

Tasmanian Government submission for the inquiry into educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.

Tasmania implements a series of strategies to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Tasmania develops these strategies to suit the local context and in line with COAG targets and the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) 2010-2014 and the new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015.

Due to the close geophysical relationship between Aboriginal students, their families and their local schools, there is no demand for the provision of boarding school education; for different school models for geophysical reasons; or for specific programmes that engage Aboriginal students in remote areas.

To address the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry relevant to Tasmania then, Tasmania would like to highlight one strategy which addresses the following:

- Access to, participation in and outcomes of pre-schooling.
- Best practice models, both domestically and internationally.

Tasmania would like to highlight Child and Family Centres, a joint initiative of State and Federal Government, and the location of Aboriginal Early Years Liaison Officers at four Child and Family Centres as a best practice model that improves access to and participation in pre-schooling programmes improving education outcomes for Aboriginal children throughout their schooling.

The Department of Education is the lead agency with responsibility for all aspects of the development and management of Tasmania's Child and Family Centres, however, they are an inter-agency collaboration. Other agencies involved are the Departments of Health and Human Services, Premier and Cabinet and Police and Emergency Management. This partnership makes the Centres ideally positioned to meet the needs of children and families.

Tasmania's Child and Family Centres are a place-based service model for the provision of early childhood services and supports in communities with high service needs. From 2011-2014 twelve Centres opened in twelve communities characterised by deep and persistent socioeconomic disadvantage across the state. These communities represent the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in the state and two Centres have a particular Aboriginal focus and are operational at Bridgewater (*tagari lia*), and Geeveston (*wayraparatte*). Programs operating from Geeveston include young parents groups, child birth and parenting courses and a toy library. The Centre has a strong and positive partnership with the South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. Programs operating from Bridgewater include Good Beginnings Play and Baby Chat Café. Services provided to centres include speech therapy, occupational therapy and child health nursing.

Aboriginal Early Years Liaison Officers (AEYLOs) are based at four Centres in Bridgewater, Geeveston, Ravenswood and Burnie and contribute to the planning and delivery of Early Years programmes and provide outreach to Aboriginal families. AEYLOs play a key role in forging positive relationships with Aboriginal families, Centres and/or schools and in creating culturally responsive and inclusive environments and programmes that are targeted to the

needs of Aboriginal children and their families. AEYLOs seek to connect Aboriginal families early in the child's life with positive learning environments, thereby building trust and preparing the child for the schooling environment. AEYLOs are involved in planning and reflection meetings with Centre Leaders and co-facilitators and collaboratively plan and target outreach efforts with Centre Leaders. AEYLOs also support Launching into Learning which may be held in a Child and Family Centre or a Primary School. Launching into Learning programmes nurture and stimulate young children's learning and help children to become 'school ready'. AEYLOs are employed by Aboriginal Education Services, Department of Education and are strategically managed to ensure alignment with Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework.

AEYLOs are funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (formerly through Supplementary Recurrent Assistance funding). An Indigenous Advancement Strategy application was made to increase the number of AEYLOs to twelve to expand the AEYLO programme to all twelve Centres. This application was rejected.

Evidence that this initiative is working: A recently published report¹ commissioned by the State Government showed that Tasmania's Child and Family Centres had a positive impact on parents' use and experiences of services and supports for young children. Parents provided evidence that Centres were successfully engaging, supporting and working with families to give their children the best start in life. Parents experienced Centres as welcoming, respectful and inclusive places that were helping them develop positive child, family, school and community connections.

The Report on Government Services 2015 for the Child Care, Education and Training Sector² shows that Tasmania was in the top two jurisdictions nationally for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being on track on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census compared to non-ATSI children.

In 2014, Tasmania had 482 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children enrolled in Government Preschools (Kindergarten) with 477 children attending - 98.9%. The number of children attending Tasmanian schools who were enrolled is the highest nationally. This compares to 91.3% nationally with Victoria at 71.3%³.

The Launching into Learning Longitudinal Study progress reports indicate that results from analysis of Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS) reading and maths show that Aboriginal students benefit significantly from regular participation in Launching into Learning.

In terms of a national comparison, Tasmania has the smallest differences in NAPLAN results between non-Aboriginal students and Aboriginal students across the majority of tests and year levels. While this is positive, Tasmania recognises that there is still a gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and looks to continue to develop strategies that close the gap in educational outcomes. The Department of Education

¹ Taylor, C.T., Jose, K., Christensen, D., & Can De Lageweg, W.I. (2015). Engaging, supporting and working with children and families in Tasmania's Child and Family Centres. Report on the impact of Centres on parents' use and experiences of services and supports in the Early Years. Perth, WA: Telethon Kids Institute.

² Report on Government Services 2015. <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2015>

³ Source: ABS 4240.0 – Preschool Education, Australia, 2014

will be conducting a longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as they articulate from pre-school programmes and track through the schooling system to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.