

Learning Indigenous languages and Standard Australian English

- 4.1 This chapter examines the value of incorporating Indigenous languages in education. It analyses the potential to improve partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities through Indigenous language learning in schools. In particular, school attendance rates and improved continuous engagement with the education system are discussed.
- 4.2 The chapter focuses on the advantages of including Indigenous languages in early education. The benefits of language nests are considered as well as the role that family and childcare centres play in preparing children for school, especially in remote locations where English is not commonly spoken. The Committee discusses how achieving English language competency is improved by teaching in Indigenous languages from a child's first years in schooling.
- 4.3 The Australian Curriculum is reviewed to assess how Indigenous language and culture is being incorporated within the new Australian Curriculum that is currently being implemented throughout Australia.
- 4.4 Various styles of teaching for Indigenous students including learning English as an Additional Language/Dialect and bilingual education are discussed. Educational benefits of ensuring English language competency are examined by the Committee as are numeracy and literacy assessments.

Building partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities

- 4.5 Building and improving partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities was highlighted as a positive way to improve educational

outcomes for Indigenous students. The potential benefits were great including improving school attendance, engagement and learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

4.6 This is an area that the Committee discussed in its previous report tabled in 2011, *Doing Time - Time for Doing, Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System*. In the previous report the Committee recommended a number of ways for schools and Indigenous communities to build partnerships together, including engaging the local Indigenous community to teach language and culture afterschool and provide extra curricula activities.¹

4.7 The Committee received evidence from the Queensland Department of Education and Training about an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement* it has developed. The object of the *Languages Statement* aims to facilitate the connection between schools and Indigenous communities:

The DET Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement provides the basis to assist Queensland educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context.²

4.8 The Department of Education and Training, Queensland, highlighted the importance of developing relationships between school and communities. In the submission it stated:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages need to be recognised, valued and supported in schools, and in developing relationships with families and communities. Initiatives that develop culture and language have been found to be significant factors in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation, attendance and achievements in schools.³

4.9 The New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Communities noted a similar sentiment in its submission:

The NSW Department of Education and Communities believes that good education practice values and incorporates the knowledge, understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal

1 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Doing Time - Time for Doing, Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System*, 2011, p. 135.

2 Queensland Government Department of Education and Training (Queensland DET), *Submission 109*, p. 14.

3 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 7.

students, their families and communities and focuses on engagement, collaboration and participation. Not only are national, state and local perspectives important in learning, but so too are the historical, social and cultural contexts and backgrounds of the peoples and communities involved in learning. Aboriginal languages, as do all languages, give voice to the heart and soul of culture.⁴

- 4.10 The Chief Executive, Greg Barnes, Department of Education and Training, Northern Territory, discussed with the Committee the importance of Indigenous community engagement and provided an example of a community that has demonstrated excellent community engagement as a result of building strong partnerships:

...you have to have the community coming with and along side of you. ... the school needs to work with the community and not the other way around. The community should be driving the show. When you get them onboard and owning things, places like Gunbalanya, Galiwinku and some of the communities on Groote now are getting enormous rollups of the community in the three-to-nine program. We have the community engaged in learning. If the community engages in learning then the modelling for the kids is amazing.⁵

- 4.11 The Australian Council of TESOL (ACTA) submission emphasised the point that schools and communities should work in partnerships with one another:

Community leaders and parents will continue to be primary agents for teaching traditional culture/s and language/s to their children. Schools and communities should work in partnership with their communities to perpetuate, grow and celebrate culture/s and language/s, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English which are students' home languages.⁶

- 4.12 Lola Jones, representing the Western Australian Department of Education, discussed the importance of including Indigenous languages into schools in order to engage Indigenous communities. She commented that the benefits can be not only useful for engaging Indigenous students but beneficial for engaging the Indigenous community in language revival:

4 New South Wales Department of Education and Communities, *Submission 59*, p. 8.

5 G Barnes, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 6

6 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), *Submission 72*, p. 27.

Having language in schools is such a small part of language revival, and in Western Australia it has been a small part but sometimes it has been the key to getting whole communities involved in language revival.⁷

Engaging students in education

4.13 The Committee heard from various teachers and educational experts on the benefits that can be demonstrated by supporting Indigenous language learning in schools. The self esteem of young Indigenous students is boosted when Indigenous languages are incorporated into the school curriculum. The inclusion of language in the curricula from kindergarten or preschool through to year 12 was discussed as an effective way of engaging Indigenous students.

4.14 Barbara McGillivray, chair of the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture Aboriginal Corporation (FATSILC), emphasised the importance that 'languages be part of the curriculum being taught in the schools from kindy all the way through.'⁸

4.15 Coco Yu, a language teacher in Broome provided the Committee with an example of how the inclusion of Indigenous language learning supported a student's confidence and self-esteem:

I teach from pre-primary to year 2 at the moment at my school. Next year it will continue to year 3 and will carry on like that. Last year in year 1, I had a very shy girl who would not speak in front of the class. She is a Yawuru child although English is her first language. She would not get up and speak in front of the class, but one day we were playing Yawuru bingo in the class and she won. I was so surprised. I thought, well, come on up and say this word. And she did. She was very proud. She practically ran up and grabbed the key word picture and said 'gugu' meaning dad or father. At that stage, I was on the verge of thinking this was too hard but she got up there and was so excited to speak in front of the whole class. I realised that, yes, this is important and we must keep doing it.⁹

4.16 A similar story was told about a year six child at a school in Queensland who was known to have behavioural difficulties. In a submission to the

7 L Jones, Western Australian Department of Education, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 9.

8 B McGillivray, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 19.

9 C Yu, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 3.

Committee, Nyoka Hatfield, an Indigenous language and culture teacher, described the positive effect her Indigenous language and culture class has on this child:

... after one of my very first year six classes, a teacher that accompanied the students said that it had been a very long time since he had seen a particular student sit quietly and listen for an entire lesson. This student had behaviour problems and I don't know if he was indigenous or not, but he ended up being one of my leaders when we sometimes performed for the entire school.¹⁰

- 4.17 Another example demonstrated how Indigenous language and culture classes could engage students' interests in secondary education. Ms Hatfield described the following situation:

In 2009 at one of the high schools that I visited, my first class were the Indigenous year eights, these students then had a Japanese language class to attend (it was compulsory for them), while my next class, were the Indigenous year nines. The year eights were practically begging the Indigenous school worker to let them miss the Japanese class and stay with me. I explained to the students that I would just be repeating what I had already told them, but they said that it didn't matter, they would rather stay with me and were very disappointed when they weren't allowed.¹¹

- 4.18 For the children to feel connected to school, the inclusion of their home language at school can be important for them to understand the link between the world they live in at home and learning English. Teachers from Yirrkala school made this point during a public hearing:

The children come to school already with a great deal of knowledge about their world, culture and language. That is what they bring because they have a language that they bring to school and it helps them to unpack what they learn at school.¹²

School attendance

- 4.19 The Committee received evidence that demonstrated positive links between incorporating Indigenous languages into schools and improvements in school attendance rates. However the point was stressed

10 N Hatfield, *Submission 63*, p. 2.

11 N Hatfield, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

12 B Ganambarr, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 10.

that incorporating Indigenous language into schools was not the silver bullet to improve school attendance rates per se.

- 4.20 Studies carried out in Queensland and New South Wales indicated that the inclusion of Indigenous language learning at school did lead to an increase in school attendance:

Supporting the inclusion of Indigenous languages can increase the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to and participation in kindergarten and other early childhood education and care programs. In Queensland between 2008 and 2010 overall Indigenous children's kindergarten participation increased by 6 percent to 35 percent.¹³

In NSW, using and learning Aboriginal languages has been associated with increased school attendance rates among Aboriginal students, improved academic performance, particularly in levels of literacy, and a heightened sense of self-worth. For Aboriginal students, learning an Aboriginal language can strongly motivate students, promoting a sense of pride and direction.¹⁴

- 4.21 Anecdotal evidence gathered by the Committee suggested that including Indigenous languages in schools lifted school attendance rates. One Arm Point School in Western Australia was provided as an example of improving attendance rates and educational outcomes:

...[T]he former principal, Mr Steven Price, has been instrumental in improving student attendance and educational outcomes in language by focusing on systematic language teaching and respect for three languages in the school (Bardi, Aboriginal English, and Standard Australian English). This program has continued with the current principal.¹⁵

- 4.22 Lola Jones from the Kimberley Education Office, Western Australia supported the view that a culturally relevant school environment assisted with increasing attendance rates:

I cannot really talk about attendance data, but some principals have commented to me that 'We did nothing else last semester that was different. The only thing we did was introduce an Aboriginal

13 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 7.

14 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Communities, *Submission 98*, p. 3.

15 C Bower, *Submission 83*, p. 3.

language, and our suspensions have dropped and our attendance is up.' That is anecdotal but that is strong, and parents who say, 'I had a choice and I could enrol my kid at school A or school B but I enrolled in that school B because I know they teach an Aboriginal language.'¹⁶

- 4.23 In Darwin, Gary Barnes discussed the complex nature of School attendance. He commented:

School attendance is a multifaceted and very interesting phenomenon. You can have the best education programs running that are culturally responsive, appropriate and grow culture, but if the kids are not in the schools – and often they are not in the schools because they are not in the communities but off doing a range of other things...¹⁷

- 4.24 Dr Brian Devlin, provided the Committee with some figures on attendance rates during the 1980s when there was a bilingual program running at Shepardson College, Northern Territory:

I can certify that during my time as principal at Shepherdson College, attendance was 82 percent on average and in some classes, for example, John Greatorex's year 6 class, attendance was consistently above 90 percent.¹⁸

- 4.25 Greg Dickson, an academic from the Australian National University, noted in his submission:

Sadly, evidence shows that Lajamanu School has suffered since its bilingual education program was removed in 2009 under the First Four Hours policy. Attendance figures have barely risen above 45% since mid-2009, down from 60% (and above) between 2006-2008.¹⁹

- 4.26 One of the most alarming statistics received in relation to school attendance demonstrated the magnitude of the problem of continuously low attendance rates:

Missing school for one day a week was calculated, by the Western Australian Office of the Auditor General, as being equivalent, on

16 L Jones, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 10.

17 G Barnes, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 5.

18 B Devlin, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 54.

19 G Dickson, *Submission 125*, p. 7.

average, to missing two years of schooling over a ten year education.²⁰

Committee comment

- 4.27 The Committee believes that fostering Indigenous community engagement is a critical factor for schools that have low Indigenous attendance and retention rates. The Committee understands that Indigenous languages can be part of the solution to assist in forming partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities.
- 4.28 Indigenous languages can be used within the school to help promote awareness of the local community languages. The incorporation of Indigenous languages into the school environment promotes recognition and pride for Indigenous students and their families. It may help students forge connections between Indigenous and non Indigenous worlds, and so provide them with the skills to succeed in both.
- 4.29 The Committee urges state and territory governments to continue to support strategies that focus on building Indigenous community partnerships with schools and recognise the importance of Indigenous languages within these partnerships.
- 4.30 The Committee is of the firm belief that language and culture learning should be integrated into school learning however it notes that children undertake some of their greatest learning before they reach school age. Further, children are constantly learning and absorbing language in the household, in the backyard and within the community. Therefore the Committee encourages families and elders to work together, before children reach school age and outside of school hours to continue the teaching of Indigenous languages.
- 4.31 The Committee believes that communities are the first teachers of children but it is important for governments to work in partnership to raise healthy children, who are strong in their first language. Indigenous communities must assist in working proactively with schools to develop a suitable way forward to incorporate language learning with their local school.

20 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Communities, *Submission 98*, p. 11.

State/Territory curricula

- 4.32 Several states and territories have included Indigenous languages in their curricula at different levels. The following section provides an overview of some of these Indigenous language components for some states and territories.

Queensland curriculum

- 4.33 The Committee received the following evidence in relation to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in the Queensland syllabus. At a public hearing in Brisbane the Committee was informed:

Very recently the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) developed two syllabus documents. The Queensland Studies Authority has responsibility for creating the syllabus for both state and non-state Queensland schools. QSA has created the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander syllabus, P-10 – that is, from prep through to year 10 – and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages: trial senior syllabus 2011, which is currently being trialled in the senior schools. This means that Queensland state schools can now teach traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as a language other than English, or LOTE. LOTE will become mandatory for all schools in 2012. The local school, along with the community, will decide what approach to take with that, but they will be required to teach a language other than English as part of their curriculum offerings, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is an option for those schools to fulfil that requirement.²¹

- 4.34 The Queensland Department of Education and Training submission detailed one of the ways this syllabus was being supported:

DET is supporting Queensland state schools to implement the syllabus and is in the process of developing support guidelines for Principals and is investigating other modes of support for implementation of the syllabus.²²

- 4.35 Within the Torres Strait, traditional languages are taught in both primary and secondary school classes, The TSRA understands that qualified

21 Queensland DET, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 October 2011, pp. 1-2.

22 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 15.

linguists and language speakers are employed by Education Queensland to provide these classes.²³

- 4.36 As discussed in the previous section the DET Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement provides the basis to assist Queensland educators and school communities to support the languages and cultures of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the school context.²⁴

New South Wales curriculum and other language support

- 4.37 The New South Wales (NSW) Aboriginal Languages K-12 Syllabus commenced in 2005 and has been developed in conjunction with the Aboriginal owners and custodians of each of the languages offered. The syllabus supports sequential learning and covers linguistic features of Aboriginal languages, grammatical structures, listening, reading, writing and speaking in an Aboriginal language, and an understanding of Aboriginal heritage and contemporary culture.
- 4.38 In its submission the Department of Aboriginal Affairs highlighted the figures for the number of students currently studying 13 Indigenous languages:
- In NSW in 2010, 7986 students, 1571 Aboriginal and 6415 non-Aboriginal students, undertook study in one of the 13 Aboriginal languages offered at one of 36 public schools. At TAFE, Certificate 1, 2 and 3 is offered in an Aboriginal language. The course commenced in 2007, and by 2011 532 students had undertaken one of these courses.²⁵
- 4.39 The NSW 2021 Plan, a ten year plan, recognises that Aboriginal people are disadvantaged across almost every social indicator and incorporates Aboriginal specific targets across all relevant goals.
- 4.40 Within the NSW 2021 Plan, the following goals specifically impact on the teaching of Aboriginal languages:
- Goal 15: Improve education and learning outcomes for all students includes the Aboriginal specific target: Halving the gap between NSW Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in reading and numeracy by 2018; and

23 Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), *Submission 146*, p. 9.

24 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 14.

25 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 17.

- Goal 26: Fostering opportunity and partnerships with Aboriginal People, establishes that a reinvigorated Aboriginal affairs strategy will be developed in conjunction with Aboriginal people, through a real and meaningful partnership.²⁶
- 4.41 Alongside the *NSW 2021 Plan* the NSW Government established a *NSW Aboriginal Languages Policy* in 2004. A five year *Aboriginal Languages Strategic Plan 2006-10* was developed after lengthy consultations with Aboriginal communities, and recognised the critical role of educational sector to the reclamation of Aboriginal languages. One of the four key result areas was Aboriginal Languages in the educational sector.
- 4.42 Through the Strategic Plan, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, has contributed more than \$1.4 million since 2005 to 78 community based language projects through the Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre.
- 4.43 The NSW Government's Aboriginal Education and Training Policy commits to the teaching of Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal studies and Aboriginal cross curriculum content. The Policy acknowledges the strength, diversity, ownership and richness of Aboriginal cultures, and custodianship of country are respected, valued and promoted. The Policy outlines the incorporation of cultural contexts, values and practices of local Aboriginal communities into the mainstream delivery of education and training.²⁷

Northern Territory curriculum

- 4.44 The Committee held a public hearing in Darwin and spoke with Northern Territory Minister Malarndirri McCarthy and other government representatives about the languages inquiry. Minister McCarthy informed the Committee that the Northern Territory was offering comprehensive Indigenous language curricula:

The Indigenous languages and culture curriculum is found in the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, the NTCF, including language maintenance and language revitalisation programs. The Northern Territory is the only Australian jurisdiction offering comprehensive Indigenous language curricula of this type. Under the new policy, each school can determine what the priority of

26 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 15.

27 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 17.

language learning is for the school and, in consultation with the community and the school, this can be achieved.²⁸

- 4.45 In relation to the Indigenous studies programs, DET continues to report against achievement of the Territory 2030 strategy requirement which states that:

By 2020 all Territory students will demonstrate achievement in Indigenous studies.' The Northern Territory's Indigenous studies modules, history and identity, support teachers to deliver these programs. Schools record Indigenous studies achievement data in a common repository.²⁹

- 4.46 Details of the Northern Territory language and culture programs were provided to the Committee:

In 2011, 60 government schools in the Northern Territory offered Indigenous language and culture programs of which there were 26 first language maintenance programs, seven to nine language revitalisation programs, 11 language renewal programs, 11 second language learning programs and two language awareness programs.

There are nine schools that received additional resources to deliver two-way or step programs offering home language learning programs and they are Areyonga, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Numbulwar, Shepherdson College, Willowra, Yirrkala, and Yuendumu. How often Indigenous language and culture programs are taught varies from school to school, but weekly programs of three to four hours is the average.³⁰

- 4.47 The Northern Territory Government has established an Indigenous Advisory Affairs Council (IAAC), which is a council made up of 16 to 18 members who are representative of the Northern Territory. The IAAC are providing advice to the Minister on developing a language policy which is yet to be completed. The Committee was informed of the IAAC vision:

By 2030, all Territorians will celebrate the diversity of our languages and cultures. We will walk and talk together in two worlds to achieve a healthy society which values respect, harmony and wellbeing.³¹

28 M McCarthy, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 2.

29 M McCarthy, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 2.

30 M McCarthy, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 2.

31 M McCarthy, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 8.

4.48 The Committee asked the Minister to comment on the significant amount of criticism regarding the Northern Territory's four hours of explicit English teaching policy that had been raised in many submissions. Minister McCarthy responded by commenting that her Government:

...have always maintained that Indigenous languages are essential in the Northern Territory to maintaining and looking at the revitalisation and the learning of languages. The decision that was taken to go to four hours English was focused on the clear fact that English was not being learnt, and the unfortunate side effect of that decision was that it was seen as a clear attack on language, which was certainly not the intent.³²

4.49 The Committee discusses the Northern Territory's four hours of explicit English teaching policy further in the latter part of this chapter under the section titled learning in first language.

4.50 Mr Barnes, CEO of the Northern Territory DET commented on the number of schools in remote locations in the Northern Territory:

We have got approximately 76 very remote schools for whom English is a second, third or fourth language, and in the vast majority of those schools – well over 70 of those – there is a form of bilingual education happening.³³

Western Australia curriculum

4.51 There has been a continuous and increasing presence of Aboriginal languages being taught in Western Australia public schools since 1992. Aboriginal languages have been part of the list of priority languages as part of the Western Australia (WA) Department of Education and Training LOTE (Languages Other Than English) Strategy. Aboriginal Languages are embedded as part of the Languages Learning Area.

4.52 The key goal for Aboriginal languages in Western Australian Department of Education is to:

- increase the levels of student achievement and participation rates in Aboriginal Languages Education

32 M McCarthy, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 3.

33 G Barnes, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 14.

- maintain a critical pool of highly skilled Aboriginal language teachers providing quality sustainable language programs in Department of Education schools.³⁴
- 4.53 The teaching of Aboriginal languages is a cooperative effort between the school and the Aboriginal community. The language (or languages) taught in the school and the language speakers are negotiated with the local Aboriginal community. A steady number of Aboriginal staff and some community members, who are language speakers, are undertaking the Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training course provided by the Department. These people graduate as qualified Aboriginal languages teachers with the skills to teach their language in a school environment.
- 4.54 In 2011 there were twenty Aboriginal languages being taught in fifty Western Australian public schools in remote, urban, rural and metropolitan areas to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. There were fifty-five Aboriginal Languages teachers and eight elders are teaching language to 7,246 students in Years K-12.³⁵
- 4.55 In Broome, the Committee was told about several schools in Western Australia that offer Indigenous language courses through to Year 10, 11 and 12:
- We have currently got one school where they have got the year 11 and 12 course of study run through the curriculum council. I am not sure of the numbers that have gone right through, but we have got another school in the Goldfields that is currently bringing on year 10s and then next year they will extend that to the year 11s and 12s. I know of a couple of people who have been through the year 11 and 12 course of study who have actually then looked at becoming trainee language teachers – it is that full circle.³⁶

Australian Curriculum

- 4.56 The Australian Curriculum is in the process of being developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in collaboration with a range of key stakeholders, communities and individuals. The aim of the Australian Curriculum is to ensure consistency of curriculum content across all states and territories in Australia.

34 Kimberley Education Regional Office, Western Australia Department of Education, *Submission 117*, p. 1.

35 Kimberley Education Regional Office, Western Australia Department of Education, *Submission 117*, p. 1.

36 L Jones, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 11.

Implementation of Phase 1 of the Australia Curriculum began in 2011 and is due to be fully implemented across all states and territories by 2014. Phase 1 includes English, mathematics, science and history.

- 4.57 The Australian Curriculum sets out what all young people should be taught through the specification of curriculum content and the learning expected at points in their schooling through the specification of achievement standards.
- 4.58 The Australian Curriculum includes a focus on seven general capabilities:
- Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - information and communication technology competence
 - critical and creative thinking
 - ethical behaviour
 - personal and social competence and intercultural understanding, and
 - three cross-curriculum priorities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and Sustainability.
- These have been embedded where relevant and appropriate in each learning area and can be viewed explicitly in the curriculum online.³⁷
- 4.59 The inclusion of Aboriginal studies in the curriculum provides an Indigenous perspective across all core subject areas. This inclusion has significant potential to inform all students of the histories and cultures of Indigenous Australians, to raise interest in learning an Aboriginal language, and to offer the value to all Australians of Indigenous languages.
- 4.60 Through the Australian Curriculum, Aboriginal Languages will be offered as a language option. The inclusion of Aboriginal languages recognises the potential benefits for all Australians of learning an Aboriginal language. It operates from the fundamental principle that for all students, learning to communicate in two or more languages is a rich, challenging experience of engaging with and participating in the linguistic and cultural diversity of our interconnected world.
- 4.61 ACARA noted that the option of choosing Aboriginal languages in the Australian Curriculum offers both opportunities and challenges. Teaching Aboriginal languages requires a substantial investment in resources to

37 ACARA, *The Australian Curriculum*
<www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Overview> accessed 6 August 2012.

respond to the need for language research, documentation and development of a range of language learning materials. ACARA commented that:

...the potential benefits of such an investment are likely to be widespread and profound, providing crucial support to Aboriginal communities' language revival efforts at a critical time.

ACARA informed the Committee that extensive collaboration and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities had occurred in relation to the Australian Curriculum.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and academics contributed to development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority, providing advice on its inclusion within the Australian Curriculum learning areas/subjects and in curriculum writing activities.³⁸

- 4.62 Face-to-face consultation meetings were held across Australia specifically focussing on the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. Invitations were sent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and community members and extended through State and Territory Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies and Education Authorities. A total of 230 people attended these consultation forums.
- 4.63 ACARA informed the Committee that the development of a Framework for Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages is underway as part of the first stage of development of the Australian Curriculum: Languages. Programs types to be developed include:
- first language maintenance and development
 - second language learning, and
 - language revival (including language revitalisation, language renewal, and language reclamation).
- 4.64 The Framework will elaborate on the program types, content, and achievement standards related to each, as well as the protocols that must be followed in decision-making in learning and teaching Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.
-

38 ACARA, *The Australian Curriculum*
<www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Overview> accessed 6 August 2012.

- 4.65 There will be some examples of how the Framework is realised in specific languages for each program-type. Language-specific curriculum development will be undertaken by state/territory jurisdictions in consultation with the relevant communities.³⁹
- 4.66 ACARA has released a shape paper, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* that provides broad directions for the development of languages curriculum. Writing of languages curriculum is underway beginning with F-10 Chinese and Italian and a Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages.⁴⁰
- 4.67 The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages is due for completion by the end of 2013.⁴¹
- 4.68 During the inquiry the Committee received evidence that supported the incorporation of languages into the Australian Curriculum currently being developed by ACARA.
- 4.69 The Association of Independent Schools SA (AISSA) commented:
- The place of Languages in the education programs of schools is currently a focus of debate as the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) progressively develops the Australian Curriculum. The place of Language Learning in Indigenous communities should be an integral element of this debate.⁴²
- 4.70 The South Australia Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS) notes that in the 'Draft Shape Paper of the Australian Curriculum: Languages' (Draft Shape Paper) the term 'Australian languages' is used to designate the languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The Draft Paper additionally states that the inclusion of Indigenous languages will:
- meet the needs and rights of young people to learn about their own identity
 - assist young people to understand and develop a deep appreciation of their culture, language, land and country.
 - contribute to the wellbeing of young people.⁴³

39 ACARA, *Submission 151*, pp. 3-4.

40 'F' stands for Foundation year, ie kindergarten or prep.

41 ACARA, *The Australian Curriculum*

<www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Overview> accessed 6 August 2012.

42 Association of Independent Schools SA, *Submission 10*, p. 1.

43 SACCS, *Submission 15*, p. 1.

4.71 SACCS supports these premises and acknowledges the numerous benefits of including Indigenous languages in the curriculum, particularly in early education through a focus on oral communication.

4.72 SACCS recognizes that particular attention needs to be given to the inclusion of Indigenous languages in schools. The implementation of programs that encourage the maintenance of Indigenous languages and the recruitment and employment of Indigenous educators to effectively undertake this role is a pertinent and complex dilemma, most specifically in urban settings. Indigenous Languages policy writers will need to work closely with Aboriginal communities and educational institutions to ensure engagement in decision making for the provision of effective outcomes in this arena.⁴⁴

4.73 This position was reiterated in a submission from the Catholic Education office, Lismore which stated:

Including indigenous languages in the school curriculum contributes to the Indigenous students' social and emotional welling by developing their sense of self (being) and their connectedness to the school (belonging). The provision of language teachers from the local community provide realistic and achievable role models (becoming).⁴⁵

4.74 The following concerns were highlighted in a submission about the content of the Australian Curriculum:

There are concerns that Aboriginal content may not be sufficiently covered, with the Stolen Generations and other key issues not a compulsory component of Aboriginal history. The number of hours allocated to the Australian History curriculum in junior high school, which includes Aboriginal history, has also been raised as a concern, with 50 hours allocated for this subject that was initially intended to cover 70-80 hours a year.

In addition, the level at which Aboriginal studies is introduced and maintained through the grade years is not evenly spread from early primary onwards, with age appropriate resources, but is weighted to the latter years of high school.⁴⁶

44 South Australia Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS), *Submission 15*, pp. 1-2.

45 Diocese of Lismore, Catholic Education Office, *Submission 86*, p. 4.

46 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Department of Education and Communities, *Submission 98*, p. 18.

Committee comment

- 4.75 The Committee is pleased that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures will be embedded now within the Australian Curriculum where appropriate. This will be informative for all students and will contribute towards an improved understanding and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- 4.76 It appears that ACARA has undertaken broad consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop the shape paper, *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* from which the Framework for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages component will be written. The Committee keenly awaits the development of the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages due for completion by the end of 2013.
- 4.77 The Committee impresses the need to incorporate flexibility into the Australian Curriculum Languages Framework to allow for Indigenous communities to work with schools in this area and to assist in the development of teaching resources and the training of local Indigenous language teachers.
- 4.78 The Committee notes that the Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages is due to be completed by 2013 but does not have an implementation date or phase in schedule. In the interim, the Committee believes the Commonwealth Government should continue to support where possible Indigenous language learning in schools with Indigenous students who speak an Indigenous language other than Standard Australian English.
- 4.79 The Committee strongly supports the development of the Framework and its inclusion in the Australian Curriculum. Given the importance placed on these initiatives by Indigenous communities, the Committee considers there would be value in specifying dates for the proposed implementation of the Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages on its website.

Recommendation 11 - Indigenous language learning in school

- 4.80 **The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government coordinate with the states and territories to announce dates for the implementation of Phase 2 of the Australian Curriculum.**

Early childhood language learning

- 4.81 The Commonwealth Government recognises that quality early childhood education is critical to ensuring young children have opportunities for early learning, socialisation and development. As a result one of the Closing the Gap targets is committed to ensuring all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education by 2013.
- 4.82 In May 2012 the Committee visited the Halls Creek Children and Family Centre which was set up under the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement. The Committee was impressed that Indigenous language learning was encouraged in the childcare centre.
- 4.83 The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) discussed with the Committee several initiatives that the Commonwealth Government is funding to provide early childhood support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:
- The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Parents Project - PaCE project on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory. The Early Childhood Language and Literacy Parents Project is being delivered by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) working closely with parents, carers and community members of Umbakumba, Angurugu and Milyakburra. The project includes the delivery of workshops that teach parents foundational preliteracy and language learning platforms that they can use to support the early learning of their children. The project runs from April 2010 – December 2012 and supports parents, carers and community members to stimulate children's early developmental language and pre-literacy skills so that they are ready to learn and thrive when they start Pre-school or transition to formal schooling.
 - The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) - The Australian Government has committed \$32.5 million over five years (2008-2012) to roll-out the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) to 50 communities nationally and support around 3,000 families. The ability to adapt HIPPY to individual community needs is central in ensuring participating children, parents and carers successfully complete the program. Adaptations to the program may include:
 - ⇒ employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tutors, and

- ⇒ flexibility in the mode of delivery and taking time to break down concepts and stories. For example in group settings over an extended period rather than the usual 30 minute individual family session; program delivery in a mix of English and traditional language; inclusion of extended family/ clan members in program delivery; and inclusion of translated materials.⁴⁷
- 4.84 There is a building momentum to ensure that Indigenous languages are recognised and incorporated in early education such as childcare centres and preschool or preparatory (Foundation) years.
- 4.85 International research has shown that early childhood Aboriginal language and cultural programs lead to increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, reduced drop-out rates and better proficiency in reading skills in both the Indigenous language and English.⁴⁸
- 4.86 Early learning experiences through playgroups, child care and kindergarten, rich in both home languages, (ie contact or traditional languages and Standard Australian English) can support early literacy and numeracy outcomes and the transition into school.
- 4.87 The Committee received evidence that supported this concept of valuing Indigenous languages in early education:
- Early childhood is an incredible time, of learning about their world and their place in it, for all young students. It is a time to enrich and develop language skills. It follows then, that for those children who have an Indigenous mother tongue, this important early learning time should be in their first language. Quality bilingual/ multilingual maintenance programs will introduce and develop English skills through planned, supportive ESL lessons.⁴⁹
- 4.88 At a public hearing in Brisbane, the Queensland Department of Education and Training (Queensland DET) discussed with the Committee what is being done to incorporate Indigenous languages in early education.
- Foundations for Success* is the teaching guidelines for the pre-prep program for 3½- to four-year-olds in 35 remote Indigenous communities. It is a guideline for teaching staff that embeds in it as one of its key principles the importance of recognising home language as a foundational understanding and as a bridge to

47 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Submission 131*, p. 14.

48 TSRA, *Submission 146*, p. 8.

49 Trevor Stockley, *Submission 62*, pp. 9-10.

students learning Australian standard English early on in their preschool career.⁵⁰

- 4.89 The Queensland Government is committed to enhancing pre-Prep programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to better prepare them for school through the implementation of DET's *Foundations for Success* guidelines.
- 4.90 *Foundations for Success* assists educators to plan, implement, document and reflect on a holistic early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children before the preparatory year in Queensland. The guidelines include significant principles and advice regarding language:

Foundations for success provides educators with strategies to support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to move between their home, an early learning program and school. It helps children develop strong foundations with both the culture/s and language/s of their family and of the wider world, allowing them to move fluently across cultures without compromising their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.

Educators promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's ongoing first language/s development by including adult first language speakers within the program at every opportunity. The program is language-based, rich in shared and sustained conversation and resources to support the development of children's first language/s in parallel with their developing awareness about Standard Australian English (SAE) as a second or additional language.⁵¹

- 4.91 Language is a key factor influencing the educational challenges facing many Indigenous children. Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group noted that:

... if we ignore the fact that children are not being offered the connection between the spoken language of their home with a set of matching resources in preschool and early school years, we are condemning them to a life of severe educational disadvantage.⁵²

50 C Gorman, Queensland DET, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 October 2011, p. 2.

51 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 7.

52 Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

Language Nests

4.92 An effective means of including language and culture into early education is through Language Nests.

4.93 Language Nests are pre-schools or crèches that are run by local Indigenous language speakers. Children attending the Language Nests are immersed in the local language and culture.

4.94 A submission from the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD) described Language Nests and the benefits of them:

Typically, a small group of children comes together in a family atmosphere through the week to be cared for by older people who are speakers of the target language. Bringing together the grandparent and grandchild generations in a home---like environment replicates or repairs intergenerational transmission. Language nest programs also typically require parents to commit to learn the language alongside their young children. This is one of the most effective components of the program and one which differentiates it from school language learning programs. It ensures that the children enrolled in the language nest can continue to use the language they are learning within the home and community.⁵³

4.95 The Social Justice Report 2009 supported the use of language nests and made the following comment about resourcing them effectively:

Establishing language nests requires the coordination of policy and resources over a number of portfolio areas across the state, territory and Commonwealth governments. Language Nests require complementary policy in the areas of early childhood services, employment services for Indigenous language speakers, training for elders and community members if required, and possibly infrastructure development resourcing. Initiating this activity goes well beyond applying for a grant from the Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records (MILR) program.⁵⁴

4.96 The NILS report discussed the benefits of Language Nests:

Focusing on Language Nests for pre-schoolers is important because they reach children at the time when they are most

53 RNLD, *Submission 130*, p. 7.

54 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Social Justice Report 2009*, p. 74.

receptive to learning languages. Language Nests are also important because they are institutions that sit between schools and communities and can help to bring the two together.⁵⁵

4.97 The teaching of Aboriginal languages to pre-school children has been occurring over a number of years in NSW, on the central coast through the Many Rivers Language Centre and through the Gugaga Childcare Centre in La Perouse, among others. These language programs have proved very successful, with Aboriginal Elders teaching at the pre-schools and the development of age appropriate resources, such as naming body parts and stories in language, as an introduction to Aboriginal language and culture. These pre-schools report benefits for Aboriginal children who develop an increased sense of pride, language and numeracy recognition and improved social interaction skills.⁵⁶

4.98 Language Nests are operating internationally and the Indigenous language programs in Australia expose children in early childhood to Indigenous language learning, stories and culture, as a key strategy to prevent language loss. Language Nests immerse young children in language use through play and activities when children are young and most adaptable to language uptake.

4.99 Margaret Florey from the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity, (RNLD) was very passionate about the successful nature of Language Nests in other countries:

... we have really strong evidence from other settings that both the master-apprentice model and the language nest model are effective in recreating intergenerational transmission of languages.⁵⁷

4.100 RNLD informed the Committee that in the past very few language nests have been set up in Australia. The reason for this is that people need to be trained adequately before Language Nests can be successfully established. In early 2012, RNLD organised for two intensive master-apprentice workshops to be run to train people wishing to teach their Indigenous language. RNLD commented:

55 Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (AIATSIS) and the Federation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture (FATSILC), *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report 2005*, p. 114.

56 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 9.

57 M Florey, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 February 2012, p. 8.

We are bringing 36 Aboriginal people from right around the country to two workshops – one in Alice Springs and one in Kununurra – to pilot the master-apprentice program. The American trainers who founded the model are coming to train people to become trainers in master-apprentice and then to be able to go out and to train other people in their regions in the master-apprentice model. That is what I hope we will do with the language nest model to intensively train a large number of people from right around Australia in setting up the model, together with the second-language classes for adults.⁵⁸

- 4.101 There was abundant evidence from the United States and New Zealand attesting to the benefit associated with teaching Indigenous languages in early childhood.⁵⁹ In New Zealand, Language Nests are attributed with averting the loss of the Maori language in a generation, with 19 percent of Maori youth aged between 15 and 24 are now able to speak the Maori language te reo Maori.
- 4.102 The success of the Language Nest program is further supported in Hawai'i, where Pu'nana Leo, the key language body, established Language Nests in pre-schools in 1980 when less than 40 Hawaiian children were able to speak their language. Through the establishment of Language Nests by 2009 the number of children speaking language had increased to 2000.⁶⁰

Committee comment

- 4.103 The Committee believes that Language Nests are a practical way of ensuring that Indigenous languages are maintained and revitalised, regardless of whether they be classified as traditional/heritage, or a contact language.
- 4.104 Further benefits include employment and capacity building with Indigenous communities. Language Nests can improve early childhood learning outcomes and bring wider benefits for the participating community and for the use of the language. The returns of Language Nests are many as they encourage the continuation of the language as well as empowering adults and elders in the community to come together with younger members of the community to learn their Indigenous language.

58 M Florey, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 February 2012, p. 8.

59 Australian Federation of Graduate Women, *Submission 47*, p. 2,

60 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 9.

- 4.105 The Committee is aware that Language Nests have been used in other countries as best practice for maintenance and revitalisation of Indigenous languages. The Committee recommends that language nest programs be resourced throughout Australia by the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Language Support program as well as by state and territory governments and the non-government sector where possible.

Recommendation 12 – Language Nests

- 4.106 **The Committee recommends that the Office for the Arts, through the Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program, prioritise funding for Language Nest programs throughout Australia.**

The Committee further recommends that the Commonwealth Government give consideration to establishing Language Nest programs in early childhood learning centres and preschools as set up under National Partnership Agreements.

Identifying first languages

- 4.107 It is well known that for many Indigenous students first attending school, English is not their first language. When a teacher is faced with a class full of students who may represent a variety of language groups, or even a class of students with most speaking English only and one or two with poor English skills, it is too easy for non English speakers to be left behind. Educators recognise that every student starts school at a different level of learning, however little recognition is given to identifying a child's first language and beginning their education from that point.
- 4.108 Identifying languages is important for all students. Particularly in the early school years however it is essential for any new student to the school to be assessed.
- 4.109 Accurate information about and particular acknowledgement of the creoles and varieties of Aboriginal English spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must inform the development and implementation of all educational programs and initiatives for these students.⁶¹

61 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 20.

4.110 The Queensland representatives from the Department of Education and Training (DET) commented that sometimes a contact language can be mistaken for poor English. At a public hearing they stated:

... understanding the language varieties that students speak is helpful. If you are thinking that students are speaking a bad form of English, the way you might deal with that situation would be totally different to the way you would deal with it if you understood that the student actually had a full and complete language and needed to be taught Australian standard English explicitly and as a second language learner in order to access the curriculum.⁶²

Committee comment

4.111 The Committee encourages the Government to meet the Closing the Gap targets to ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years. Whilst this is an important target it is not good enough to provide access to early childhood education if the Indigenous students and their families are not well understood. Recognising first languages and developing appropriate teaching strategies and learning environments are essential to engaging Indigenous students and the community from the critical early years.

4.112 International and Australian research indicates that Indigenous students will have improved educational outcomes overall if first languages are identified and incorporated into the learning environment in the early years of education.

4.113 The Committee was concerned to hear that at times teachers do not recognise that some Indigenous students are speaking Aboriginal English and confuse it with a poor form of Standard Australian English. A greater awareness of Indigenous languages and their current use should be brought to the attention of the teaching community as well as included in teacher training. Teacher training is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.114 The Committee believes it is essential for all Indigenous students to be given a first language assessment in order to determine what language skills young Indigenous students have when entering early childhood education. Further learning can then build on a child's existing knowledge and understanding, rather than alienating the child from learning and understanding.

62 C Gorman, Queensland DET, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 6 October 2011, p. 3.

- 4.115 The Committee was impressed with the Queensland Department of Education and Training's work in the field of Indigenous early education, including the *Foundations for Success* program and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Statement*.
- 4.116 The *Foundations for Success* program acknowledges the importance of culture and language that families and children bring to school and encourages first languages to be included in early education. The Committee considers that States and Territory education departments should consider developing similar programs such as *Foundations for Success*.
- 4.117 Noting the importance of making early learning a positive experience and of understanding the prior learning of a student the Committee recommends that mandatory first-language assessments be carried out for Indigenous students entering early childhood education.

Recommendation 13 - First language assessment

- 4.118 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education work through the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood to develop protocols for mandatory first-language assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering early childhood education.**
- 4.119 Following on from this recommendation, if an Indigenous child's first language is other than Standard Australian English then the methods of teaching must be adjusted to create the appropriate learning environment. Teaching methods, such as using English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D). Appropriate training for teachers to meet the special needs of EAL/D learning is discussed in Chapter 5.

English as an Additional Language (EAL/D)

- 4.120 Learning English as an Additional language/dialect (EAL/D) has been referred to frequently throughout the inquiry using different names including: ESL, English as a Second Language and LOTE learning, Language Other Than English. However it is now recognised that ESL is not always an accurate descriptor since English is often the third or fourth language being acquired, as is the case for some Indigenous language speakers. The terms EAL/D, ESL and LOTE learning are used interchangeably within this report.

- 4.121 The 2006 Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)⁶³ report identified a lack of this specialist instruction at the centre of the educational achievement gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Disproportionate numbers of Indigenous students do not meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7 – results are generally about 20 percent below the national average. Of grave concern is the fact that the proportion of Indigenous students who meet these benchmarks drops significantly from Year 3 to Year 7. Research attributes this drop to the difference between the acquisition of basic interpersonal communication skills in a new language (which takes about two years) and academic language proficiency (which takes around seven years). From preschool to Year 3, most learning is based on acquiring interpersonal communication skills. At Year 4, the focus changes to the acquisition of academic language proficiency. *Without second language or dialect instruction at this point, students fall behind at increasing rates.* Lack of academic achievement and loss of confidence in these early years mean that most Indigenous students never catch up.⁶⁴

- 4.122 The EAL/D support materials developed by ACARA to complement the Australian Curriculum in all learning areas will assist mainstream teachers in Australian schools to understand the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, skills and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and to address their linguistic and socio-cultural learning needs.⁶⁵

- 4.123 The Queensland Department of Education has been doing considerable research on ESL learning in various communities. DET's Northern Indigenous Schooling Support Unit has a Language Perspectives Team that consists of teachers and linguists. The team conducts research on second language acquisition and vernacular languages, supports schools with building capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners, implements projects, including the Bridging the Language Gap project, and offers professional development.

63 MCEEYA is now called the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). It comprises state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers with responsibility for these areas. SCSEEC is one of twelve Standing Councils established under new Council of Australian Governments arrangements.

64 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 8.

65 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 31.

- 4.124 The Queensland Department of Education listed in its submission the English as a Second Language / English as a Second Dialect Procedure. It stated ‘This procedure has been developed to provide a clear definition of ESL learners and outline the responsibilities of schools and regions. It is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL/D learners.’⁶⁶
- 4.125 The Language Perspectives team informed the Committee of the following case studies highlighting the significant need for EAL/D teaching instruction:
- *White Rock Longitudinal Study* has revealed that many Indigenous students at this urban primary school in far north Queensland are ESL learners, despite enrolment data indicating otherwise. Now in its 4th year, it is showing positive correlations between Indigenous students’ level of spoken SAE and their results in standardised tests. Furthermore, most Indigenous ESL students are not attaining levels of SAE sufficient for accessing classroom learning independently and are therefore dependent on teacher knowledge and skills to teach the “language load” of classroom concepts and content.
 - *Woree State High School Study* demonstrated that there are many “hidden ESL learners”, especially with Indigenous language backgrounds in this urban high school in far north Queensland. Students whose families and communities have experienced language shift to creoles and related varieties (which often have no standardised nomenclature) require language awareness in order to be able to self-declare their language backgrounds. Many of the identified ESL learners were at Bandscale levels in speaking and writing where they would not be able to actively and independently participate in classroom learning through SAE without considerable language support from teachers.
 - *Bundamba State High School study* showed how ESL learners at beginning and intermediate levels (Bandscale levels 1-2 and 3-4 respectively) have literacy pathways which are clearly differentiated from L1 SAE speakers’ in terms of vocabulary counts, quantity, errors and features of syntactic complexity. ESL learners begin to overlap with lower literacy SAE speakers’ pathways at consolidating levels (Bandscale levels 5-6), where both groups of learners require focussed teaching of complex language in order to express complex ideas powerfully. This study also revealed many potentially “hidden ESL learners” in this metropolitan high school, as well as many identifiable

66 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 13.

ESL students who had not attained levels of SAE sufficient to access classroom learning without significant language teaching.⁶⁷

- 4.126 SACCS considers it a social justice issue that Indigenous Australians are supported to develop English language fluency in rigorous English as Second Language (ESL) programs alongside literacy/ies in first language/s.

In communities where English is a second language or dialect, we promote educational models akin to those offered for migrant children in New Arrivals programs. This requires a language based curriculum delivered by teachers who have expertise in ESL teaching and learning. These programs are essential to the success of both multi-lingual programs, and post-school transitions for Indigenous people who work and function across multiple cultures.⁶⁸

- 4.127 A study by Daly, Rural Outcomes of Schooling Research Project Report, examined what strategies were characteristic of the rural schools that performed at a higher level than others in state-wide tests. The Report highlighted the need to build positive relationships between school and community, build student self confidence and engage Aboriginal students through the use of culture. The teaching of Aboriginal language as a language other than English (LOTE) was a key strategy:

An Aboriginal language as LOTE for all students in Year 8, taught by an Aboriginal elder, is an effective community interaction that seemed to have a strong influence on the learning, ..[of the] whole community.⁶⁹

- 4.128 The Committee was told that an accurate understanding and reporting of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language backgrounds is crucial to any plan to improve educational outcomes for these students:

In the Northern Territory, for example, several dozen different traditional/heritage languages are in active use by Aboriginal people, who constitute approximately 30 percent of the territory's total population of 200,000 and up to 49 percent of the population in remote and very remote areas.

67 Queensland DET, *Submission 109*, p. 13.

68 SACCS, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

69 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Community, *Submission 98*, p. 6.

The dominant or only language of the majority of Aboriginal children entering Northern Territory schools is any one or more of these languages and/or a variety of Aboriginal English and/or an Aboriginal creole. All remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory are thus operating in bilingual and bicultural contexts because that is the nature of the students in the communities they serve. In addition to this, in a number of multilingual communities there is an expectation that, as they grow older, Aboriginal young people will maintain, learn and/or become fluent in one or more of these traditional/heritage languages as well as English.⁷⁰

Committee comment

- 4.129 The Committee strongly supports the need for schools and teachers to identify all students who need EAL/D support when entering the education system. This is important for teachers to be aware of Indigenous students who may have Kriol or an Aboriginal contact language as their first language as in the past such languages have been misunderstood to be poor forms of English. As a result, specific EAL/D teaching methods have not been implemented for these students resulting in poorer educational outcomes.
- 4.130 The issue of Both Ways learning and partnerships arises again in this section. Indigenous families should be encouraged to meet with the school before enrolling the student to discuss the child's first language background and form a partnership with the school to be aware of and support learning strategies.
- 4.131 The Committee believes it is critical for all Indigenous students attending school with English as an additional language to be taught using EAL/D methodologies. Where possible the Committee supports bilingual teaching for Indigenous communities in the first language and supported by EAL/D teaching strategies.

Improving learning outcomes

- 4.132 While EAL/D recognition and resources are important the Committee received substantial evidence about the value of continuing Indigenous language learning in order to improve overall learning outcomes.
-

70 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 8.

- 4.133 The Committee received a plethora of evidence supporting the benefits of including Indigenous languages in education. The evidence and witnesses informed the Committee that by understanding and recognising the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Indigenous children, education departments are in a better position to provide appropriate support for these students. The research has demonstrated that it is critical to implement relevant support for children and families in the early years of education as engagement and continuous attendance is vital in the early years in order to increase retention rates in the latter schooling years.
- 4.134 The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) stressed that ‘The active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ languages and cultures by teachers and educational authorities, within educational curricula, and through the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, are essential to students’ wellbeing and success at school.’⁷¹
- 4.135 In a submission ACTA commented that effective educational policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must entail:
- accurate identification and acknowledgement of students actual linguistic and cultural backgrounds
 - the explicit valuing of the skills, knowledge and understandings they bring from these backgrounds to the classroom
 - provision for empathetic and ongoing consultation and negotiation with local communities and elders, and for their collaboration, input and participation in the development and implementation of school curricula
 - distinctive, differentiated and expert second language pedagogies and assessment programs designed to address the specific needs of the diverse cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.⁷²
- 4.136 In a joint submission from a number of Indigenous educators, the value of recognising and supporting Indigenous languages was supported:
- As experienced educators in Indigenous Education, we believe that when the mother tongue is valued and recognized, school can become a place where children explore and extend their cultural

71 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 19.

72 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 32.

understandings, while they begin to learn English and the knowledge regarded as important by the Australian society.⁷³

- 4.137 Another joint submission discussed the benefits of Indigenous children learning in their mother tongue:

We must give our children in Wadeye and the Thamarrurr region the opportunity to receive quality education. Our people are strong in culture and many languages are spoken in the community and back in the Homelands of the different clans. We dream, think and communicate in our daily lives through our language.

At OLSH Thamarrurr Catholic School we now have a 'culture centre' called DA NGIMALMIN FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY CENTRE. It's a place of significance in the centre of the school where our old people come to teach our children our way of life. Teaching the children about people and the relationship to each other, traditional dance and songs, stories, land, name of animals and plants, the universe, art and craft and the list goes on. The culture centre fits in well with what the teachers are doing in the Early Years. We know it will form a very strong foundation for our children's learning and hope that by strengthening education in the first language will make learning in the English language easier. Children will enjoy coming to school every day to learn. (Tobias Ngardinithi Nganbe and Gemma Alanga Nganbe, Personal communication, August 21, 2011)⁷⁴

- 4.138 Language education for Indigenous adults was raised with the Committee. A submission suggested that further education for Indigenous adults would be beneficial in bridging the divide between Indigenous adults and their children and hence could assist with 'Two way' learning strategies. Why Warriors Pty Ltd and the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development (AHED) project stated:

If Indigenous children are being taught English then it would be beneficial for Indigenous adults with limited English proficiency to attend adult classes. Some of these classes would specialise in areas such as Science, technology, areas that have progressed tremendously in the last 50 years.

Because most of the knowledge that children are learning in school is new knowledge, that is, dominant culture knowledge which is

73 K Gale, B Graham and C Grimes, *Submission 19*, p. 2.

74 B Devlin and M Christie, *Submission 81*, pp. 3-4

new to the local Yolngu culture, there tends to be a gap between what the child is learning and what the parent and senior leaders of their Clan know. At times the worldview of the parents will clash with the knowledge received in the classroom across a range of different subjects. For example, children learning about microscopic organisms, germs and bacteria in the classroom may be re-educated by their family.⁷⁵

Learning in first language

4.139 The Committee received many submissions which supported the idea that Indigenous students should be taught in their first language. The submissions described what had been tried in Australia in the past and what is being taught currently by way of bilingual education in some schools in the Northern Territory. There was a strong emphasis on the international research that supports the notion of better educational outcomes for children learning at school initially in their first Indigenous language.

4.140 A report published by the World Bank in 2006 supported the need to teach in first language, stating:

Children learn better if they understand the language spoken in school. This is a straightforward observation borne out by study after study (Thomas and Collier, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Patrinos and Velez, 1996; Walter, 2003). Even the important goal of learning a second language is facilitated by starting with a language the children already know. Cummins (2000) and others provide convincing evidence of the principle of interdependence – that second language learning is helped, not hindered by first language study. This leads to a simple axiom: the first language is the language of learning. It is by far the easiest way for children to interact with the world. And when the language of learning and the language of instruction do not match, learning difficulties are bound to follow.⁷⁶

4.141 The Research Centre for Languages and Culture (RCLC) brought to the Committee's attention International research evidence of best policy and practice of languages in education for Indigenous Peoples. The RCLC

75 Why Warriors Pty Ltd and the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development (AHED) project, *Submission 37*, p. 7.

76 Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL), *Submission 60*, Attachment 1, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Why and how*

Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education. In relation to this study RCLC commented:

An evidence- and practice-based policy advocacy brief (Ouane and Glanz 2010) draws on the most recent evidence which indicates why and how indigenous languages need to be used, maintained and strengthened in education. While this research has been directed towards Africa, the research data, theoretical underpinnings, and scenario-setting would be useful for Australian considerations.⁷⁸

4.142 In its submission the Australian Society for Indigenous Languages (AuSIL) commented:

there is over 60 years of research around the world and in Australia to support the fact that early education in one's first language is the key to educational success in multilingual societies. As counter-intuitive as it might seem, this also results improved proficiency in second languages such as Standard English.⁷⁹

4.143 AuSIL provided an attachment to its submission which highlighted the following benefits of educating children initially in their own language and transitioning them to the national language. These three points below are a subset of a longer list and were read out to the Committee during a public hearing in Darwin by Kendall Trudgen:

- Children LEARN BETTER. This is supported by study after study.
- Children in rural and/or marginalised populations STAY IN SCHOOL LONGER.
- Children in rural and/or marginalised populations REACH HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION overall.⁸⁰

4.144 Further support for a bilingual approach to education for Indigenous students suggested that wherever possible, all such children would be best served by a model of schooling that:

- values and uses their mother tongue and the knowledge encoded in that language as the starting point for their formal schooling

77 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

78 Research Centre for Languages and Culture (RCLC), *Submission 44*, p. 2.

79 AuSIL, *Submission 60*, p. 3.

80 AuSIL, *Submission 60*, Attachment 1, p. 7.

- demonstrates to the community that their way of being and knowing is valued and that the schooling offered will add on to what the children bring with them and not discard it or subtract from it
- develops literacy in the mother tongue before doing so in English
- continues Indigenous language and cultural studies as a highly valued strand of the total education program, leading to the development of translation, interpreting and other highly developed language skills [supporting the objectives of the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership]
- develops an appropriate curriculum for the teaching of all aspects of English, Mathematics and other mainstream studies, and
- attracts and maintains a body of teachers from both cultures who are specialists in teaching Indigenous children in a bilingual/bicultural setting.⁸¹

4.145 In a submission from Greg Dickson, a linguist from the Australian National University with many years experience working with Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, he described the meaning of bilingual education:

Bilingual education programs are structured programs using two languages of instruction. One of the two languages will be the students' mother tongue, or first language. The other language is the 'target' language – usually a national or regional language of importance.⁸²

4.146 His submission briefly outlined the history of bilingual education and the controversy that surrounds it:

[Bilingual education] is an approach that was embraced and strongly supported by many Indigenous communities when offered to them in the 1970s and 1980s. Indigenous people and communities responded by drastically increasing the number of qualified Indigenous teachers and transformed schools into culturally-appropriate places of learning for their children. Bilingual education programs featuring Indigenous language have always been somewhat controversial. Critics of such programs seem to struggle ideologically with notions of giving Indigenous languages such a core role in education. Such views are linked to

81 K Gale, B Graham and C Grimes, *Submission 57*, p. 3.

82 G Dickson, *Submission 125*, p. 5.

the general lack of value placed on Indigenous languages on a national level.⁸³

- 4.147 The Committee received many submissions that were critical of the Northern Territory's education policy that dismantled several bilingual education programs in 2008. The following submission outlines when the Northern Territory introduced the First Four Hours policy and the negative impacts that were observed in some schools:

Bilingual education in the Northern Territory has had a difficult history. In 2008, a significant move was made by the Northern Territory Government which has essentially ended its 37- year history. In 2008, the Northern Government announced the Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours, heavily restricting the use of Indigenous languages in education, in particular, seriously limiting their use as language of instruction and also limiting Indigenous language literacy practices.

The policy has been criticised widely by politicians, educators, Indigenous leaders, Indigenous language speakers, linguists and human rights advocates. The introduction of the First Four Hours policy has coincided with a decline in attendance in most former bilingual schools despite recent policies developed by Federal and Territory governments designed to improve attendance. The First Four Hours policy has diminished the role that Aboriginal educators play in the education system and has not led to an obvious improvement in student outcomes. Note that many studies, including some carried out in the Northern Territory, show that bilingual education programs can lead to improved student outcomes in all areas.⁸⁴

- 4.148 Statements supporting bilingual education and the use of Indigenous languages in education from Aboriginal educators across Northern Territory were shared with the Committee. The following quotations provided by Greg Dickson highlight the point that bilingual education supports the national language and the mother tongue or additional language:

What we want is both-way teaching in the school – not only for two hours a week but everyday there should be both-way teaching... That policy of speaking English only at the school is the wrong thing – it is not good for our children ... they will forget

83 G Dickson, *Submission 125*, p. 5.

84 G Dickson, *Submission 125*, pp. 5-6.

their language (Rembarrnga speaker Miliwanga Sandy (Beswick Community) in Gosford 2009).

I am a qualified bilingual teacher... I speak several Yolŋu matha languages and English fluently. I have thirty-two years teaching experience... I have been told that I am not allowed to use the children's language anymore... I already know that the children won't understand what I'm saying, they will laugh at me, and they may even misbehave because they'll be bored and won't know what the lessons are about... What a strange role model I will be, a bilingual Yolŋu teacher, using only one of my languages! ... The decision to make English the only important language in our schools will only make the situation for our young people worse as they struggle to be proud Yolŋu in a world that is making them feel that their culture is bad, unimportant and irrelevant in the contemporary world (Yunupingu 2010: 24-25).⁸⁵

4.149 There is research that shows 'a number of studies, from the Northern Territory and internationally, provide evidence that bilingual education programs achieve higher outcomes than non-bilingual programs in similar settings.'⁸⁶

4.150 Brian Devlin worked as a teacher-linguist at Yirrkala for three years and discussed with the Committee the benefits of bilingual education for Indigenous Australians. Dr Devlin is now an Associate Professor, Bilingual Education and Applied Linguistics at Charles Darwin University. He commented:

I worked as teacher-linguist at Yirrkala. During that time, the bilingual program was accredited by the Department of Education. That meant that Yirrkala students in grades 5, 6 and 7 were found to be doing as well as or better than students in a comparable group of schools with English-only programs. In return, the department conferred official recognition and a permanent allocation of resources.

From 1983, for two and a half years, I was principle of Shepherdson College at Galiwinku on Elcho Island. During that time, the bilingual program was evaluated by the department's accreditation team and was found to be doing as well as or better

85 G Dickson, *Submission 125*, p. 6.

86 Concerned Australians, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

than a group of six comparable schools with English-only programs.⁸⁷

- 4.151 The Evaluation of Literacy approach (ELA) is finding that by the time the children reach Grade 5 in the bilingual schools they achieve better results in active reading skills in English.⁸⁸
- 4.152 The Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group commented that some of the bilingual programs in the Northern Territory were not funded and resourced adequately.

The reported failure of bi-lingual programs in Australia has however overlooked the method of delivery of those programs in making recommendations for their closure. Any program which is from the outset poorly delivered and resourced will produce poor outcomes. In the case of bi-lingual teaching programs, this situation was wrongly used as a case against the effectiveness of traditional language learning as a means of supporting the development of English language competency.⁸⁹

- 4.153 The Committee heard from Kendall Trudgen as to what he thought could be done to improve language learning in Indigenous communities. He made two points in relation to the community in Galiwinku:

The first point was ‘the idea to teach in first language as far as possible.’ The second most important aspect would be to ‘have community-controlled schools where the community makes decisions on the direction of their curriculum – have a national curriculum or a Territory based curriculum with the community controlling the implementation of it, including two-way learning.’⁹⁰

Committee comment

- 4.154 The Committee received convincing evidence for bilingual education. This evidence is supported nationally and internationally by numerous studies. Several international organisations such as the World Bank and UNESCO have published findings over many years that support Indigenous language learning in education. The research demonstrates that educational outcomes for students are higher when the mother tongue or first language is incorporated into early education.

87 B Devlin, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 54.

88 Sisters’ of St Joseph SA Reconciliation Circle, *Submission 41*, p. 4.

89 Eastern States Aboriginal Languages Group, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

90 K Trudgen, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 15.

- 4.155 The Committee stresses that learning in first language does not mean that English proficiency will be neglected. The research undertaken in this area within Australia and internationally clearly states the dual benefits of first language learning in schools. The research shows that first language learning in primary education leads to improved English/dominant language competency.
- 4.156 After reviewing the evidence and speaking with the Northern Territory Government representatives in Darwin, the Committee believes the Northern Territory Government had the best of intentions in 2008 when it announced the Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours, in order to improve English competency and NAPLAN results. However the Committee believes this policy was not successful in achieving its aims of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. The Committee notes that the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training has withdrawn the Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours policy as of July 2012. The Committee discusses NAPLAN in more detail in the last section of this chapter.
- 4.157 The Committee expresses its support for the teaching of first language in schools. Currently there appears to be some support for Indigenous languages in the very early years of development and education from 0-4 years, and then in some TAFE and university institutions. However there is only ad hoc support for Indigenous language learning in primary and secondary schools. The Committee is convinced that the evidence demonstrates that bilingual and multilingual students can deliver higher educational outcomes with the right programs and support in place.
- 4.158 Incorporating Indigenous languages into the education system leads to an improvement in both Standard Australian English and Indigenous languages and can have many cultural, health and wellbeing advantages. The use of bilingual education increases English proficiency and children and their communities can grow and prosper in a bilingual or multilingual society.
- 4.159 Indigenous languages have the potential to reap economic, social and cultural benefits to Indigenous communities and regions, with flow-on effects nationally and internationally. It is clear that incorporating Indigenous first languages into bilingual school programs supports the Commonwealth Government's Closing the Gap agenda.
- 4.160 The Committee believes that the term 'bilingual education' in the past has received negative connotations due to the fact that bilingual programs have lacked thorough community consultation and have not been

sufficiently resourced and supported by specifically trained language teachers and the bureaucracy. Careful consideration should be given to the process of delivering bilingual programs and most importantly real local community consultation is required to successfully implement bilingual programs.

- 4.161 The Committee recommends the Commonwealth Government work with the state and territory governments to provide adequately resourced bilingual education programs for Indigenous communities in areas where the dominant first language is an Indigenous language (traditional or contact). These language varieties are defined and discussed in Chapter 2.

Recommendation 14 – Bilingual education programs

- 4.162 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to provide adequately resourced bilingual school education programs for Indigenous communities from the earliest years of learning, where the child’s first language is an Indigenous language (traditional or contact).**

Achieving English language competency

- 4.163 Abilities to read and write in English and to be numerate are critical if young people are to complete their schooling successfully in Australia, exercise choice about what they do in life beyond school and participate fully in the economic and social development of their local communities and the broader Australian society.
- 4.164 All students in Australia have the right to be taught to communicate effectively in Standard Australian English, to understand how the English language works, to think and learn in and through English, and to be given access to the cultural understandings it carries.⁹¹ But Standard Australian English learning should not be at the expense of Indigenous languages and cultural learning. Neither should Indigenous languages and cultural learning be to the detriment of English language learning. Both should act as bridges to succeed in the other rather than creating barriers.

91 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 31.

- 4.165 All Indigenous and non Indigenous contributors to the inquiry reiterated the point that they wanted their children to be fluent in both their Indigenous languages and English:

Indigenous community leaders and parents that we talk to consistently want their children to be able to function fully and responsibly in both the traditional language and culture and in Standard English and the mainstream culture and job market. It is not an either/or situation (either traditional language or English); it is a both/and situation (both traditional language and English). People who think they want either/or, and that indigenous parents do not want their children to be proficient in Standard English are misinformed.⁹²

- 4.166 Case studies of schools and programs that accept, value and build on the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students and communities are presented in the 2008 *Australian Council for Educational Research Report Indigenous Languages Programmes in Australian Schools*. These case studies exemplify the principle that 'learning an Indigenous language and becoming proficient in the English language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive activities'.⁹³
- 4.167 Just as understanding the structure of numbers lets children apply those concepts to finance or physics, so understanding the structure of one language enables a child to grasp the tenets of another language.
- 4.168 For example, the Noongar language revitalisation program at Moorditj Noongar Community College near Perth is embedded within all aspects of the school curriculum, students home language/s and their English language development needs are also fully integrated into the teaching and learning program:
- 4.169 Students at Moorditj mostly speak Aboriginal English and learn Noongar as a second language. A two way approach is used in teaching all programmes at the school. This means that while teaching Standard Australian English, staff at the school also acknowledge and value the students' first home language.
- 4.170 The Gumbaynggirr language program implemented at St Mary's Primary School at Bowraville on the mid north coast of New South Wales also produced positive outcomes for both teacher professional learning and students English language development:

92 AuSIL, *Submission 60*, p. 3.

93 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 14.

- 4.171 The rigour of the programme at St Mary's is enhanced by staff understanding of the general principles of language teaching. Classroom teachers commented that not only were the children learning Gumbaynggirr, but that their English language skills had increased as they were introduced to how languages worked – notions of syntax, structure, and grammar were being applied to English in ways teachers had not been able to get children to apply before. In the words of one teacher, 'students now have some vocabulary to use in our discussions about the English language.'⁹⁴
- 4.172 The benefits of learning an Aboriginal language can be significant for Aboriginal students. The 2008 research pilot project, 'Aboriginal Languages Research: Impact of Learning an Aboriginal Language on Primary School Student's Literacy in English', which consulted with a number of schools, Principals and teachers, found that students developed better literacy skills in English word awareness and decoding, if they learned an Aboriginal language. The process of learning an Aboriginal language supported students in developing the critical early skills of learning the connection between sounds and letters in English.⁹⁵
- 4.173 Lola Jones informed the Committee on the following benefits of learning first language which leads to strongly English competency outcomes:

Kids can learn to code-switch and they can be proud that they speak Broome English or Walmajarri or Yawuru. It does help, because when you are teaching language and you are discussing verbs, and in Yawuru the verbs are really different and this is how they operate, straightaway that is something that kids can relate to their standard Australian English. We say, 'We are going to learn about adjectives or adverbs,' and kids straightaway get it: 'Oh, this is how it works in Yawuru.'

Sometimes when I have talked to classroom teachers I tell them that it is about intonation, the stress, and people say, 'No, we don't do that in English.' They do not understand because they only speak English. But when you have another language to compare it to, it actually helps your language learning skills in whichever language you are using, whether it is standard Australian English or whether it is Kriol or Walmajarri or Yawuru. Once you have a different language to compare it to, it makes it easier.⁹⁶

94 ACTA, *Submission 72*, pp. 14-15.

95 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Department of Education and Communities, *Submission 98*, p. 5.

96 L Jones, *Committee Hansard*, Broome, 30 April 2012, p. 13.

NAPLAN

- 4.174 The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is the national testing program for all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It commenced in 2008 and runs annually in May each year. NAPLAN consists of five tests across three days, assessing the following domains: reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy.
- 4.175 The National Assessment Program is run at the direction of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (previously named Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs {MCEECDYA}).
- 4.176 The Committee received a lot of evidence that described the negative impact of NAPLAN testing for children who learn English as an Additional Language. The point was made by many academics, teachers and international research to show that students learning a language other than English do not start to become proficient in the language until the latter years of primary school.
- 4.177 The ACTA submission highlighted four problematic areas for Indigenous Australians being assessed by NAPLAN:
- First, these assessments are liable to make false assumptions about learning contexts and about age-appropriate knowledge of Standard Australian English.
 - Second, because assessment tasks are written (from a particular cultural viewpoint) in a language that learners do not understand or understand only partially, and they require learners to respond in that language, they do not permit learners to demonstrate what they do know and can do.
 - Third, such age-based assessments of literacy and numeracy fail to provide data that relate to these learners' actual learning milestones or progress, for example, in mastering the complexities of Standard Australian English question forms.
 - Fourth, because they do not take account of learners home language/s, the data they provide is open to misinterpretation – for example, a failure to recognise phonemic differences in Standard Australian English has been taken, quite incorrectly, to indicate that learners have a speech or hearing disability.⁹⁷

97 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 17.

- 4.178 A number of submission and witnesses pointed out that bilingual children struggle with the year 3 NAPLAN testing in particular. However by high school the students are often on par or surpass students who learn English only:

Again and again we have issues in the Northern Territory of literacy, reading and writing, and numeracy outcomes. The bilingual schools generally did not have NAPLAN scores in year 3 on par with the rest of Australia. That was because of the nature of bilingual education and the fact that they were being taught in their own language, rather than them being uneducated individuals, but by grade 5 generally the trend was that they came to par. So there are some unenviable political situations for the government in this issue because people are looking at NAPLAN tests and making observations based just on the NAPLAN tests.⁹⁸

- 4.179 At a public hearing in Alice Springs, Wendy Baarda from Yuendumu made the following comments about the problems with NAPLAN for Indigenous students:

The NAPLAN tests are very unsuitable for Aboriginal kids speaking a second language. I do not think English-speaking kids would do well either in NAPLAN tests if they were tested in a different language. At year 3 and year 5, how can they learn what those other kids have been learning all their lives in three years? It is impossible. The miracle is that we have one or two really linguistically gifted children every year who do actually get benchmark 1 in NAPLAN tests. In the last lot of testing, one of Barbara's grandchildren, who is in year 3, made it to benchmark, probably because she learns at home. NAPLAN tests are not suitable. They should have different tests for ESL learners.

The other thing is, what they found with bilingual education in one of the Top End communities where people had a choice – they could learn bilingually or they could be in English class – is that the all-English ones did better on English in the early years, years 3 and 5, but in years 7 and 9 the bilingual ones were ahead. They had caught up and passed the other ones. But now it is all-English, mainly, and what they are reading does not have much meaning. For example, with *Happy Little Dolphin* there is not much in their lives that they can relate to, whereas they understand the *Walpiri* books completely. That is what literacy is about. It is about

98 K Trudgen, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 17.

understanding. It is not just about the mechanics of reading. I do not think they are going to get better results in the long run – in the short term, maybe, but not for life and not for having kids who see their learning at school as related to life outside school.⁹⁹

4.180 National Assessments undertaken at Year 3 through NAPLAN, are not applicable to Indigenous children who have their early education in their mother tongue. These children will not have advanced sufficiently in English to be able to participate at that level and will only measure what they cannot do, not what they can. [Experience in the N.T. before the disbanding of the Bilingual program, indicated that by Year 5, participation in National Assessments (prior to NAPLAN) was more appropriate].¹⁰⁰

4.181 The Committee spoke to the principal, Ms Philomena Downey of the Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (AIICS) during a Brisbane public hearing. The AIICS commented on the push on numeracy and literacy for their school and noted the following:

The school has long argued that results such as these do not give a true picture of individual children, particularly in our context. To explain: students may join our community at the beginning of any school year and as mentioned previously, often join us with a skill base not consistent with their age group. It is not possible to bridge gaps of up to seven years in a few months. That is not to say however, that individual students may have made significant gains.¹⁰¹

4.182 Most worrying is the anecdotal evidence that suggests NAPLAN can lead to disengagement in education:

In addition to being misleading, in painting a negative portrait of learners, assessments that fail to take account of these issues impact negatively on learners' sense of worth and ongoing engagement with formal education.¹⁰²

4.183 The Committee asked the teachers of Yirrkala whether NAPLAN testing should be in their own language. Ms Ganambarr, a teacher from Yirrkala school commented:

99 W Baarda, *Committee Hansard*, Alice Springs, 4 April 2012, p. 45.

100 K Gale, B Graham and C Grimes, *Submission 19*, p. 5.

101 Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School (AIICS), *Submission 133*, p. 2.

102 ACTA, *Submission 72*, p. 17.

Yes. That is a very good strategy for the children here because English is their second language. When students learn, they are able to unpack the big picture in their first language.¹⁰³

Committee comment

- 4.184 The Committee notes the difficulties that are associated with NAPLAN testing for students who are learning English as an Additional Language. In the context of this inquiry the Committee understands that NAPLAN testing presents challenges for Indigenous students learning English as an additional language, especially for the year 3 testing when English language skills are still being introduced and practiced.
- 4.185 The Committee is satisfied that the studies demonstrate that Indigenous students can obtain NAPLAN results on par/or above that of English only learning students in the higher testing years. However the Committee remains concerned about the negative impact of early NAPLAN testing and this may contribute to engagement levels dropping off significantly when students transition into high school.
- 4.186 As the National Assessment Program is run at the direction of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, the Committee believes that a review of NAPLAN testing should be undertaken to ensure all papers are culturally neutral so that questions can be clearly understood by all Australians.
- 4.187 Of great concern to the Committee is the evidence that suggests NAPLAN testing discourages Indigenous students and can lead to disengagement. The Committee encourages schools to undertake information sessions to provide students and the school community with a better understanding of NAPLAN and the purpose of NAPLAN results.
- 4.188 While NAPLAN aims to compile standardised data on student learning, this data has little value when English and non English speaking students results are not separated into different categories. It should be remembered that NAPLAN seeks to measure knowledge and skills across a range of competencies and language should not be a barrier to these assessments.
- 4.189 The Committee sees the benefits in NAPLAN tracking the progress of EAL/D students separately from mainstream students between years 3 and 5. It should be recognised that EAL/D learners will be usually on a different learning pathway from first language learners when learning the
-

103 B Ganambarr, Yirrkala School, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 2 May 2012, p. 11.

target language in the initial years of education. It must be emphasised that students learning more than one language usually catch up and can surpass students learning English only.

- 4.190 The Committee considers that ACARA should develop an alternative assessment tool for all students identified as EAL/D learners for the Year 3 and Year 5 assessment in particular. In addition, the Committee believes this alternative testing tool would have positive benefits for all EAL/D students' confidence in learning.

Recommendation 15 – NAPLAN alternative assessment tool

- 4.191 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education work through the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood to develop a National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) alternative assessment tool for all students learning English as an Additional Language/Dialect.**

