8	2010	95%
NGDES 9	2009	88%
NGDES 9	2010	84%
NGDES 10	2009	100%
NGDES 10	2010	89%
NGDES 11	2009	100%
NGDES 11	2010	100%

Table 4. NGDE Staff Retention

Finding 34. NGDE staff retention indicates staff satisfaction with the NGDE program

NGDE schools reported that despite being underresourced when compared with traditional classroom schooling; their staff indicated that they were satisfied with their schools' educational program. This satisfaction was demonstrated by various ways, common to the teaching profession; however, strong staff retention figures particularly indicated a high level of staff satisfaction with their school's NGDE program.

4.13.2 Measuring market satisfaction with NGDE programs

Schools providing NGDE reported a high level of market satisfaction with their education programs. This level of satisfaction is indicated in the following ways:

- Regular surveys of parents (see Appendices 1, 2 & 4)
- Regular surveys of students
- General feedback from parents
- General feedback from students
- Wider community awareness of our program

- An independently commissioned market survey research project (NGDE 2) showed high levels of satisfaction with convenience, educational results, and ease of use
- High numbers of word-of-mouth referrals to NGDE schools. NGDE 10 stated “Word of mouth recommendation indicates that many existing families are advocates of our program”
- Positive feedback from residential schools
- Annual “Satisfaction Survey Form”
- Survey results collated and examined for trends
- Schools keep a record of the main reason for enrolments

Most schools provided examples of anecdotal evidence of parental satisfaction with their educational programs.

4.14 The advantages of NGDE

Schools were asked to describe their view of the advantages of NGDE. The responses were grouped into 10 categories which describe how NGDE brings advantages to its participants, including: (1) pedagogical advantages, (2) a positive environment, (3) social advantages, (4) assisting the students’ personal development, (5) advantages to the school, (6) advantages to the teacher, (7) advantages to the family, (8) time management advantages, (9) better involvement with ICT and (10) situating education in a real world setting. The following is a summary of the perceived advantages of NGDE, as cited by teachers in various NGDE schools.

4.14.1 Pedagogical advantages

- Ability to vary the student’s work rate, based on the student’s ability
- Ability to vary the degree of difficulty of academic work, based on student ability
- Limitations of time are not as relevant compared to the traditional classroom
- Students can focus on a particular area of study for an extended period, uninterrupted
- Assists students who are distracted or at a disadvantage in a traditional classroom
- More efficient use of time
- Ability to access course work anywhere, anytime
- Ability to offer alternative strategies for comprehension rather than just reading
- Allows for easy revision of work
- Students can seek clarification repeatedly, without embarrassment
- Individualised education – one-on-one tuition and interaction between teacher and student e.g. more individualised feedback and attention than in a classroom
- NGDE provides the ability to incorporate the child’s interests into the curriculum
- Enables a more custom-designed curriculum, based on the students’ learning styles and specific needs
- Students develop independent learning skills
- Usually NGDE students are prolific readers
- Allows students to progress beyond age/grade-based limitations and lock-step education systems

- It is highly conducive to the use of mastery learning pedagogical approaches
- Slower students are better able to achieve conceptual understanding
- Gifted students are able to move on to new learning experiences, preventing boredom.
- Greater implementation of ICT
- Enables students living in remote areas to receive a full education program
- Students have a greater access to experts in particular fields of interest

4.14.2 Positive environment

- Creates an atmosphere where the student is comfortable to ask questions without fear of embarrassment or ridicule as in a classroom environment
- Students with low self-esteem e.g. physical disability or personal problems find DE creates an environment very conducive to learning
- The home is a safe environment compared to many traditional school-based environments
- DE eliminates the distractions of a traditional classroom
- Students are surrounded by people who love them, not just by paid employees. It is an environment conducive to positive development
- Many students are not suited to day schooling settings

4.14.3 Social advantages

- Minimises negative peer influence
- The socially destructive nature of traditional schooling is removed for example
 - Bullying
 - Negative peer pressure
- Showcasing – students are able to share and encourage each other, uploading examples of work etc. to a broad audience
- Students have opportunities to spend more time with children and adults of all ages rather than just those in their peer group

4.14.4 Students' personal development

- Students have the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning
- Because of DE's flexibility, students can pursue a wider range of their own interests
- Students learn to value the views of their families, rather than simply taking on the values of their peers
- Students learn time management
- Students learn goal setting
- DE students gain greater involvement with a mature adult than students in a traditional classroom
- The greater adult-to-student interaction in DE enhances child development
- Greater involvement with talented experts, in the students' education
- DE accommodates students with special sporting/artistic/musical talents

- Confidence – some children are better able to express themselves on-line whereas they may be quieter and less confident about voicing their thoughts in a face-to-face classroom setting
- Students are surrounded by people who love them, not just paid employees. It is an environment conducive to positive development
- DE allows students greater ability to work independently, which often allows for the development of advanced higher order thinking ability and problem solving skills

4.14.5 Advantages to the school

- School gains more reach to a broader range of students
- School gains more flexibility
- School can better support students who have special requirements e.g. illness etc.
- School can better connect with students who are motivated by ICT
- School grows teacher skill sets, especially their communication skills, educational design and ICT skills
- School connection allows monitoring of home activities

4.14.6 Advantages for the teacher

- Teacher gains knowledge of students on a more personalized level
- More real-life interaction and projects are more possible than in a classroom setting
- Less time needed for classroom management procedures
- NGDE allows for more objective, measured progress
- Enables close monitoring of academic progress through summative assessments

4.14.7 Advantages to the family

- DE respects the right of parents to choose an alternative education pathway or method for their children
- Parents can have a greater input into their children's education
- Students can potentially develop closer relationships with their parents and siblings
- Students learn to value the views of their families rather than simply taking on peer values

4.14.8 Flexibility and time related advantages

- Ability to schedule breaks which provide rewards for work done or the means for students to expend excess energy
- Numerous opportunities for excursions e.g. time and transport arrangements are more accessible
- More teaching time is available to each pupil
- Time flexibility – students can focus on a particular area for an extended period
- Eliminates wasted travelling time to and from school

- DE is flexible, modern, tailored, accessible and supportive of individual students. Day schooling structures were not designed for everybody. A broad breadth of student needs can be met through DE delivery

4.14.9 Accessing ICT

- Greater and more meaningful access to learning technologies
- The greater use of ICT is engaging for students, including formerly disengaged students
- NGDE has a significant on-line environment
- Student sees positive on-line modeling e.g. the teachers' example in forums etc.

4.14.10 Beyond the classroom – Real world context for learning

- DE learning is in a real world context, rather than just in a classroom setting
- Skills for life: DE prepares students for a world beyond school, where virtual teams exist in work and university

The staff at NGDES 7 provided a summary of what they believed are the advantages of NGDE:

“NGDE 7 is committed to the concept of individualised education. This methodology benefits from 1-on-1 tuition where there is constant interaction between the teacher and student. The learner will benefit from an atmosphere where they feel comfortable to ask questions and challenge their comfort zones without fear of embarrassment or ridicule. Students with low self-esteem due to physical disabilities or personal problems, find distance education very conducive to learning; e.g. Asperger's, ADHD. Outside the confines of a classroom routine, it is possible to schedule breaks, which reward or provide a means for excess energy to be expended. Likewise, there are numerous opportunities for excursions as time and transport arrangements are far more accessible outside of a school. Students have the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning as well as pursuing a wider range of their own interests.

4.15 Disadvantages of NGDE

Schools were also asked to describe their view of the disadvantages of NGDE. The responses were grouped into 7 categories, including: (1) pedagogical disadvantages, (2) social disadvantages, (3) personal development, (4) disadvantages to the teacher, (5) disadvantages to the parent, (6) ICT and (7) resourcing disadvantages. The following is a summary of the perceived disadvantages of NGDE, as cited by teachers in various NGDE schools.

4.15.1 Pedagogical disadvantages

- Less face to face time with teachers
- Less group-work with other students
- Less opportunity to use expensive facilities such as science laboratories
- For some students, there may be less opportunity to involve in competitive sports, drama or musical productions
- Frustrations when the child is not learning well

- Less emphasis on manual arts and physical activities
- NGDE can be more expensive and labour intensive for teacher e.g. working the LMS and developing courses.
- Dependence on reading instructions can be a disadvantage
- Access to collaborative learning can be problematic

4.15.2 Social disadvantages

- Lack of socialisation can occur

4.15.3 Personal development

- Some students are not suited to independent, self-regulating learning
- Students with expressive language disorders may be disadvantaged

4.15.4 Teacher disadvantages

- Heavy teacher work load due to higher teacher / student ratios
- It can sometimes be difficult for the teacher to access the child's learning level
- DE teachers need to spend time making communication a priority
- "To hire instructional designers, enhancers and academic advisors to any reasonable level would be out of the question with current funding. Fortunately with committed teachers this is possible, but as the on-line world continues to grow (globally and locally) there is a need for scalable and sustainable practice". (NGDES 2)
- In some cases there is a lack of real-time of monitoring of student progress
- The potential for cheating on tests
- Various state syllabi do not take into account the issues characteristic of distance education. This can often present implementation problems for teachers. One school described this problem. "We also struggle to demonstrate learning outcomes that have been established without consideration to implementation via distance. We would request a supplementary guide to the syllabus for implementation via distance." (NGDES 1)

4.15.5 Parental disadvantages

- Larger amounts of parental time is needed to be successful
- Discipline problems can occur if parent is not in control
- DE can be costly for the parents i.e. living on a single income and paying for fees, curriculum and ICT
- Parents can find it difficult when students need remedial help
- A parent could be negligent in their supervision of their student

4.15.6 ICT

- Inconsistency of broadband
- IT tuition can be ad hoc
- On-line distractions.

4.15.7 Resourcing disadvantages

- Lower funding compared to day school
- Not as many educational resources
- Heavy administrative work load due to lack of personnel relative to high student numbers
- NGDE requires more administration work than face-to-face schooling

Finding 35. Advantages and disadvantages of NGDE

In the eyes of teachers, who are practitioners of NGDE, NGDE presents both advantages and disadvantages.

4.16 Adequate resourcing - The greatest need of NGDE schools

NGDE schools were asked to indicate what are their greatest needs in order to improve their delivery of education. All schools indicated that adequate funding is NGDE's greatest need. Adequate funding would assist with:

- Adequate numbers and quality of teaching staff
- More time for student tuition
- More ICT training
- Adequate numbers of administration staff
- More resources e.g. library stocked and staffed adequately
- Additional technical resources
- Additional remedial resources
- Better ICT in the homes
- Establishing regional NGDE centres allowing more face-to-face contact between teacher and student and teacher and parent
- More and better dedicated educational design and curriculum development
- One school requested the removal of the compulsory 15 day residential component for all NGDE students in NSW.
- Providers of part time NGDE, such as schools that provide individual courses to students enrolled in other schools, often do not recover any costs for their courses or teacher labour.

4.16.1 What appropriate resourcing of NGDE would provide

Schools were asked what educational services would they provide if they received appropriate funding for NGDE. Teachers cited the following improvements.

- Better staff/student ratio
- More opportunities for family/student interaction with school
- Staff who are instructional designers, enhancers and academic advisors for curriculum development
- More staff training in distance education-specific pedagogies
- Staff training in advanced ICT skills relevant to NGDE

- Staff with more broader skill sets e.g. psychiatrists, speech therapists and counselors
- Increased learning support specialists
- Employment of more teacher aides
- VET coordinator
- LOTE teacher
- Provide a dedicated team of teachers for home visiting
- Empower staff through provision of better electronic equipment and resources
- Provision of computers to all upper primary and secondary students
- Far greater personalising of their individualised educational programs
- Improved fine arts, drama and music programs
- More online subjects
- Better development of on-line subjects
- Much richer technology for delivery of education
- Interschool sports programs
- Extensive educational field trips
- Additional regional activity days (music, arts and sport)
- More school excursions, camps etc.
- Provide a fully resourced library
- Access to better educational resources
- Local IT support
- Create regional NGDE centres
- Regional conferences
- Better school/home supervision communication
- Broaden and deepen student services
- Greater marketing to rural and remote areas

4.17 Should NGDE include regional offices?

Schools expressed a desire to have regional offices across their states. Current Commonwealth policy requires NGDE staff to be located on the school's campus, thus keeping staff from regularly accessing students in their local communities. They listed the following advantages of such a scheme.

- It would make local student support and home visits more frequent and economically viable
- More students would have equitable access to services, irrespective of location
- Students would have better access to activity days
- Students would have greater opportunity for social networking
- It would allow the school to address local issues as part of the education program
- It opens employment opportunities e.g. work experience networks
- It would allow for greater practical learning experiences
- It would allow for participation in local sporting events
- Parent education would be more extensive

- It would allow for storage of heavy or fragile equipment (microscopes, laptop computers, iPads, sports equipment) for activity days, rather than having to transport them from the school campus
- It would give the NGDE school a local presence
- It would provide a centre where local events can be held
- It would provide a centre where resources and a library could be maintained.

Some schools saw it as an advantage to have the NGDE associated with an on-campus day school in that it allowed for the sharing of resources. However, others saw it as a disadvantage as day school campuses are expensive to build and maintain, and are not relevant to most distance education students. All schools supported the view that establishing regional offices as part of a central school was a valuable concept as this allowed educational advantage to be taken to where the clusters of student numbers are. Schools noted that current Commonwealth policy does not allow providers of NGDE to establish regional offices. Rather, all staff are required to be located at the school's campus.

Finding 36. Regional offices

Commonwealth policy requires NGDE staff to be located at the school campus. Schools are not permitted to establish regional offices. All schools indicated that they would like to establish regional offices, to better implement their programs.

This chapter has delivered a summary of the findings of the study. It has presented a broad description of NGDE, having referred to students, the educational program, the teachers, educational outcomes and post schooling study pathways, parents, administration and various anecdotal opinions about NGDE. The next chapter presents a discussion of the issues of NGDE's funding problem, in the light of the study's key findings.

5 Discussion – The Funding Problem

This chapter presents a discussion of the Commonwealth's problematic NGDE funding policy, in the light of the literature and the data. It explains the disadvantages delivered by the policy, in particular that it precludes NGDE from having appropriate numbers of teachers. Comparisons between per-student funding and the funding directed to the rest of Australia's schooling graphically illustrates the inequity of the policy. Finally, an immediate and a long-term solution to the dilemma, are posited.

5.1 The Commonwealth's current NGDE recurrent funding policy

The Commonwealth's recurrent funding policy for NGDE, which is described in Chapter 2, prescribes chronic underfunding for NGDE providers and their learning communities. It is a discriminatory inequity and a social injustice, which applies educational disadvantage to all NGDE communities across Australia. The disadvantage affects their schools, staff, students and families, irrespective of location and socioeconomic status. In particular, the policy implies that teachers, whose salaries comprise the majority of a school's budget, are not important to distance education in the independent sector and that NGDE students are to be denied access to teachers and their teaching.

5.2 Disadvantage to NGDE schools

The study has demonstrated that NGDE schools are required to service their learning communities with limited resources and infrastructure, yet still meet all requirements of their state's syllabus and registration criteria. Thus, whilst NGDE is subjected to limited government resource inputs, it must still comply with all, and, in some cases, extra government compliance criteria, in order to achieve and maintain school registration. Whilst unrealistically resourced, NGDE has to produce the same educational outcomes, as do the rest of schools across Australia, which are appropriately resourced. Because NGDE schools must meet all compliance requirements of state educational authorities, underfunding has created an environment of limited government inputs, with full government expectations of educational outcomes.

The findings of this study have demonstrated, that across Australia, NGDE staff members are required to work with large numbers of students, over long hours, having limited time to communicate with their students and to deal with both their academic and administration needs. Both economists (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011) and prominent educators (Brock, 2010; Gilbert et. al., 2011) have stated the obvious, indicating that funding plays a key role in the teaching quality of a school. It assists in attracting high quality teachers, rewarding high calibre teaching, shaping the allocation of teachers across and within schools and in increasing teacher quality over time, via professional development. The Commonwealth's underfunding policy however, provides little assistance to NGDE schools in these terms. Rather, these schools are compelled to provide NGDE to their students, on low budgets to produce dedicated, quality teaching. The policy limits opportunities for NGDE students. In addition, whilst difficult teaching conditions resulting from underfunding can drive NGDE communities to target educational productivity efficiencies, they also place undue stress upon NGDE schools and their staff.

5.2.1 Disadvantage to NGDE school staffing

As mentioned, an obvious result of the underfunding of NGDE is its negative impact on NGDE staff numbers. Independent Schools Queensland (2011), the peak body representing independent schooling in Queensland, stated that non-government schools normally spend between 65% and 72% of their recurrent expenditure on staff salaries. This expenditure, for example, allows a “medium range” non-government day school (NGDS) to have the following teacher/student ratio

- Primary NGDS staff / student ratio 1:16-18
- Secondary NGDS staff / student ratio 1:11-13 (Independent Schools Queensland, 2011)

However, because NGDE students are allocated only around 23% of the Commonwealth funding which NGDS students are allocated, (which is 13.7% of the AGSRC), it is impossible for non-government schools to provide similar teacher/student ratios to their distance educated students, in comparison to their on-campus day school students.

Further to this point, as a result of the author’s discussion with a number of principals of various government schools of distance education (GDE), from various states, at the Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools (AADES) conference in 2005, the following information was obtained. The agreed upon, approximate staff / student ratios for state schools of distance education in 2005 was:

- Primary GDE staff / student ratio 1:14
- Secondary GDE staff / student ratio 1:11 (AADES principals, 2005)

Whilst these figures are estimations, they do present an understanding of what GDE staff / student ratios are. Further, these estimations were made by the leaders of GDE in various states and thus, though approximate, are arguably valid.

This study has demonstrated a chronic short fall of both teaching and administrative staff numbers in NGDE, in comparison to the staffing numbers typical of the rest of Australian schooling in the government and non-government sectors.

Chilcott and Cornish (2012) published the results of a study of teacher-to-student ratios, in Queensland schools, in Queensland’s Courier Mail. That study showed that the schools which provided NGDE featured the highest teacher-to-student ratios in the state of Queensland. Again, this data reflects the flow-on effects of the Commonwealth’s NGDE funding policy, which presents significant educational and workflow disadvantages to NGDE schools.

If the Commonwealth funds day schooling in the independent sector appropriately, so that it can employ sufficient teaching and administration staff, equity would require that it should appropriately fund distance education in that same sector, for the same reason. Teachers are not only important to the quality and success of day schooling, they are also important to the quality and success of distance education schooling.

5.2.1.1 Teachers are important to good schooling

Researchers (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Dinham, 2007; Hattie, 2003, 2009; Mulford, 2006; Rowe, 2003) agree that good teachers are a critical key to good schooling outcomes. Professor Stephen Dinham (2006, 2007, 2008), an eminent Australian educator, views teachers as a vital link for child development in schooling, stating, “Many empirical studies have confirmed that the individual classroom teacher is the major in-school influence on student achievement” (Dinham, 2007). Bill Gates (2009) as an educational philanthropist, in commenting on the findings of the research programs of the world’s largest philanthropic educational enterprise, also emphasised the importance of teachers in schooling, stating: “If you want your child to get the best education possible, it’s actually more important to get him assigned to a good teacher than to a great school.”

In light of this recognition that good teachers create good schooling, NGDE schooling should be given the opportunity to engage an appropriate number of teachers and the right sort of teachers for its educational delivery, rather than its students being deprived of this valuable human resource.

5.2.2 Disadvantage to NGDE students

Those most disadvantaged by the Commonwealth’s underfunding of NGDE are NGDE students. The NGDE funding policy implies that these students are expected to progress through their thirteen years of schooling with a limited number of teachers to teach them. As a consequence, they are expected to have limited contact with their teachers, their schools and their class peers. These students are being denied the key input that leading educators and the broader community deem to be essential to the education of school students and which is clearly provided to the rest of Australia’s school students, that is – fair access to quality teachers and quality teaching. One NGDE student’s mother whose husband is a professor of education, at an Australian university, explained her annoyance at the funding disadvantages NGDE students face:

“Equal opportunity for funding should apply to all students no matter what the school of choice or if it is religious based. The (state government’s accreditation body) has accredited the school, my child is receiving a decent education with great results so what is the problem with the ... Government providing funding for my child? ” (NGDES 1)

5.2.3 Disadvantage to NGDE families

The social injustice of NGDE funding policy also extends to the families of NGDE students. As taxpayers, the parents of NGDE students are required to contribute to Australia’s education system, a system that is intended to service all of Australia’s school students. However, this system fails to address their own children’s educational requirements, in a just and equitable manner. Unlike most Australian parents, their children are allocated little resource benefit from this system.

Further, NGDE families are, by definition, mostly single income families. This is because they choose a form of education, which requires one parent to remain at home with the students, acting as a full-time supervisor, under the guidance of the NGDE teacher (Harding, 2011b).

Thus, their educational choice typically includes relegating their family to a lower socioeconomic status, than most dual income families. This often overlooked, yet self-evident factor of the single-income NGDE family, heightens the phenomenon of the socioeconomic disadvantage in NGDE learning communities. Whilst NGDE parents voluntarily accept lower socioeconomic status for their families as a result of their educational choice for their children, they do not expect their children's educational experience to be underresourced because of government policy. NGDE families expect their children's education to be resourced in the same manner as other children in Australian non-government schooling (Harding, 2011a).

5.3 Exclusion from the SES funding criteria

Chapter 2 has highlighted that because the NGDE funding level is predetermined in the Commonwealth legislation, it is excluded from the socioeconomic funding criteria, which is used to determine the funding levels of most non-government schools. However, it is worth discussing that NGDE is not the only aspect of Australian schooling, which has a predetermined level of funding.

There are four other groups of non-government schools, which are not included in the needs-based funding mechanisms of the SES funding model. These schools are the (1) Funding Maintained and (2) Funding Guaranteed schools, which are assigned a lower SES rank and thus, funding rates higher than the rate which the SES system would normally allocate. Similarly, (3) Special Assistance Schools and Special Schools and (4) Majority Indigenous Schools are automatically allocated a very low SES rank, which, in turn, attracts an appropriately high level of recurrent funding, in recognition of the particular challenges and disadvantages which these schools and their students encounter (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008b). Thus, for these four types of schools, their exclusion from the normal SES assessment protocols delivers a funding advantage, greater than the normally scheduled SES funding allocation. By way of contrast, NGDE schools experience a major funding disadvantage due to their exclusion from normal SES processes, in that they are allocated the highest possible SES rank in the SES system. Thus predetermined SES ranks are used to deservedly advantage four special types of schooling, whereas the predetermined SES rank for NGDE delivers significant disadvantage to this educational modality.

This discussion not only begs the question, why is NGDE allocated the lowest SES rank, but, if it is to be excluded from SES funding determinants, as are the other three types of schooling, why is NGDE disadvantaged by this exclusion, when the other three are greatly advantaged by such exclusion?

5.4 Funding discrepancies demonstrated

This section illustrates the funding discrepancies in real dollar terms. Harding (2012) detailed these discrepancies further, in a call for equity in Australia's Commonwealth recurrent funding system for schooling, with respect to NGDE students.

5.4.1 Comparing NGDE and NGDS funding

When one compares the levels of Commonwealth recurrent funding of non-government on-campus day school students with that of NGDE students, enrolled in the same school, it is

evident that NGDE students attract around 23% of the funding that on-campus day school students in non-government schools receive. This is despite the fact that NGDE students in the same school, study from the same educational programs, derived from the same state educational syllabuses as their appropriately funded student counterparts, in on-campus, brick and mortar non-government schools. Figure 11 compares the levels of Commonwealth funding between NGDE and non-government day schooling (NGDS) in three schools in the states of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

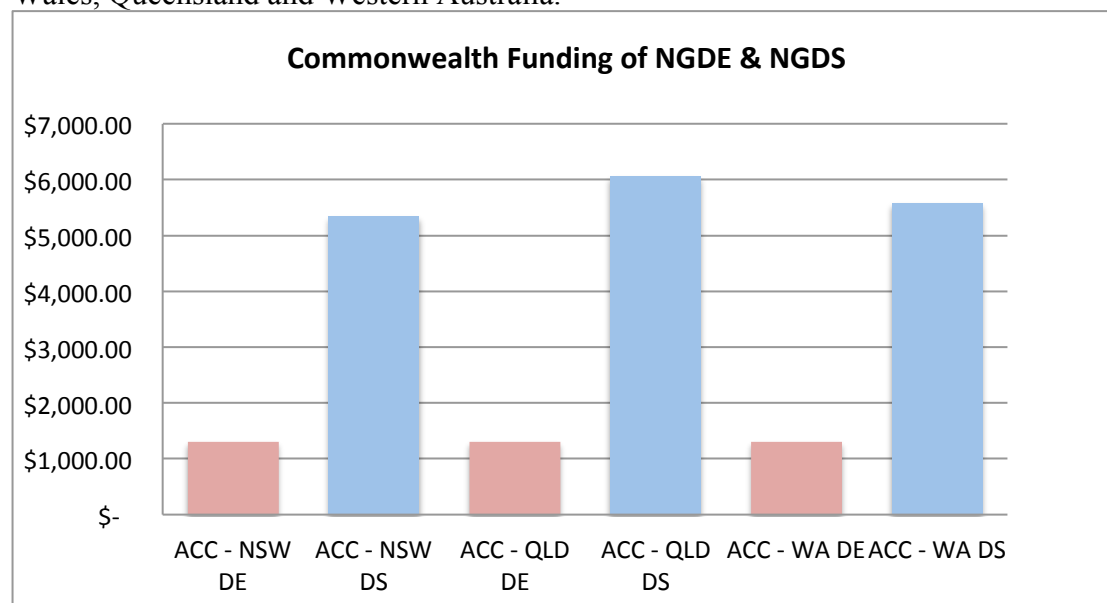


Figure 15. Comparison of 2009 Commonwealth Funding of NGDE & NGDS at 3 Schools in NSW, Qld & WA (Source - The 3 Schools' Actual Funding Figures)

Figure 11 demonstrates the major funding discrepancy between distance education and on-campus day school students enrolled in the same non-government school, in three different states of Australia. The figures indicate that NGDE students receive around 23% of the Commonwealth recurrent funding, which on-campus students, enrolled in the same school, receive.

Thus Commonwealth NGDE funding policy has established a culture of funding discrimination within individual schools, as a school's on-campus students are funded appropriately and its distance education students are funded minimally. This funding discrepancy is unjustifiable and inexplicable given the rhetoric of government leaders who are responsible for funding non-government schooling.

Finding 37. NGDE students receive less Commonwealth recurrent funding than their fellow students in the same school

NGDE students are allocated around 23% of the Commonwealth recurrent funding which on-campus day school students, enrolled in the same school, are allocated.

5.4.2 Comparing NGDE funding with Australian school funding in general

A further comparison of recurrent funding figures of the average net income per student in the government, Catholic and independent sectors (Gonski, 2011, p. 15) with the average combined state and commonwealth funding figures of NGDE students (Personal communication with the business manager of 3 schools - NSW 17 August, 2011; Qld 15 August, 2011; WA 16 August, 2011) in three states, further highlights the funding disadvantage experienced by NGDE.

The average net recurrent income per student in 2009 was \$11,121 for the government sector, \$10,002 for the Catholic sector, and \$13,667 for the independent sector.” (Gonski, 2011, p.15). Figure 12 demonstrates the discrepancy between this funding of students in these three educational sectors and NGDE students. The Commonwealth’s minimalist NGDE funding policy is the key contributor to the funding discrepancies in Figure 12.

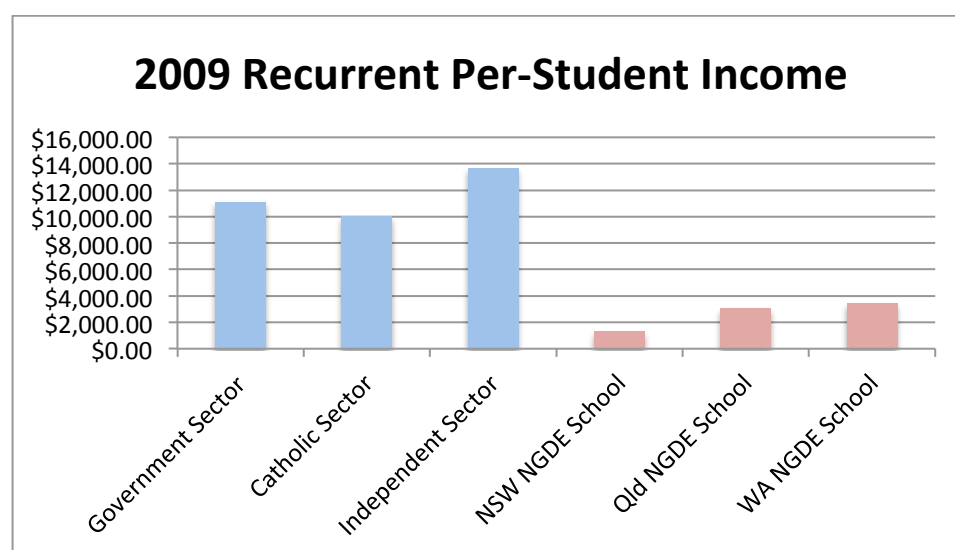


Figure 16. Comparison of 2009 average recurrent per-student income of the 3 sectors with NGDE schools in 3 states
(Sources: Gonski, 2011, p.15 & The 3 schools’ actual funding figures)

Figure 12 demonstrates that NGDE is significantly underfunded and thus underresourced when compared to the average funding levels of the government, Catholic and independent school sectors. This significant underfunding problem is experienced by all NGDE schools.

If one were to take the 2009 per-student recurrent funding of the Qld NGDE school cited in Figure 12, which was \$3,053 and compare it to the average per-student recurrent funding figures in the government, Catholic and independent sectors, the percentage comparisons further highlight major funding discrepancies experienced by NGDE. Table 5 demonstrates this in real dollar figures and percentages.

SECTOR	FUNDING PER STUDENT	The Qld NGDE School's Funding % Compared to Sectors
Government	\$11,121	27%
Catholic	\$10,002	31%
Independent	\$13, 667	22%
Qld NGDE School	\$3,053	100%

Table 5. Comparison of 3 Sectors' Student funding with one Qld NGDE School's Student Funding
(Sources: Gonski, 2011, p.15 & The Qld school's actual funding figures)

Table 5 exhibits that, in 2009, this particular Queensland school, which provides NGDE, received 27% of the per-student funding that government school students were allocated; 31% of the per-student funding that Catholic students received and 22% of the per-student funding that students in the independent sector (which is the sector in which NGDE is located) were allocated. It is an indefensible position for the Commonwealth to maintain this funding discrepancy and yet purport to be supportive of all Australian school students.

Thus, since 2000, Commonwealth legislation has established and legitimised a policy of underfunding NGDE in Australia. This legislated, institutionalised underfunding of NGDE clearly disadvantages these schools and their NGDE students, when compared to the funding received by their on-campus day school counterparts and, indeed, the rest of all other students in Australian schooling.

This low funding level renders NGDE students to be the least-resourced school students in Australia. The Weekend Australian (Ferrari & Hooke, 2012) researched the levels of funding of Australian schools in 2011. It reported that the national average expenditure per student was \$11,754. The highest level of expenditure was at a remotely located government primary school in New South Wales, which averaged \$130,000 per student. The four lowest funded schools in Australia were providers of NGDE, all of whom are participants in this study. The lowest funded school in Australia, according to Ferrari and Hooke (2012) was the Australian Christian College – Caboolture (Moreton), which averaged \$3,739 per student (Ferrari & Hooke, 2012, p.10). The funding plight of NGDE was also publicised in 2011, in two state-based newspapers (Chilcott & MacDonald, 2011; Tillett, A., Ryan, V. & Trigger, R., 2011) in Queensland and Western Australia when funding figures were released in 2011 on the MySchool website.

Thus, Commonwealth NGDE funding policy has also established a culture of funding discrimination across the nation's schooling systems, as students in all three sectors of schooling are funded appropriately, except for NGDE students, who are funded minimally. Again, this funding discrepancy is unjustifiable and inexplicable, and to date remains unexplained by those responsible funding Australian schooling.

Finding 38. NGDE students receive less funding than all Australian students

NGDE students receive significantly less recurrent funding than their fellow school students in all sectors of Australian schooling. It appears that they are the lowest funded students in Australian schooling.

5.4.3 Comparing GDE funding with GDS funding

State governments are aware that distance education requires different funding, when compared to traditional on-campus day schooling. This awareness is demonstrated by a comparison between government funding of GDE and GDS. Figure 13 shows a per-student funding comparison between GDE and GDS in three states, using 2009 figures. Note: For consistency of comparison, the figures for Brisbane State High School and West End State School, Qld; and Rossmoyne High and Primary schools, WA, were averaged. (Source – MySchool Website)

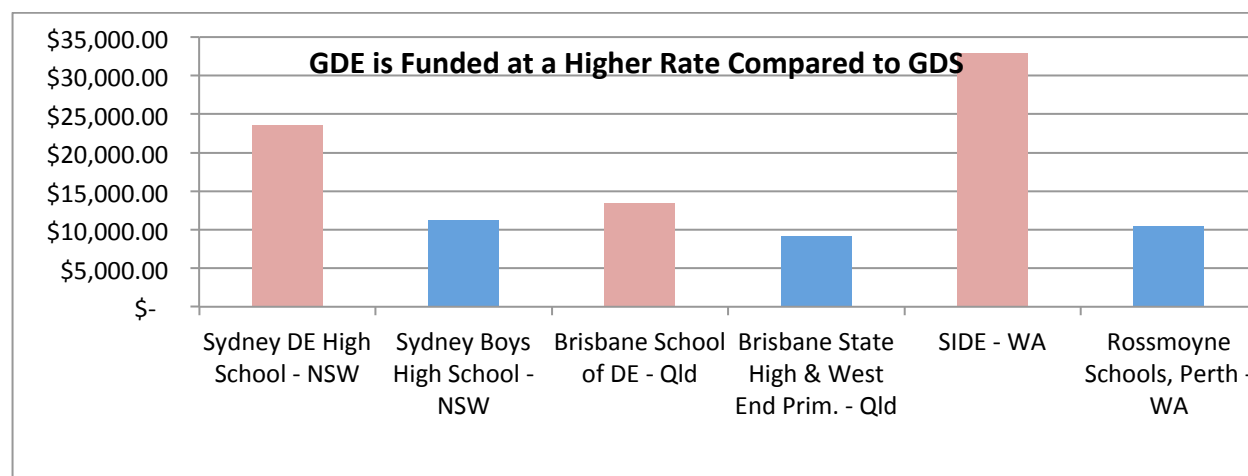


Figure 17. Comparison of Government DE and DS Funding in NSW, Qld & WA.

Figure 13 demonstrates that the per-student funding of GDE is greater than the per-student funding of GDS in each of the three states of NSW, Qld and WA. Because governments recognise that distance education requires significant recurrent funding in the government educational sector, GDE is well resourced when compared to GDS. On the basis of this GDE funding precedent, it is logical that NGDE, in the independent sector, would also require funding which is appropriately articulated to the requirements of its optimal delivery.

Finding 39. Australian Governments recognise that DE requires adequate funding in the government sector

Australian governments fund government distance education to an appropriate level. This funding may often exceed the level of funding for government on-campus day schooling. This recognition strongly suggests that adequate funding for distance education in the non-government sector, should be at least equivalent to, if not greater than, the recurrent funding allocated to day school education, in that sector. What is true for the government sector is probably also true for the non-government sector.

5.4.4 Commonwealth policy reduces Queensland state NGDE funding

In Queensland non-government schools, both day school students and distance education students have been funded on an equal basis up until 2008. State recurrent grants to students were composed of per capita base grants and needs-based funding. The needs-based funding is disbursed using several indicators of relative need, including:

- the socio-economic status (SES) index,

- the school resource index,
- the school isolation index and
- student needs categories.

In 2008, the Queensland Government approved an increase in the needs-based component from 22.5% to 40% of total available recurrent funds, to be implemented gradually over a number of years from 2009.

Because NGDE students are on the lowest SES level of funding, the Queensland government's increase of the needs-based funding component (which includes the SES index) from 22.5% to 40%, effectively reduces the state recurrent funding of NGDE students in real terms.

Thus NGDE students are disadvantaged twice because of their SES status. Firstly, they are disadvantaged by the arbitrary allocation of the lowest level of Commonwealth funding to NGDE students, within the SES model. Secondly, because State recurrent funding includes the SES index, the greater the needs-based component of State recurrent funding is determined by the SES index, the greater is the reduction to the State recurrent funding of NGDE students.

The dilemma of not allocating NGDE students a funding indicator (e.g. SES index) appropriate to their educational requirements is no longer restricted to being merely a Commonwealth recurrent funding problem. It now negatively impacts the State recurrent funding of NGDE students in Queensland.

The Commonwealth Government should provide appropriate funding commensurate to the educational needs of NGDE students. This is the only way that justice, access and equity can be served when comparing NGDE students to the Commonwealth's resourcing of the rest of Australia's school students.

Finding 40. Commonwealth NGDE funding policy reduces state NGDE funding in Queensland

Because the needs component of state funding for non-government schools, in Queensland, is linked to the SES model, and because the state had increased the needs component in its funding formula, state funding for NGDE students in Queensland has been effectively and increasingly reduced, since 2009.

5.5 NGDE reduces traditional educational costs

NGDE does not incur the same expenses, which are incurred in traditional on-campus schooling. It does not require the same capital purchases, as does traditional schooling. It does not require the purchase of large tracts of land in population centres, all the school and administration buildings associated with traditional classroom-based education and further, it does not require the maintenance of both. Whilst NGDE does require some land and some buildings, the requirement does not compare with the size and the frequency of the requirements of traditional schooling, which needs several school campuses in every town. The real costs of NGDE are the recurrent costs, which provide resourcing for the ongoing delivery of education, annually.

Having mentioned the real savings which distance education avails to the public purse and the real costs of NGDE, this next section briefly discusses a process of establishing a strategy of funding models which would bring equity and then adequacy to the funding needs of NGDE.

Finding 41. NGDE can reduce traditional educational costs

NGDE can provide education for students without the usual costs of acquiring and maintaining large tracts of land and many buildings in population centres, as is the normal practice for traditional schooling.

5.6 Funding models

This section presents a discussion of possible funding models, which, if implemented, would remedy the funding problems of NGDE.

Chapter 2 has highlighted that NGDE has been overlooked in all published documents relating to the review of funding in Australian schooling. Thus, given the lack of representation of NGDE in discussions about its funding in the past, it must not be assumed that NGDE will be included in any current funding considerations.

Should the funding model proposed in the Gonski report (2011) become a reality, there would need to be an assurance that NGDE students would be included in the new funding model. Further, a distance education loading for NGDE would need to be added to the base Schools Resource Standard (SRS), in the same way as has been suggested for GDE, in the Allen Consulting Group's (2011) report. This loading would need to reflect the true cost of providing distance education in the independent sector.

If the Commonwealth does not adopt this recommended SRS model, an alternative model to the present funding model would be necessary, in order to achieve fairness, equity and social justice in terms of resourcing NGDE.

Whilst the Education Minister has promised to have new funding arrangements in place for 2014 (Hall, 2012), there is current speculation among political leaders and leaders of various education sectors, that the implementation of new funding arrangements may be delayed beyond 2014 (Education Review, 2012; Stevenson, 2012).

Irrespective of whether there is on-time 2014 delivery of new funding arrangements or if there is a delay beyond 2014, NGDE's funding dilemma should be immediately addressed. One approach to solving this dilemma is a two-pronged strategy, which provides (1) a short-term solution of equity funding until (2) a more informed, long-term funding solution may be introduced.

5.6.1 Short term funding solution – Equity funding model

A short term solution to NGDE's underfunding dilemma would be to immediately fund NGDE students at the same SES level as their on-campus day school counterparts, who are enrolled in the same school. This solution could be implemented with no change to existing funding systems. It would, however, require a change to legislation, as the current NGDE funding arrangements are cited in legislation.

If all NGDE students were allocated levels of Commonwealth funding equivalent to their on-campus day school counterparts, the Commonwealth would be required to allocate a minimal outlay of increased funding. Because there the number of NGDE students in Australia is a small minority, funding equity for NGDE students would not make a significant impact on the national education budget of \$44.4 billion. However, funding equity would produce a major educational advantage for each NGDE student. The hypothetical example below, demonstrates how allocating NGDE students the same funding as NGDS students would look.

Table 6 compares the current NGDE funding level (SES rank 130) of the students included in this study, with a hypothetical funding level if those students were allocated an SES rank of 94.

	Current SES 130	NGDE Students	Current Total - SES 130	Hypothetical SES 94	NGDE Students	Hypothetical Total - SES 94
Primary	\$1,329	1693	\$2,249,997.00	\$5,693	1693	\$9,638,249.00
Secondary	\$1,637	1607	\$2,630,659.00	\$7,012	1607	\$11,268,284.00
TOTAL		3300	\$4,880,656.00		3300	\$20,906,533.00

Table 6. Comparison of Current NGDE Funding with Hypothetical NGDE Funding

This example demonstrates that in 2011, the Commonwealth Government allocated \$4,880,656 to the education of the 3,300 students cited in this report. If these same students were allocated an SES rank in a similar way to their day school counterparts, it would have cost approximately \$20,906,533. In order to provide funding equity to these 3,300 NGDE students, it would have cost the Commonwealth an additional \$16,025,877.

This funding equity policy would have delivered to NGDE students, a similar educational staff-to-student ratio as is delivered to on-campus day school students. This relatively minimal increase in funding would deliver a significantly improved educational advantage to these 3,300 students.

This hypothetical example demonstrates a general picture of the costs involved in bringing equity to NGDE students. However, it is important to note that one NGDE school did not participate in the survey. Thus this hypothetical example, though helpful, understates the exact dollar figures necessary to achieve educational equity for NGDE students. Whilst the figure is mildly understated, it does show that making equity-based financial adjustments would not impose a significant financial imposition upon the Commonwealth Government. Rather, such adjustments would provide educational equity to a cohort of students who are currently educationally disadvantaged because of Commonwealth policy.

5.6.2 Long term funding solution – Appropriate funding model

A weakness in this short-term equity-funding model is that it is not based upon the pedagogical praxis of NGDE and the needs of NGDE staff and students. A more informed model for the funding of NGDE, relevant to this educational delivery mode, is necessary in the long term.

5.6.2.1 SRS funding model – Determining a NGDE loading

This section outlines a discussion of determining a model for a hypothetical NGDE loading, which could be articulated with the SRS funding model, as recommended in the Review of Funding for Schooling (Allen Consulting Group, 2011, Gonski, 2011). Given that the provision of distance education carries very distinct needs beyond the needs of traditional classroom pedagogy, it is reasonable to conclude that NGDE ought to be allocated additional recurrent funding. This additional funding would be in the form of a specific loading in the same way that other educational needs domains such as (i) literacy and numeracy needs, (2) low SES status, (3) indigeneity and (4) disability attracts a specific loading, in addition to the proposed SRS or base recurrent funding figure.

Whilst it is a given that NGDE does not require the expenses incurred by building and maintaining large school campuses and their buildings, nonetheless, this mode of educational delivery does incur significant recurrent expenses. What is required is to determine how much would an NGDE loading figure be.

An examination of distance education in the government sector demonstrates that GDE incurs greater recurrent expenditure, than GDS. This has been illustrated in Figure 13. Figure 13 demonstrates that government distance education per-student recurrent expenditure exceeds that of government day schooling per-student recurrent expenditure in the three states, which were researched.

In order to arrive at a loading figure for NGDE, an examination of the variation between GDE and GDS as cited in Figure 13, presents significant dollar and percentage variations between GDE and GDS, from state to state. Table 7 demonstrates these variations in dollar and percentage figures, from the schools listed in Figure 13.

	GDE \$	GDS \$	\$ Variation	% Variation
Sydney	\$23,502	\$11,188	+\$12,314	+ 110%
Brisbane	\$13,420	\$9,104	+\$4,316	+ 47%
Perth	\$32,855	\$10,434	+\$22,421	+ 214%

Table 7. Dollar and Percentage Variations between GDE and GDS in Three States

Table 7 indicates that for the schools cited in Figure 13, in Sydney, GDE received 110% more per-student funding than the comparable day school (Sydney Boys High), located in the same area. For Brisbane, GDE received 47% more per-student funding than the averaged funding amounts of a primary (West End Primary) and a secondary (Brisbane State High) GDS school, in Brisbane. In Western Australia, GDE received 214% more funding than the averaged funding amounts of a primary (Rossmoyne) and a secondary (Rossmoyne) GDS school in Perth. In exploring the variation between GDE and GDS across three states, the variation is so great, that it would be difficult to determine any consistent pattern. The only consistency in these figures is that GDE receives greater funding than GDS. There can be no consistent conclusion beyond that. It would be interesting to conduct further research into these figures to understand how they are determined in each state.

An extrapolation from government education data in Figure 13 and Table 7, would allow the case to be argued that distance education in non-government schooling may incur expenditures, which are greater than the costs of non-government day schooling, if conducted at an optimal level.

Thus in determining what the special loading figure for NGDE would look like in an SRS model, another strategy would need to be taken, beyond that of looking at the funding comparisons of GDE and GDS. The only thing that can be learned from such a comparison is that all governments agree that GDE recurrent funding should be greater than GDS recurrent funding, in order to achieve optimal delivery of GDE, as stated in Finding 33. It is recommended that the Commonwealth explore what the NGDE loading should be.

Recommendation

The Commonwealth should investigate the distinct needs of NGDE to determine the extent of the NGDE loading in the SRS funding model.

5.6.2.2 Inclusions in a NGDE loading

In researching the distinct needs of NGDE, beyond the base student SRS amount, Table 8 presents some of the dimensions, which are critical to the provision of NGDE. These dimensions would be part of the consideration in determining a NGDE loading in addition to the SRS base student dollar figure. A suggested percentage breakdown of the NGDE loading is also offered with the proposed dimensions of the loading.

Dimension	Percentage
Curriculum: Design, development & delivery	40%
Communications	30%
ICT	15%
Research & development	10%
Remoteness	5%

Table 8. Suggested dimensions of NGDE Loading for the SRS Model

These inclusions and their suggested percentage allocations are not exhaustive, however, they are the suggestions of three schools, which are currently providing (NGDES 1, NGDES 3, NGDES 10). An examination of the distinctives of NGDE would take into account some of the critical features of distance education. Some of these features would include the following aspects, which characterise the delivery of distance education in the government sector:

- Professional development
- Student activities
- Curriculum
- Special needs
- Literacy & Numeracy
- Regional coordinators

- Parent training
- Distribution
- Travel

These features are common to schools providing distance education in both the government and non-government sectors. It is recommended that further research into the distinctive costs of NGDE be undertaken. Such research should involve all providers of NGDE.

In summary, this chapter has presented discussion points relevant to the funding problems of NGDE. It has demonstrated graphically the significant variance between the recurrent funding allocated to NGDE students and that allocated to the rest of Australian school students. The suggested models, one for the immediate redress of this educational injustice and one for the long-term, are not exhaustive of possible solutions. In particular, the long-term solution is really an unknown, as, at the time of writing, the funding model for Australian schooling in the future, has not been determined. The long-term model suggested in this chapter has been composed to articulate with the proposed SRS model, as suggested in the Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report (Gonski, 2011).

The next chapter presents a short conclusion, with a request that the Minister remedies the NGDE funding problem, created by Commonwealth policy.

6 Conclusion

This chapter presents a short conclusion to the study. It reiterates the suggested short-term and long-term models, which could be applied as solutions to NGDE's funding dilemma. It then recommends immediate redress of the problem.

6.1 NGDE seeks acceptance in Australia's education system

Modern distance education in Australia has expanded beyond merely meeting the needs of the geographically isolated. It includes students who reside in metropolitan and provincial centres in significant numbers, as well as students in remote areas and travelers within or outside of Australia (Harding, 2011b). In the non-government sector, distance education has emerged in tandem with the development of new technologies and pedagogies. Because NGDE is new to the Australian educational landscape, it is necessary that it be genuinely recognised and supported as a bona fide pedagogy and be allowed to develop in its own context.

Marsden (1996) argued that distance education ought not be deemed as an inferior form of education, rather, that an educational hegemony, mostly uninitiated to distance education, ought to seek to understand it and should then support it by means of the various educational authorities and their associated infrastructures. NGDE, as the emerging participant in distance education, needs to be nurtured by Australia's education system, rather than being admitted to the system and then starved by underfunding.

6.2 Recommendations

Chapter 5 of this study has made the recommendation that the underfunding of NGDE be addressed in two stages, an immediate short-term solution and a more appropriate long-term solution.

6.2.1 Short-term: Equity funding model

The short-term solution is based upon an equity model. It calls for the Commonwealth to recognise NGDE students at the same SES ranking as the on-campus students, enrolled in the same school. This would deliver NGDE students the same level of funding enjoyed by their on-campus counterparts. It would require a change to current legislation.

6.2.2 Long-term: Appropriate funding model

The long-term solution is based upon what funding would be required to adequately resource NGDE for its optimal delivery. This model reflects how governments currently view distance education in the government sector, as GDE is resourced at a higher level than GDS. This model will require further research, inclusive of all participants in NGDE. As with the short-term model, this solution also would require a change to current legislation.

6.3 Beyond rhetoric to reform

At the announcement of the 2010 election, the Prime Minister once again confirmed the Commonwealth's support of Australian schooling, stating: "And moving forward above all in our schools means putting at the centre of our agenda getting every child, every child, a quality

education.” (Gillard, 2010b). In similar vein, Gonski’s (2011) Final Report on the Review of Funding for Schooling is replete with statements, too many to list, which state the need to uphold equity in Australian schooling. These include:

“Every school must be appropriately resourced to support every child” (p.xiii)

“The system as a whole must work to meet the needs of all Australian children, now and in the future.” (p.xiv)

“Australia and its children and young people, now and in the future, deserve nothing less.” (p.xix)

Such statements can engender hope to those who have been disadvantaged by underfunding if they give impetus to rectifying the disadvantage; otherwise, they may engender cynicism if they are not actioned. It is hoped that this rhetoric will be effectively applied to Australia’s lowest funded school students – those students currently studying in non-government distance education.

The late Emeritus Professor, Headley Beare’s prediction (2010), of exponential changes to Australia’s education system, motivated by the demand for a more personalised and interactive form of education and fuelled by the development of technology, is upon us. NGDE is part of that radical change to the Australian educational landscape. However, its resourcing, recognition and representation are yet to be equitably established.

This study has described NGDE in Australia, in broad terms, demonstrating that it is a bona fide pedagogy. It has presented the position that the Commonwealth’s legislated underfunding of NGDE is contrary to public policy on education, excluding NGDE from the resourcing enjoyed by most Australian schooling. Such exclusion is a form of educational deprivation. Social justice would posit that the Commonwealth Government should support NGDE firstly, in terms of appropriate resourcing, secondly, by recognising it as a bona fide educational modality and thirdly by allowing it to participate with a representative, effective voice in the processes of relevant policy development. Without such redress, NGDE learning communities will continue to be subjected to entrenched, resourcing disadvantage.

Because of the serious nature of this defective funding policy and the broad extent of its reach, social justice would warrant an expeditious rectification of the problem of the Commonwealth’s underfunding of NGDE.

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8 **Appendices****Appendix 1****NGDE PARENT SURVEY (NGDE 10)**

*We would like your feedback so we can continue to improve our service.
Please tick the box that reflects your level of agreement with each statement.*

Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mildly Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Mildly Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I feel welcome to approach the school to discuss concerns relating to my child.	0	1	2	11	96
I feel welcome to use the one-on-one tutoring service offered by the school.	0	0	22	13	66
The school provides excellent communication to me via newsletters, phone and their website.	1	0	1	13	93
I am satisfied that my child is learning good social skills, and is not negatively influenced by peers.	0	1	5	13	89
The curriculum incorporates an appropriate emphasis on Christian values.	0	4	1	10	94
The educational programs offered by the school are suitable for my child.	1	4	4	21	78
I am satisfied with the electives offered by the school.	0	1	19	25	58
I see the school striving to improve their service to students and families.	0	0	2	15	88
The staff is competent and provides excellent educational advice.	2	0	2	18	86
The staff is helpful and caring.	0	0	0	10	98
I am satisfied with the academic progress of my child.	0	1	1	23	84
The activity days/camps are worthwhile.	0	1	22	20	57
I am happy with the ordering processes.	1	6	7	29	62
The enrolment process went smoothly.	1	1	0	13	95
I have confidence in the leadership provided by the Principal.	0	1	1	12	92
Overall, I am satisfied with the education my child receives from this school.	0	1	1	17	85

Appendix 2

NGDE PARENT SURVEY (NGDE 10)

Positive Student Outcomes

The following are statements from the principal of NGDE school 10. He has summarised a body of written anecdotal evidence supplied by parents, indicating good outcomes for their children as a result of being enrolled in NGDE.

- Children who have been bullied now feel safe.
- Children who have been performing at a poor academic standard can now achieve success by doing work, which is at their level.
- Children who were bored because the work was easy can now excel (examples available).
- Children who have been ill and not well enough to attend school regularly can still learn at home.
- Children who have learning difficulties often need one-on-one tuition, which can be provided by parent under supervision of our special needs teachers (examples available).
- Children were previously homeschooled and parent realised they did not have enough learning structure and accountability of an outside school and teacher; the parent appreciates the formal learning structure and accountability to teachers, since commencing NGDE.
- Children who are isolated can join our online discussion forums and participate in activity days. They may also qualify for support from CAP funding where they may attend College camps.
- Pregnant teenagers use the program.
- Indigenous families use the program and achieve excellent results (examples available).
- Students whose parents must travel, have an efficient and regular education.
- Students who are elite sports persons or musicians are able to pursue their career paths, whilst engaged in the College's education program (examples available).
- For many, NGDE is a "school of last chance"
 - Children who refuse to go to a traditional school for various reasons (examples available).
 - Children who have been expelled from other schools because of behaviour issues.
 - Children who have low immune systems.
 - Children with cancer.
 - Children who were bringing home bad attitudes, swearing and disrespect for authority have had a complete turnaround when taken away from that culture in a local school (examples available).
- Comments can be given of our students at *Activity Days* when outside instructors have indicated that they are the best-behaved school group they have ever seen.
- Many parents have commented on the strengthened parent-child bond as a result of NGDE.
- Many parents have reported that their children have much better mental health since starting with NGDE

- Many parents who were formerly home schooling, find that they are thrilled with the support that they receive from NGDE and the improvement in their students since starting.

- **Appendix 3**
 - **NGDE TEACHER OBSERVATIONS (NGDE 10)**

NGDE Teacher Observations of Student Outcomes

Below are brief statements by NGDE teachers, indicating various positive outcomes resulting from students engaging in NGDE (NGDE 10). Student names have been changed, to maintain privacy. The alphanumeric references following the quotations are referenced to the student's academic file on the school's database. All names have been changed.

1. Sarah has poor visual perception and poor working memory retention. At age 7 she started the ACE curriculum at a low year 1 level. Her mother has been able to incorporate a music and movement program into place at home to assist with cognitive functioning. Sarah, now 9, is reading at a Year 4 level and is achieving very well in all subject areas. LANS901
2. Mary has dyslexia and has difficulty with processing information. At aged 9 she started the ACE curriculum at a Year 1 level in Maths and English and Year 2 level in other subjects. Mary has responded positively to one-on-one supervision at home with an added music and movement program, which has assisted her learning pathways. Mary, now 11, is reading at a Year 5 level and has confidence in all subject areas. LANS901
3. Bill had a global development disorder at 2 and has been diagnosed with high functioning Asperger's syndrome. He is socially and communicatively challenged. Billy commenced his ABCs program in Jan 2010 and received his certificate in October. Under the supervision of his Grandmother, Billy is progressing well, reading confidently and developing socially through small group therapy sessions as well as NGDE 10 activity days and music classes. His Grandmother has much experience in education and is very impressed with the structure of the ACE curriculum. Billy has a set routine to which he responds positively. EVAN1001
4. Alex has a chronic heart condition and low muscle tone. He had difficulty in the school setting due to fatigue and absences due to operations and illness. Alex has thrived in the home setting and has been able to access funding through the school to purchase the manipulative tools he requires, exercise equipment and supplementary activity-based learning programs to complement the ACE curriculum. Alex is reading confidently at his year level and learning gaps in Maths and English have been addressed. HEND801
5. James is an 11 year old boy with Asperger's syndrome, dyspraxia, ADHD and juvenile arthritis. James was bullied at school to the point where psychological help was sought. After three months working in the home environment on the ACE curriculum his mother said, 'I have my boy back again.' James was keen to learn and was no longer suffering anxiety. He is working towards catching up to his year level. His brother, David, has also started distance education due to the success with James. DOWL1001
6. Esther was struggling with writing correct paragraphs and essays. However, after sending her some worksheets that explained how to write a correct paragraph with a clear topic sentence and supporting sentences she is enjoying her work and looking forward to writing her next essay. DALY901

7. Hannah did not understand how to structure an essay correctly, but is now writing correctly structured essays with references and a clear introduction and conclusion. MATT1001

8. Samantha is a very social girl and was upset initially to be doing distance education and staying at home. She wanted to be with friends in school. However, she is enjoying distance education now and likes to stay at home. Her behaviour and attitude has improved tremendously since she started with us. She still has a very active after school life. Attends Karate classes, Art classes at local Library, Ballet and Tap dance classes. DELL1001

9. Diane Howson's family was very negative about her decision to home-school her two children - John and Lara - when she first decided to join us. They don't believe that she would be able to cope and educate them since she herself was dyslexic and not great academically. However, after a year of doing distance education with us, her extended family sees the changes in John and Lara and now believes that Diane has made the right decision for the children. Lara used to be very quiet; not a confident child, but now she's a people person. COOK901

10. When Phillip joined the school last year he was so far behind, academically with his studies. After a year at NGDE 10, his reading improved dramatically and he started to gain more and more confidence in his reading. BURK1001

11. Morgan has struggled to be diligent with his studies during his schooling years. After being with Southlands for a while he could not handle the workload and left to go to a state school. When he was at the state school he realized that he was not learning much and needed to come back to Southlands to get a good education. He is now progressing well. CROW0801

12. Lyn (*student's mother*) is very happy to be able to school Anthony at home as she is able to deal with any issues that arise from his troubled past immediately. She feels that if he were at school, many issues would not be identified and therefore not dealt with. FORE1101

13. Joel started with us in January as a poor reader who did not have a lot of confidence. Since gaining a thorough knowledge of the basic phonics sounds he has gained much confidence and has shown great improvement in his reading ability. BROW1102

14. Rachel was finding Maths very challenging and had lost all motivation to continue. Since adding more practical work and games to her program, she has gained much confidence and has a renewed enthusiasm for her work. VLAS1001

15. Danny was finding the amount of work very tiring. Since reducing the number of pages per day, he is now completing the work because he wants to and not because he has to. Danny is now enjoying it so much more and is enthusiastic. ROSS1002

16. Michelle (*student's mother*) was pleasantly surprised when she saw that her son, James was really keen and interested in his work and couldn't wait to get started again (*after the holidays*). SWAN1001

17. Rhonda started doing the ACE program just over a year ago now. Their family were at a loss as to how they would manage to catch Rhonda up with the work she had missed & they had no idea as to what she could remember, as her memory had been damaged through the trauma & the treatment. Today, Rhonda is working towards her Year 10 certificate. There is still a very long way to go, but she is managing to work at a speed that suits her and her memory is improving by the day! SAMM1001

18. Amanda was originally going to only distance educate her 11 year old son to begin with, however, after the enquiry visit and hearing that NGDE 10 would be able to give her the support and encouragement to help her younger daughter, Sophie, who is many years behind, to catch up and gain confidence in herself again – Amanda was willing to give it a go. This last week, I have received two phone calls from the family to tell me that both Reuben and Sophie had both done their first tests, and had both scored into their 90's for the first time in many years. They are so excited, so focused and their confidence has gone through the roof! In Amanda's own words – "With the encouragement & support received so far, they are watching their lives being transformed". KELL1103

19. Rebecca started distance education with Stephanie almost 2 years ago. Stephanie, who was once an outgoing young girl, with lots of confidence had, over a time, become very withdrawn (*at school*). She had stopped drawing and doing the things she loved and her school grades were going further down. Within a few weeks of starting distance education, Stephanie was changing back into her old self and Rebecca sent in a beautiful picture, which Stephanie had drawn! Rebecca's two younger children, Josh and Robert were enrolled a couple of weeks later. MCCR901

20. Rene decided to commence distance education with her youngest daughter Isobel, as she could see that Isobel is very easily influenced and already there were attitudes and things coming home, which Rene wanted to "nip in the bud". It was a bit of a rocky start as Isobel felt lonely and missed her friends from school. Her siblings are much older than Isobel and no longer living at home. Within a few weeks Rene could see the change in Isobel's attitude. DELL1001

21. Shelly was not sure at first if the ACE program was the right choice, but after the enquiry visit, she was convinced it was! Her aim was to first start the schooling with Nikki, their 2nd eldest daughter and as soon as she was settled, she would consider possibly doing the ABC's with Clara, her third daughter. Nikki has thrived from the beginning and within a couple of weeks Shelly enrolled Clara who completed the ABC's within a couple of months. Their girls are thriving and Shelly has been so grateful for the continued support. LANG1003

22. Marion (grandmother) decided to commence distance education with her grandson, Frank (age 6) and her foster son Tony (age 12) as both the boys were struggling at school. Frank has autism and Auditory Processing Disorder, which has been a challenge from the beginning. With the group of young boys Tony was hanging out with at school, the negative influence could only have gone from bad to worse. At first, Marion was not convinced that she would be able to cope with both the boys, but within a few weeks, and with the support from NGDE 10, Marion has seen the most drastic changes in both the boys, mentally and spiritually and she says that the improvement in their work has just been amazing! EVEN1001

23. When I visited the Loch family in November, William had been having trouble at school and reacted badly to being unfairly treated by a teacher. He was not learning and didn't want to be at school. I talked to William at activity day in April; he had the biggest smile on his face as he told me he had been getting 100% in his tests. "I would never believe I could learn and then get 100%". WAYN1101

24. When I visited Maryanne she had been homeschooling 3 of her children for a year. With each visit from the (*state*) moderator the goals would be changed and she was not happy that Linley was teaching bible to the children. Maryanne decided to enroll her children in NGDE 10. On my last visit, Maryanne was enjoying having time to be Mum again, not spending all her time setting and finding work for the children. The fact the goals no longer moved; that they all know what work has to be done and the bible is though all the work is a blessing for the family. BALL1101

25. Erin no longer feels like all she is for her children is a taxi driver but that they are starting to become a family. Having the children at home is giving them the time together to get to know each other and do things together. GULL1101

26. Jenine has a health problem with her back, which means she cannot attend school full time. She has been at home two days each week for most of 2010. When I talked with Katherine (*student's mother*) she was amazed at how much Jenine is learning though distance education. Jenine can now take time out when needed with her health and not miss work or fall behind. MCRO1001

27. Anne feels so blessed to have found NGDE 10 and to be schooling her children at home. The family is building a strong bond and enjoying each other. Anne was able to take Shanee to "Snow White" and John helped Peter paint the house. HOLL1101

28. When this family started with us in Term 1 2010 both children Jamie-Lee and Craig were being home schooled. Jamie-Lee, who is two years older than her brother Craig, was struggling with her reading. She was at the same level as her younger brother and lacking lots of confidence. After 6 months using our program, her confidence had improved so much she needed to be re-prescribed - a jump of approximately one and a half academic years from her original prescription. She basically had caught up with her academic chronological age level within 6 months and has been going strongly ever since. Angela (*student's mother*) is delighted with her children's increased confidence and skill levels. NAIR1001

29. Sherie has 5 children with the three oldest boys enrolled with us. The boys had a very negative attitude towards schooling and towards their mother's authority. Ben had issues with reading. Sherie did not complete high school and lacked confidence in her ability to supervise the boys. When the boys first started distance education, Sherie found it difficult to get them to do more than 2 or 3 pages in each subject, daily and that they were difficult to motivate and get their cooperation. They grizzled, complained and cried! They felt they were being asked to do so much more work than they did at school. After several visits, and helping Sherie to understand the significance of setting goals and self-checking, she got the boys into a routine. This year, the boys are powering ahead doing 5 pages per subject (sometimes more). Their confidence and

diligence has improved markedly and so has their attitude towards schooling and their mum's authority. Sherie is now much more confident and very pleased with the progress of her boys. SHEL1001

30. When the Pearsons started in Oct 2009, Adrienne was very nervous and highly anxious about her boys. David was struggling at school and at home too. He was easily distracted and easily stressed. A few times when I either visited or rang, Adrienne and one or other of the boys (usually David) had just had a 'melt down' - both Adrienne and David were in tears. She found it very difficult to keep him on task and was extremely anxious herself. By March 2010 (five months) David was doing much better - but the greatest change was the significant improvement in his attitude. A year later, David had improved so much he was finding the work a little too easy and some adjustments were made to give him a greater challenge. Adrienne is delighted in how the boys have progressed and how the family dynamics have improved. PURC1001

31. Edward Gilham, an Aboriginal boy from XXX. He was not engaging in school at year 9 level and spent 2 years with us and, since leaving NGDE 10, has been working as a full time TA to a mechanic for a year, and will be offered an apprenticeship next year if all goes well.

32. James Cameron, another isolated Aboriginal child joined us at 9 years of age in 2008 unable to read. He started at Year 1 level and is now 11 years old and reading well, and working at Year 4 level, after 2 years on our course. His 2 younger brothers have also started with our course. Larry who is 8 and is finishing Year 2 work, and Seb is just learning to read.

Appendix 4

PARENT ANECDOTAL COMMENTS FROM VARIOUS SCHOOLS

The principal of NGDE 10 sent the following parental anecdotal comments regarding their observations of their children's educational experience in NGDE. All names have been changed.

1. We have only been with NGDE 10 for a short time, but so far we do not have any complaints! All is wonderful!
2. We feel very blessed and privileged as a family to have this knowledge and opportunity with our children.
3. It's hard to measure Carrie's progress on a purely academic level. The improvement she has achieved is directly attributable to the style of learning and to the very well organized activity day. Thank you. Elsie's progress is also a credit to the school and the program.
4. You all helped us to settle in and get started. Thank you to all of our teachers.
5. You are doing a wonderful job. I am constantly grateful for the opportunity for Chrissie to have a Christian education and to be a part of her learning experience. Thank you!
6. Didn't know about tutoring. Would love online ordering. Haven't received details yet. My children loved the Maths manipulation at the last activity Day. Would love to see that again. Maybe music/singing might be good at Activity Day as well. Thanks for all you do! We love NGDE 10!
7. Lifeskills awards –FANTASTIC! Provides direction and a reason why.
8. As parents, changing from mainstream education to Distance Education with NGDE 10 has been the best decision we have made for our family.
9. Thank you very much for your prayers and hard work. We thank the Lord that we can be a part of this fantastic school. Thanks again.
10. Thank you for the opportunity of having my daughter enrolled with your school. Mary has achieved more in the short time with NGDE 10 than all her high school days of attendance. Your program was the best choice and I sing your praises at every opportunity. I have visions of this program becoming huge competition with govt schools. (education issues + teaching issues, bullying issues, Centrelink issues etc.)
11. Nick has not attended any activity days so that is why I ticked undecided. Overall I am very happy with Nick's progress. I must say it is one of our best decisions to do distance education with him. Regarding Nick's dyslexia I do find the amount of reading and writing does take its toll on him. I try not to put too much pressure on him regarding his neatness and allow him to have a few breaks. Thank you for your support.
12. I am very happy with the school and my children have come along in leaps and bounds.
13. Keep up the great work!
14. Keep up the great job you all provide for our students! Teachers as well as staff. Thank you.
15. We have had a great experience.
16. I have really appreciated Mr. Wilson's contributions to the newsletters, finding what he says to be most sound and encouraging!
17. Not tried tutoring yet. Best thing we have done, not just for our children, but for the whole family. Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant
18. I think everything so far has been fantastic. Sandy (*NGDE teacher*) has been amazing to me with ideas and encouragement I have needed. Thank you so much!

19. I don't know how anyone homeschools without this program! However I don't like the American spelling.
20. Thank you, you are doing great!
21. I love the new on-line ordering – Well done!
22. We have found NGDE 10 to be positive, caring and interested in our children. We no longer feel the pressure, which our children were feeling previously. We love the atmosphere and people we meet on Activity Days. Thank you for all your encouragement. Your school has been a prayer answered.
23. You do a great job. After each Activity Day I always mean to send a note of thanks but haven't done so yet.
24. I am extremely happy with the phone ordering system. Upgrading is required with some courses. Perhaps acceptable alternative courses could be investigated and provided to families.
25. Teaching staff is helpful and caring. Very encouraging to my child's progress. Enjoy caring Christian values.
26. Finding NGDE 10 has been a blessing!
27. I am very happy with the progress Sarah is making and I am in the process of enrolling Brittany full time. I love the structure of the program and the goal setting.
28. Excellent program and school. Everything is designed to make the learning experience for both parents and children as stress free as possible. Thank you.
29. The fruit is in the pudding! My child is doing fantastic! Thank you....

The following parent comments were submitted as part of the survey response from NGDES 3.

1. The children have really enjoyed this education program... The results that they are now achieving compared to the previous school are really quite outstanding. Their confidence and general approach to school has changed significantly.
2. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for a fantastic curriculum, which has grounded her in God's Word and taught her to read and write.
3. Also I feel extremely blessed to be associated with a school that encourages students not only academically but also in their faith.
4. Just a note to encourage all the maths students. Our daughter Sharon, due to changing circumstances, has gone into year 11 at a public school. She is ranking first in Maths and Maths Extension. She did the year 10 Math exam in term 4 and was third - without any other tuition.
5. Just a note to let you know that Bill has found full time work. Bill's boss has told Mark and I several times that Bill is the best and most reliable worker he has. Bill also had to do a safety and management test, hazard management, safety and security and SPTE orientation test and he received 100% for every test. We are so proud of him. We want to thank you so much for your support and help in the past.
6. Congratulations on your staff for providing parents the opportunity to access Christian curriculum for distance education. The kindness extended by your teachers was special. The graduation ceremony for Marion has been a cherished special occasion for us.
7. We are so pleased with the different approach of the ACE Courses – self-directed and mastery. We only wish we had transferred our children earlier. It has been liberating for my wife and the children and we are achieving so much.

The following parent comment was submitted as part of the survey response from NGDES 11.

I have been involved with home schooling for 4 years, and after that period of time my daughter was getting a little bored of mum's lessons and needing a challenge.

After hearing about NGDES 11 from our District Office in XXX, we decided to check it out. My daughter is only 10 and I wasn't sure if she had the ability and motivation to be able to do this. After speaking to Mrs. Smith and Mr. Jones regarding my daughter's ability, they assured me that she would be able to do the work required. The first day of Term 1 2011, my daughter was up at 7am ready to log on. We haven't looked back.

The program and support we have received has been remarkable. The education my daughter is receiving online cannot be compared to anything I have ever seen before. The lessons are fun, colourful, meaningful and my daughter is actually retaining the information because she is doing it all herself. Science is her favourite subject and the virtual frog dissection had us all squirming as we watched her do it. The feeling of achievement she gets every day puts a smile on her face and has made her excited about learning. I love hearing her get up in the morning race out to the computer so she can be the first to log on. This is the best investment in my child's future I have ever made. This is real learning, for real kids and it will help them in the real world.